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Porn and Its Uses

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Porn and Its Uses

This issue contains sexually explicit imagery.

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Porn and Its Uses

REBECCA HOLT, DARSHANA SREEDHAR MINI, AND
NIKOLA STEPIĆ

As a proliferating subfield of sexuality studies, porn studies has become a larger framework to understand sexually explicit media. The growth of the discipline has been supported through debates and disagreements that allow for teasing out radical ethics and politics which, in turn, enable certain reading practices and representational schemas to persist. The growth and solidification of porn studies notwithstanding, the field maintains a marginal status in academia. Porn scholars routinely attend conferences where fellow attendees are embarrassed by their topics, and stories abound of young scholars who are advised to repackage their work in order to be taken more seriously or seem more “hireable.” In other words, assumptions exist that pornography studies are either too limited in scope or too contentious for the academy. The three co-editors of this issue all study porn from radically different perspectives: Darshana researches transnational porn cultures with a specific focus on South Asia, Nikola employs a queer historicist approach to adult media within a larger discourse on urban masculinities, and Rebecca studies the cultures and technologies of digital pornography. Through our discussions, which were originally occasioned by the Society for Cinema and Media Studies’ Adult Film History Scholarly Interest Group where the three of us met, it became evident to us that adult media allows for a confluence of different ideas, sensibilities, and political perspectives even as it represents a point of departure from more traditional objects of study. With that in mind, we wanted this special issue on “Porn and its Uses” to wrestle with critiques, both institutional and popular, that had questioned and challenged pornography on the grounds of its use value or as “pointless” deliberation while at the same time meditating on our own sense of porn’s usefulness as an object of study.

Fantasy is pornography’s mother tongue, as well as its utterance. Lauren Berlant reminds us that fantasy is the crystallization of ideals and ideologies that they might assume a readable, representational shape (2011, 2). It follows, then, that fantasy engenders a profusely *useful* space. Pornography—as either an object with finite values perennially attached to it (good or bad, empowering or debilitating), or as a value unto itself (the pornographic as indelicate, obscene and exploitative, or indeed subversive and exciting), is thus called upon to contain, and respond to, the cultural anxieties of any given moment. Accordingly, this collection of peer-reviewed and non-peer-reviewed essays, artworks, conversations and panels, puts critical pressure on the perceived serviceability of “smut” as a point

of access to tensions around attitudes and aesthetics of desire, identity, well-being, diversity and infrastructure, to name only a few.

The special issue does not shy away from porn's functional usefulness, as the theme cheekily gestures towards the happy endings broadly associated with the pornographic. However, use is also employed as an anchoring conceptual framework to describe why we, as editors, believe the study of pornography plays a vital role in the humanities. Porn is ubiquitous as both an object and a framework for understanding other objects and processes. It is often because of pornography's capacity to act as a mirror to institutional adherences to modesty and congruity that it remains neglected in academia. Objects that are everywhere and nowhere all at once often slip from analytical grasp; that which intrusively cuts to the core of institutional and decorous limits runs the risk of retaining only symbolic value. And yet, studying pornography means asking vital questions about sexuality, desire, and the self that porn articulates. Similarly, we might consider pornography as a centre around which larger questions and fears about the Internet surge, or how pornography is deemed answerable to discussions around sex work and labour conditions.

As university instructors who include pornographic material in our syllabi, we look at the privileged practice of teaching anew whenever we ask students to think about adult content. In our teaching, we have reflected on the necessity of showing explicit material alongside discussions on pornography as a filmic and cultural institution, while being conscious of our precarious position as first-time lecturers/international graduate students/junior scholars. Whether we are teaching queer cinema, South Asian cinema, or the histories of the internet, there is no question for us that our syllabi would have to include sexually explicit visual material in the spirit of intellectual honesty and rigour. Without a doubt, screening explicit material in the classroom requires careful management, which may include content warnings and increased attention to facilitating discussions. However, at their core, these practices are responses to anxieties around adult media that are conditioned by the question of "use value" in the humanities. Thus, even introducing adult content into the classroom to address questions around form, genre, history, industry and spectatorship is unto itself an argument for the tangible use value of otherwise devalued objects of study.

In *What's the Use? On the Uses of Use*, Sara Ahmed expounds on the philosophical underpinnings of the notion of utility, or what she calls the logics of selection that animate "*the strange temporalities of use*" (2019, 9), wherein values such as "useful" and "useless" map legitimate areas of inquiry by judging what counts as improper or appropriate, relevant or anterior; in a similar vein, the contributors to this special issue recognized and grappled with pornography's advantageous position to question these hermeneutics. Elsewhere, John Champagne has established continuity between queerness and pornography as two cultural forms that represent "nonproductive expenditure," and thus share a subversive potentiality to "not overthrow disciplinary means of subject production, but rather respond to their force with a counterforce, attempting to reverse the strategic relation of discipline to body" (1995, 30). Conversely, this special issue gives space to discus-

sions on the pornographic as a way to index precisely this counterforce of the defiantly nonproductive, in spaces and structures such as academia (but also: museums, parks, the postal system, film festivals, various media platforms, etc.) that themselves represent arenas where the obscenely personal wrestles with bureaucratic prudence. In their own ways, the papers collected in this issue respond to the provocation that pornography, whether as genre or subject matter, routinely occupies what Wasson and Acland have dubbed “useful cinema,” or “one defined by film’s ability to transform unlikely spaces, convey ideas, convince individuals and produce subjects in the service of public and private aims” (2011, 2). Repetition, functionality, and appropriation in disparate contexts make “use” a matter of relative conditioning.

Finally, the special issue on “Porn and Its Uses” mirrors in large part the experiences, discussions, and challenges around introducing pornography into the academic context aggregated into the landmark 1996 special issue of *Jump Cut* by editor Chuck Kleinhans. Twenty-five years later, the concerns that animated that special issue—namely, the proliferation of academic and artistic inquiry into visual pornography as an intervention into “the ongoing controversy about sexual representation in the public sphere” (Kleinhans 1996, 103)—feel urgent again. While our contemporary context is certainly our own, those controversies have persisted with the COVID-19 global pandemic reframing the very notions of public and private, the hysteria around sex work resulting in oppressive legislature such as FOSTA/SESTA, social media-enabled forms of ostracism policing formal and informal discussions of sex and sexuality—which is to say nothing of the scrutiny that divergent sexual praxes continue to attract. While the pornographic image itself remains central in our research, the unequivocal status of pornography as a globally recognizable and contested *articulation* of desires and anxieties which may or may not have anything to do with sex per se, allowed us to propose a theme for this issue that would appeal to porn specialists, enthusiasts and dabblers alike.

The first section of the journal, titled “Historic Obscenities,” collects papers interested in tracing the significance of adult media as it has responded to particular moments in history, and opens with Quinn Anex-Ries’ examination of pornography’s role in shaping cultural and procedural definitions of private versus public space. In “Prohibitory Order: Postal Regulation, Citizen-Surveillance, and the Boundaries of Obscenity,” Anex-Ries analyzes the United States Post Office Department’s mobilization of Anti-Pandering statutes in 1967 and 1970 as mechanisms that censored and criminalized erotic media. By outlining this context, Anex-Ries spotlights how ideals of “free speech” and “the right to privacy” have operated as ploys to reinforce heteronormativity and moralism in the public discourse. Finley Freibert continues in the same time period with his account of Joseph and Michael Anthony, a father-son entrepreneurial team based in Houston who produced and distributed gay pornography in the 1960s and 1970s. Freibert’s research on the Anthonys reads in equal parts as a compelling queer microhistory and a consideration of how gay pornography and its attendant cultures reflected

and animated the ideologies engendered by the gay liberation movement. His paper, titled “Distribution, Bars, and Arcade Stars: Joe Anthony’s Entrepreneurial Expansion in Houston’s Gay Media Industries,” bends Wasson and Acland’s conception of “useful cinema” in order to arrive at the term “gay useful media” to describe gay media’s historic role in facilitating communication, community formation and cultural convergence. Finally, Bobby Noble’s paper “Harbord Street Histories” offers a “radical contextualization” of the Feminist Porn Awards through a historiography of brick-and-mortar feminist businesses located along Harbord Street in Toronto. Noble’s interviews with the organizers of the Feminist Porn Awards throw into relief tensions both familiar and specific, from antagonistic positions that pornography has invited in certain feminist circles to discussions around nationhood, queer legacies, and feminist intergenerationalities that the Awards generated. Noble situates these discussions in a historical stroll down Harbord Street, reorienting the history of the Feminist Porn Awards around Canadian sex wars, as indexed by past and present feminist businesses on this particular Toronto strip.

“Digital Publics” emerges as an overarching theme in the articles by Eric Weichel, Jennifer Moorman, Ruepert Jiel Dionisio Cao, and Samuel Poirier-Poulin, who interrogate how desire, intimacy and art operate across digital locations as varied as Pornhub, Twitter and video games. In his work on Kent Monkman’s subversive oil paintings, Eric Weichel’s “A Particular Kind of Romantic Entanglement: Kent Monkman’s *Nation to Nation* (2020) and the Limits of Canadian Political Pornography” positions the pornographic as not only a language through which to represent the racism that structures Indigenous experience in Canada but also as a privileged vantage point—a way of looking—that coalesces digital and analogue landscapes. In “Flows of Desire: ‘The Pleasure Principle’ (2019), *Shakedown* (2017), and Pornhub’s Political/Libidinal Economy,” Jennifer Moorman follows the unlikely association between feminist art and the world’s most popular digital pornography platform, Pornhub. By focusing on Pornhub’s commission of the feminist art show “The Pleasure Principle,” and its distribution of Leila Weinraub’s experimental documentary *Shakedown*, Moorman grapples with the complexities that emerge through Pornhub’s investments in experimental art and documentary and locates queer and anticapitalist potentialities in the interstices of sex and commerce. If Moorman’s analysis helps us understand how market logics, corporate social responsibility and promotion campaigns govern Pornhub’s expansionist overtures, Ruepert Jiel Dionisio Cao offers us a case study from the Philippines to showcase how cultural and social norms shape digital publics. In “Twitter Porn in Filipino Alter Community: Primitive Aesthetics and Affect,” Cao maps out amateur gay porn production practices of the alter community on Twitter. By means of online ethnography, Cao explores how porn aesthetics intersect with the technical affordances offered by Twitter on the one hand, and larger discourses on masculinity in the Philippines on the other, with a particular focus on anonymity as the dominant impulse that structures this community. Finally, in the paper titled “Beefcakes, Ambiguous Masculinities, and Pornographic Bodies,” Samuel Poirier-Poulin historicizes “dating sim” video

games as examples of recent digital media that advance the crypto-queer tradition of physique culture into the internet landscape. Focusing on the sexually explicit game *Coming Out on Top*, Poirier-Poulin sees in the erotic figure of the beefcake an opportune meeting place for game studies and queer theory, as well as a rich conceptual space for divergent perceptions of masculinity.

In the final section of peer-reviewed works, “Pleasure and Policy,” our authors explore the relationships between policy research and pornography studies, expanding the often limited focus in policy research on porn as a question of legislation. Thus, the articles in this final section intervene in an area of research that is simultaneously undertheorized and overdetermined. Clarissa Smith’s paper, “Putting Porn Studies (~~Back~~) into Porn Literacy,” addresses the idea of porn literacy by looking at media produced to disseminate purportedly “authentic” and behind-the-scenes narratives centered around porn production and consumption. Through an analysis of documentaries about the porn industry, such as the BBC’s *Porn Laid Bare*, Smith considers how the notion of porn literacy is mediated through purportedly sex-educational material and attendant conversations on safety and risk. Pivoting towards questions of public health, Valerie Webber’s article “Crossovers and Consent: Underlying Assumptions in Porn Health Protocol” analyzes health protocols in the pornography industry. Webber balances quantitative data with a sensitive insider approach and interrogates occupational health and risk management in the porn industry. Finally, John-Paul Stadler’s “Pornographic Altruism, or, How to Have Porn in a Pandemic” addresses our most recent global health crisis. Stadler’s analysis of pornography’s response to COVID-19 puts it in the continuity of mutual aid and collective care networks produced in and around porn communities in times of crisis. Stadler’s paper rethinks sexual labor in terms of altruism, arguing that crises throw into relief the oft-neglected connection between pornography and care.

The non peer-review section opens with a category of work we are labeling “Meditations.” In a conversation on feminist uses of pornography, Lynn Comella and Desirae Embree extrapolate the quandaries between porn and feminism by emphasizing the complex arena engendered by feminism, sex and capitalism. Looking at the sex positive movement and how feminists put porn to various uses, from education to activism and community building, the two interlocutors give the reader a glimpse of how this pans out in their own research on feminist sex toys (Comella) and “dyke porn” (Embree). Alpesh Patel interviews visual artist Wojciech Puś on the project *Endless*, which consists of a non-narrative film as well as spontaneous performances that interrogate the fluid formation of identities. The conversation dwells on Puś’s artistic practice and how he constructs a multimedia assemblage to explore questions of queerness, pornography and aesthetics. Jasper Lauderdale’s article “Make Your Own Neverland, Where Nonfiction Interacts with Lesbian Porn” integrates research at the intersections of porn and documentary. Lauderdale’s focus on Jonathan Harris’ documentary-style project *I Love Your Work*, which explores narratives of producers of lesbian pornography, allows the author to revisit questions of genre within the resonant field of interactive online environments.

The non-peer-reviewed section on pedagogy collects introspections on curating and discussing explicit media in academic and para-academic spaces. Madita Oeming's piece "Porn Poacher—Coming Out as an Aca Porn Fan" outlines the challenges of simultaneously positioning oneself as a porn academic *and* a fan of the genre; the piece ends with a demand that porn scholars be unapologetic about their objects of study in order for the field itself to be reclaimed as pleasurable and complex. In his paper "Going Public with Pornography Studies: Lessons from Creating the *Porno Cultures Podcast*," Brandon Arroyo reflects on the creation of his podcast as an example of public scholarship, or an attempt to outline the work of porn studies—and, as he mentions, to *humanize* porn scholars—for people outside of the field, and even outside of academia. David Church's paper "From the Classroom to the Theater: Public Porn Viewing as Counterpublic Engagement" wrestles with the tensions and potentialities of erotic film programming—in the classroom, in the public movie theatre, and/or as part of a film festival such as SECS (Seattle Erotica Cinema Society)—at a time when adult film viewing is most commonly understood as a solitary, private practice. Finally, Kyler Chittick curates a roundtable titled "Porn and/as Pedagogy, Sexual Representation in the Classroom," discussing the state of the field with Peter Alilunas, Ummni Khan, Laura Helen Marks and Thomas Waugh. Their "transdisciplinary, intergenerational" discussion outlines the scholars' personal histories and stakes in studying and teaching porn. It emphasizes the continued challenges of inserting adult content into academic contexts, where it will invariably and incongruously brush up against discourses surrounding #MeToo, trigger warnings and punitive attitudes around sex and sexuality. The contributions to this section each tackle the complexities of porn pedagogy in public and semi-public spaces, testifying to the thorny and gratifying pedagogical spaces pornography occasions at the university and beyond.

In a nod to the 1996 *Jump Cut* issue, which showcased elements from syllabi and discussed pedagogic practices when it comes to introducing adult media into the classroom, we are proud to round off this pedagogy section by spotlighting three contemporary approaches to teaching pornography at the university level. Further animating the conversation on use and usefulness, the generous gesture by João Florêncio (University of Exeter), David Church (Indiana University) and Madita Oeming (independent scholar) to share their porn syllabi testifies to the variety of possible approaches and strategies to teaching explicit media in different academic contexts.

The issue concludes with artworks and accompanying statements by Martha Muszycka-Jones, and Marius Packbier and Aïlien Reyns. Muszycka-Jones's *Doll* is a compelling piece that layers photographic images with liquid latex. The result is a visual artwork that engages, and challenges, broad conceptions of erotic imagery. Similarly, in his video essay, "Skin Pleasure," Packbier and Reyns layer images of the artist's body with amateur pornography as an exercise in exploring the embodied experience of image-based pornography. The contrasting stances on pornography in the two pieces—as an instrument to question the pornographic gaze that structures geometries of desire or a generative space that

invites unorthodox means of knowledge production, respectively—speak to the polyvalence of the pornographic as an object, framework and method. In this light, these artistic praxes respond to the theme of the issue in their consideration of the central question of porn and its uses, and join a provocative roster of work that represents new interventive strands into the field of porn studies.

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SYN

An Online Journal of Film

PEER

REVIEW

**HISTORIC
OBSCENITIES**

Prohibitory Order

Postal Regulation, Citizen-Surveillance, and the Boundaries of Obscenity

QUINN ANEX-RIES

Since the late-nineteenth century, the United States Postal Inspection Service has policed and censored obscene materials flowing through the mail. As a part of such efforts, the USPIS published an informational brochure with a striking image covering its front page. In the foreground of the image, a pair of long bare women's legs in black high heels jut out from the bottom of an oversized piece of mail labelled "FREE CATALOG." The walking catalog-turned-woman is in mid-stride, ominously heading towards a quaint single-family home. Written in bold letters across the bottom of the image, the front cover of the brochure reads "Stop Unsolicited Sexually Oriented Advertisements in Your Mail." While this publication evokes the puritanical ethos of the Comstock Act's suppression of "obscene, lewd, or lascivious" materials, the USPIS brochure was in fact published in 2008 and remains a current source of information for postal patrons (*Act for the Suppression* 1873, 599; USPIS 2008).

The 2008 USPIS brochure was published in an effort to educate postal customers about the legal tools available to stop "unsolicited sexually oriented advertisements" from reaching their homes or children (USPIS 2008). Under current federal statute, individuals are able to prevent such materials by either issuing a prohibitory order against a mailer that has sent "pandering advertisements" or by signing up for a list maintained by the Postal Service of individuals who do not want to receive "sexually oriented" ads in the mail. These two statutory mechanisms—known as the Anti-Pandering statutes, authorized in the 1967 *Pandering Advertisements Statute (PAS)* and the 1970 *Sexually Oriented Advertisements Statute (SOAS)*—place the responsibility for identifying, surveilling, and repressing the distribution of obscenity on the individual. This policy strategy upended and reversed the top-down censorship of obscenity by judges, lawmakers, moralists, and the church by linking the mail recipient to the system of postal surveillance. The following essay explores the underlying history behind the 2008 USPIS brochure, examining how this reconfiguration of postal power emerged in 1967 as part of ongoing debates about the circulation of erotic media and the corresponding limits of the right to privacy.¹

Intervening into a moment of great uncertainty about obscenity law, the two Anti-Pandering statutes wed together the individual, the home, and the Federal Postal Service to police the boundaries of private consumption amidst growing concern about the distribution of pornography. Historians of law, media, and sexuality characterize the eight years between the 1965 *Freedman v. Maryland* and

the more stringent 1973 *Miller v. California* Supreme Court cases as a period of thriving and relatively unregulated sexual expression heralded by loosening legal standards and new privacy protections (Bronstein 2011, 70-74; D’Emilio and Freedman 2012, 277-288; Gorfinkel 2017, 153-196; Schaefer 2014, 1-22; Strub 2010b, 146-178; Strub 2013, 202-208). In the face of mounting ambiguity about the status of obscenity, the *Freedman* case eased restrictions on the movie industry by striking down prior restraint and the use of state censorship boards. Several years later, the 1967 *Redrup v. New York* and the landmark 1969 *Stanley v. Georgia* Supreme Court cases furthered this liberal trend by affirming the constitutional protection of an adult’s right to privately possess obscene materials. Together, these rulings helped create the conditions of possibility for the massive growth of the commercial pornography industry and a sharp increase of erotic media, giving way to the 1970s era of “porno chic.”²

In response to this distinct rise in the public circulation and private consumption of pornography, advertisement-based distribution arose as a pivotal site of political, legislative, and popular concern. Symbolically, mail order advertisements represented the entry point for pornography to access the American home. Legally, advertising offered a constitutionally viable avenue for the state and federal regulation of obscenity. During this period, multiple Congressional hearings and an entire volume of the *Technical Report of the Commission on Obscenity and Pornography* were thus dedicated to the discussion of the growing threat of obscenity in the mail.

While immense attention was paid to the supposed problem of unsolicited mail order pornography, these materials accounted for a “relatively insignificant” portion of all mail advertising, at a mere 0.23%, and constituted only 4-5% of all pornographic media that adult men and women came into contact with during 1968 and 1969 (U.S. Government 1971a, 127; U.S. Government 1971b, 27). Furthermore, the Anti-Pandering statutes created a cumbersome, costly, and ineffective system that offered little help to the small number of patrons who received unsolicited advertisements (U.S. Government 1971a, 160-64). This new system of postal surveillance ultimately failed to “reduce the volume of sexually oriented mail” as unsolicited advertising *increased* between 1968 and 1969 (U.S. Government 1970, 109). Anti-Pandering legislation was thus an unsuccessful attempt to address a problem that had little impact on most postal patrons. Why, then, was there such outsized anxiety devoted to obscenity advertising in the first place?

Although the Anti-Pandering statutes were of little impact from a practical perspective, they mark a key turning point in mid-twentieth century pornography debates. By introducing “pandering” and “sexually oriented” as categories of control, these policies marked a distinct shift towards distribution as a new arena of federal obscenity regulation. Prior to the *Redrup* case and the passage of the Anti-Pandering statutes, the courts were locked into “a recurring conflict between state power to suppress the distribution of books and magazines and the guarantees of the First and Fourteenth Amendments” (Hixson 1996, 74). The legal limits of pornography distribution were disputed in a number of Supreme Court cases throughout the 1950s which were all somehow concerned with determining

the legal culpability of purveyors of pornography.³ The Anti-Pandering statutes consolidated this debate around mail order advertising as a way to bring distribution under the purview of federal control.

Through this reconfiguration of regulatory scrutiny, policymakers sought to reconcile tensions between expanding sexual circulation during the post-*Freedman* era and evolving notions of privacy. This study thus adds to the historiography of mid-twentieth century obscenity law and sexual cultures, by showing how the liberalism of the late-1960s coexisted with renewed attempts to police the boundaries of the home and to control the dissemination of pornography. I follow Marc Stein's characterization of 1965–73 as a period governed by a doctrine of sexual rights that "affirmed the supremacy of adult, heterosexual, marital, monogamous, private, and procreative forms of sexual expression" (Stein 2010, 3). I extend Stein's work by showing how the avowal of the heterosexual nuclear family and sexual conservatism took hold not only in the Supreme Court but also within Congress, the Postal Service, and the homes of many Americans. The history of the Anti-Pandering statutes reveals how the notion of domestic privacy was deployed as a counterbalance to this period of flourishing pornography, setting the stage for the more conservative obscenity standards inaugurated by the *Miller* decision and the later rise of the Moral Majority.

In this article, I examine how the implementation of the Anti-Pandering statutes in 1967 and 1970 managed the blurry boundaries of obscenity by promoting the home as a private space of sexual morality and the individual as its necessary protector. Through an analysis of the cultural and legal history of Anti-Pandering legislation, including their ideological and applied effects, I argue that this policy approach combated pornography consumption by criminalizing advertising through appeals to heteronormative ideals of political subjectivity. Studying Congressional proceedings, government documents, and popular press coverage, I show how state officials and the public struggled to make sense of the limits of privacy in relation to free speech, fears about the nuclear family, and the growth of the erotic market.⁴

In the first part of the article, I explore the historical, judicial, and legislative context out of which the two Anti-Pandering statutes were created. In so doing, I show how policymakers empowered the mail recipient as adjudicator of obscenity and protector of the home. In the next section, I examine how the statutes implemented a system of privatized postal regulation, which I term *citizen-surveillance*. I argue that this effort to criminalize mail order advertising is part of a longer history of privatized surveillance in which the right to privacy is promoted as a moral and civic responsibility. To enact this strategy, the Anti-Pandering statutes created both new taxonomies for individuals to categorize "pandering" or "sexually oriented" materials and new methods of identification, reporting, and prohibition of said materials. I posit that the introduction of these new categories and systems of control armed citizens with legal tools to police and define the boundaries of obscenity through the criminalization of advertising.

The third section of the article applies this framework to explore how, although these policies were originally framed as safeguards of individual free-

doms, they were advertised and deployed to uphold the private sphere as a space of family values, moralism, and heteronormativity. I analyse how bureaucratic documents, prohibitory order forms, and popular news coverage narrated obscenity as a source of moral decay, constructing advertisements as an inherently obscene threat to domestic life. I argue that the popular promotion of the Anti-Pandering statutes gave way to the growing use of prohibitory orders to target gay and lesbian publications. At the same time, however, I reveal how gay and lesbian publications responded by publicly criticizing the discriminatory usage of prohibitory orders, undermining the logics of domestic heterosexual privacy. The history of Anti-Pandering legislation, and the attendant battles over the uses of prohibitory orders, thus show how advertising and distribution emerged as key pivot points between new ideas about the home as a space of private protection, the rising circulation of erotic media, and the growing visibility of sexual subcultures.

Regulating Obscenity at the Margins: Congress, the Courts, and Unsolicited Advertising

In 1967, the battle over obscenity was in crisis. Contradictions surrounding public life and sexuality were omnipresent: as the Courts and the Post Office continued to agonize over the limits of government intervention, the Federal Government embarked on an effort to bring renewed clarity to the “problem” of obscenity, all while new social movements and cultural norms expanded the possibilities for sexual self-expression. Amidst the shifting cultural landscape of the sexual revolution, in May of 1967, the Supreme Court issued a per curiam decision in *Redrup v. New York* which consisted of three cases involving the sale of materials deemed to be obscene. Reversing the previous convictions in all three cases, the Court ruled that the non-intrusive sale of obscene material to willing adults was protected under the rights of the First and Fourteenth Amendments. This decision dramatically reconfigured existing Supreme Court doctrine—guided by the 1957 majority opinions in the landmark *Roth v. United States* and *Alberts v. California* cases—that found obscenity to fall outside of all protections of free speech.⁵ Instead, the Warren Court deemed that obscenity was permissible as long as it remained between consenting adults and did not impinge upon public life (Supreme Court 1966, 770-771). Along with several later cases, the *Redrup* decision “create(d) a legal safety zone for...willing adults,” bringing on a slew of reversals that brought greater ambiguity to the legal terrain of obscenity regulation (Strub 2013, 207).⁶

While the courts continued to waffle over the boundaries of free speech and the consumption of erotic materials, the Executive Branch and Congress rallied around the creation of the President’s Commission on Obscenity and Pornography in the fall of 1967. The Commission was established to investigate and yield legislative recommendations on legal “definitions of obscenity and pornography” as well as the scope of the pornography industry and its public effects (*Creating a Commission* 1967a, 254). After the publication of the Commission’s final report in 1970, however, the findings were met with intense public scrutiny due to the

report's recommendation to repeal all obscenity laws related to private adult possession. The backlash to *The Final Report of the Commission on Obscenity and Pornography* was so severe that, within a month after its publication, the report was rejected by a landslide vote on the floor of the Senate and publicly condemned by President Richard Nixon (Nixon 1970; United States Senate 1970). Thus, although the Commission was intended to resolve the obscenity question, it ultimately created more controversy and confusion.

These federal and judicial efforts emerged against a backdrop of American culture that John D'Emilio and Estelle Freedman characterize as the peak of "sexual liberalism" (2012, 301–25). In this period, the growing visibility of urban sexual subcultures, the birth of radical movements for sexual liberation, and a booming pornography industry defied Cold War expectations about family life and sexual expression. The increasing availability of erotic media, in particular, brought sex into public and private worlds like never before (Young 2018).

Within this moment of anxiety about the status and circulation of obscenity, new forms of consumption, and changing domestic norms, mail order pornography came to optimize the government's failure to successfully control obscenity and the threat that it posed to the American home. As a result of postwar economic expansion, the advertising industry grew in large proportion, leading to a 1960s resurgence of direct-to-consumer advertising in the form of mail order marketing (Beard 2016, 215–18; Cohen 2003, 292–344; Pollay 1985, 28). Pornography producers and suppliers capitalized on the growing demand for erotic media and the popularity of mail order advertising by using the Postal Service to sell and distribute pornography. As this new traffic in pornography drew public attention, control of mail order advertising assumed a politically significant status as the symbolic bridge between the permissiveness of public life and the privacy of the heterosexual family.⁷

The passage of Public Law 90-206, the *Postal Revenue and Salary Act of 1967*, in mid-December attempted to bring at least some clarity to the boundaries of obscenity advertising and private consumption. In particular, the *Pandering Advertisements Statute (PAS)* passed as part of the *Act* directly intervened into the gap left open by the *Redrup* decision. In response to a drastic 400% increase in citizen complaints about the receipt of "lurid or sex oriented advertising," the House Subcommittee of Postal Operations commenced a series of Congressional and public hearings to consider the passage of several Bills designed to combat such unwanted mailings (Post Office and Civil Service 1967d, 1). The Congressmen, judges, psychiatrists, police officers, and activists that convened to discuss the proposed Bills needed a legislative solution that walked the fine line between obscenity regulation and existing protections of free speech. While the *Redrup* decision held that obscenity was protected as long as it remained between consenting adults in private, the same principle provided an opening to regulate *unwanted* materials received through the mail, and especially those sent to juveniles, as outside of First Amendment protections (Post Office and Civil Service 1967e, 52-53, 68). Thus, the legislative answer was found, in the words of Congressman Glenn Cunningham: "the old English common law principle that a man's home is his

castle, that I have a right to privacy in my home” (Post Office and Civil Service 1967d, 4).

The *PAS* empowers the individual postal patron as the sole arbiter of the sexual permissibility of all mail entering into the home by affirming the principle that the right to privacy guarantees absolute protection of one’s home and family. The *PAS* does so by allowing any mail recipient to issue a prohibitory order against any sender of material believed to be of an unwanted “erotically arousing or sexually provocative” nature (*Postal Revenue* 1967b, 645). After receiving a prohibitory order, distributors are required to remove the complainants name from their mailing lists, ceasing all future distribution of mail order advertisements.

Legislators were able to successfully implement this policy by drawing on the definition of “pandering” from the 1966 Supreme Court decision in *Ginzburg v. United States*. According to *Ginzburg*, “pandering” is defined as “the purveying of publications openly advertised to appeal to the customers’ erotic interest” but, significantly, such publications do *not* necessarily have to be “erotic” in and of themselves to be classified as “pandering” (Brennan 1965, 463). Using the newly created category of “pandering,” the *PAS* made a critical differentiation between that which is “legally obscene” and material that is not inherently obscene but is still “clearly unwelcome in many homes” (USPOD 1968). Under this definition of “pandering,” the individual interpretation of any mailing as erotic amounts to enough legal proof to prohibit the distribution of any further mailings to the addressee. The relatively malleable category of “pandering” thus created a perfectly legal avenue through which the *PAS* was able to bring the not-quite-obscene category of advertising under postal surveillance and suppression.

While the *PAS* was made in an attempt to secure the privacy of the home, many lawmakers saw the *PAS* as insufficient because it was only able to function as a reactionary measure directed against specific mailers. These concerns came to the fore in 1969, as President Richard Nixon began his public crusade against obscenity and pornography. In the first year of his term, the House Subcommittee on Postal Operations reconvened hearings to address, in the words of House Representative Thaddeus J. Dulski, the concern that the *PAS* “unfortunately...comes into force after the fact. That is it doesn’t come into use until the first piece of smut mail is received by a householder” (Post Office and Civil Service 1969c, 4). These hearings were prompted by a 1969 Congressional address in which President Nixon responded to what he saw as the continued “invasion of privacy” facing many American homes by calling for a drastic expansion of the protections afforded under the *PAS* (Post Office and Civil Service 1969c, 129). By publicly voicing concerns about the power of the head of household and the invasive force of pornography distribution, policymakers and the Nixon Administration rendered the home as a private space in need of greater postal protections.

The Nixon administration was successful in passing legislation to address the limited scope of the *PAS* as part of the massive overhaul of the Post Office instituted by the *Postal Reorganization Act* of 1970. The *Postal Reorganization Act* established the U.S. Postal Service as a government-owned corporation in place of the U.S. Post Office Department and, significantly, added the *Sexually Oriented Advertise-*

ments Statute (SOAS) as a supplement to the existing *PAS*. The *SOAS* introduced two important new measures. First, the *SOAS* created definitional guidelines that require distributors to externally label all mailings that contain “sexually oriented” materials. Secondly, the *SOAS* enables mail recipients to preemptively prevent against the receipt of unwanted “sexually oriented” advertisements by registering for the Prohibitory Order List maintained by the Postal Service. This anticipatory form of prohibition is fulfilled by the *SOAS* mandate that the postal registry be used by local Post Offices and distributors, who are required to purchase the list, to stop all mailings labelled as “sexually oriented” from reaching any registrant (*Postal Reorganization 1970, 749-750*).

Together, the Anti-Pandering statutes created both reactive and proactive mechanisms for controlling pornography distribution. Through this policy approach, mail recipients are able to prohibit materials they consider “pandering” from continuing to their homes and to preemptively block against the receipt of “sexually oriented” materials before they enter the home. These policies also impacted the business side of pornography. While the economic and legal costs of the Anti-Pandering statutes are not fully accounted for, several pornography distributors and producers faced criminal trials for failure to comply with the requirements of the two statutes.⁸ The policies also created additional costs for companies who were required to remove names from their mailing lists and purchase the Postal Service’s prohibitory order list at their own expense (U.S. Government 1971a, 160). By empowering citizens to censor their mail and penalizing distribution companies, this system effectively established a legal mechanism to surveil and criminalize mail order pornography advertising.

Created during a period of mounting erotic consumption and confusion about legal definitions of obscenity, the *PAS* and *SOAS* identified distribution as a necessary site of federal intervention and regulation. In so doing, the statutes brought pornography advertising under the control of the Postal Service and the authority of the private household. As I explore in the next section, this legislation continues in the legacy of earlier twentieth century histories of privatized censorship by introducing an individualized system of postal regulation that I term *citizen-surveillance*. Through this new regulatory mechanism, the Anti-Pandering statutes affirmed the home as a space of private protection and encouraged mail recipients to define the blurry boundaries of obscenity by creating new terms to categorize and suppress pornography advertising.

Between Obscenity and Advertising: Citizen-Surveillance, the Right to Privacy, and Borderline Taxonomies

The Anti-Pandering statutes unite the Postal Service and everyday Americans (postal patrons) to create a broad apparatus of surveillance that actively polices the boundaries of obscenity. The introduction of the prohibitory order, as well as the ability to sign up for the Prohibitory Order List, restructured governing power such that the inspection and enforcement of obscenity shifted towards the individual. This created a method of privatized postal censorship, which I term *citizen-surveillance*, that promoted the mail recipient’s participation in the sup-

pression of obscenity as an essential public and private moral responsibility. As a part of this system, the *Statutes* created the classifications of “pandering” and “sexually oriented” to allow individuals to account for and monitor advertising materials that cannot be definitively classified as obscene.

To implement and enforce these new categories of obscenity, the Anti-Pandering statutes relied on a model of heterosexual domestic privacy. The consolidation of the right to privacy as the right to defend one’s home importantly defined the terms of state protection and free speech according to the norms of the nuclear family. This strategy advanced earlier twentieth century attempts to liberalize and expand obscenity censorship through individual participation, supporting the right to privacy as necessarily achieved through policing and censorship.

Prior to the 1960s, local and federal attempts to censor obscenity often relied on community and individual involvement. In the decades between the passage of the Comstock Act and World War II, social reformers struggled to define obscenity as new social norms changed existing justifications for censorship (Friedman 2000; Strub 2013, 27-48). As public opposition to the absolutism of the Comstock Act grew leading up to and after World War II, a new governing logic of obscenity regulation emerged. This political ideology, which historian Andrea Friedman terms “democratic moral authority,” was based on democratized principles and processes (Friedman 2000). One of the foremost aspects of this modernized approach to obscenity was the creation of community standards and regulatory mechanisms based on the values of the “average person.” Under this system, individual citizens played an active role in defining and repressing obscenity through participation on juries and censorship boards (Friedman 2000, 168-182). The advent of “democratic moral authority” set into motion an individualized approach to obscenity that promoted censorship as a citizen’s democratic obligation.

Although the 1952 decision in the *Joseph Burstyn, Inc. v. Wilson* Supreme Court case weakened the legal authority of state and national censorship boards, citizen-based suppression continued throughout the late-1950s and early-1960s.⁹ In 1959, under the leadership of Postmaster General Arthur Summerfield, the Post Office “declared war on the mailing of obscenity into American homes” by calling on citizens to report obscene mailings to their local postmasters (Summerfield 1959, 4). Angered by leniency of the *Roth* decision, Summerfield launched this citizen-based strategy by recruiting postal officials to give speeches across the country about the dangers of obscenity (Johnson 2019, 133-135). In an editorial column written in 1959, Summerfield described the spread of obscenity through the mail as a pervasive threat to the nation, urging all citizens to “join a new crusade against mailbox smut” (Summerfield 1959, 4).

Summerfield’s anti-obscenity campaign quickly received substantial press coverage which supported the crusade as vital for protecting children from pornography.¹⁰ While Summerfield’s campaign to incite individuals to act as obscenity censors peaked public attention in 1959 and 1960, his tactics fell out of favour by the mid-1960s. Following John F. Kennedy’s appointment of a new Postmaster General and revelations about the Post Office’s deliberate intimidation of por-

nography customers and discriminatory targeting of gay physique magazines, Summerfield's anti-obscenity campaign faded out of the public eye (Johnson 2019, 149).

However, Summerfield's strategy helped link together the liberalized ethos of democratic moral authority with the idea that "the privacy of the mail is one of our basic American rights" (Summerfield 1959, 4). In so doing, Summerfield identified mail order pornography as a central site of intervention for maintaining both public morality and the right to privacy. The rise of democratic moral authority and Summerfield's anti-obscenity campaign thus laid the groundwork for the Anti-Pandering statutes to emerge as a new tool for censoring the mail.

The Anti-Pandering statutes take these earlier attempts to democratize and liberalize censorship one step further by formally endowing the individual citizen with the right to police and criminalize obscenity advertising. The PAS and SOAS create a system of citizen-surveillance by encouraging censorship as a matter of private responsibility. This extends the libertarian ethos of democratic moral authority and Summerfield's anti-obscenity campaign by shifting state surveillance further towards civic participation. Notably, the relatively liberal President's Commission on Obscenity and Pornography endorsed this strategy because it allowed for individual choice (U.S. Government 1969, 13-20; U.S. Government 1970, 60-62). While the Anti-Pandering statutes may appear to be liberalized forms of censorship, the longer history of citizen-based surveillance reveals that the statutes rely on notions private citizenship and self-regulation to justify new and expanding forms of suppression.

Citizen-surveillance promotes the liberal subject's obligation to defend the home as a private space by distributing the power of censorship amongst postal patrons. At first pass, the Anti-Pandering appear to be the mirror opposite of the shield of privacy afforded by *Redrup* case, which confirmed every adult's right to wilfully consume "obscene" materials in private. The *Statutes*, in fact, maintain the individual's total dominion over the domestic sphere by constructing the freedom of speech as the right to both private consumption and prohibition. *Rowan v. United States Post Office Department*, which established the constitutionality of the PAS, cemented this construction of privacy by asserting that "man's home is his castle" and that the freedom of speech includes "the right of every person 'to be let alone'" (Burger 1969, 736-737).¹¹ This protectionist notion of domestic privacy directly countered the growing public circulation of sexuality underway during the 1960s growth of commercial pornography. Responding to the mounting permissiveness of public life, Anti-Pandering legislation operationalized the notion of privacy to encourage the censorship of pornography as familial and social responsibility.

Through the construction of the private home as both liberal right and civic duty to defend, citizen-surveillance reifies Enlightenment ideals of political subjectivity. As a number of queer and ethnic studies scholars have argued, the exclusive formation of the liberal individual subject secures nationalistic ideals of bodily comportment, public belonging, and sexual citizenship by reinforcing a model of political subjectivity predicated on whiteness, manhood, and reason.¹²

The individualistic construction of privacy upheld by the Anti-Pandering statutes maintains these limited boundaries of citizenship by binding the right to privacy to home ownership, morality, and heterosexual domesticity. This construction of privacy, as Nayan Shah points out, not only affirms the rights of the domestic nuclear family, but also renders nonnormative subjects as outside of the protections afforded by privacy (2005).¹³ Anti-Pandering legislation therefore promotes the right to privacy as the liberal subject's responsibility to heteronormative ideals of public and family life, rendering the censorship of erotic media as a social good. And, as the next section reveals, these ideological investments are manifested through moralistic descriptions of the *Statutes* and the persecution of gay and lesbian publications. Thus, while appearing to equally extend powers of freedom and protection to all subjects, citizen-surveillance actually works to secure the norms and boundaries of citizenship through the notion of domestic privacy.

In order to criminalize advertising through a system of private suppression, the Anti-Pandering statutes created new taxonomies, methods, and strategies for defining and prohibiting obscenity. The two *Statutes*, however, adopt different approaches for categorizing advertising as obscenity. The *PAS* creates a subjective system that places definitional and regulatory power entirely in the hands of individual citizens. Whereas, the *SOAS* proactively expands the powers of citizen-surveillance through an opt-in postal registry that relies on the more narrowly defined classification of "sexually oriented" to create generalized and seemingly objective means by which to increase existing modes of censorship. While differing in taxonomic approach, the creation of these new definitional tools provided citizens with the ability to both enforce the limits of the private household and to produce the very terms of permissibility by which erotic materials are regulated.¹⁴

The *PAS* created the category of "pandering advertisements" in order to mediate across the wide gulf between the obscene and the non-obscene. Beyond offering a route to sidestep concerns about First Amendment protections of non-obscene materials, the passage of the *PAS* emerged in response to a slew of legal, political, religious, and medical concerns about mail order advertisements. These materials posed a particular problem because they could not be conclusively defined as obscene or non-obscene. Chief Postal Inspector, Henry B. Montague, provocatively termed this "material in the grey or borderline category" (Education and Labor 1967c, 36). Which he goes on to describe as materials that "try to titillate the interests of those susceptible" "by keeping both their advertisements and their products hopefully within the legally safe, grey, borderline area of obscenity" (Education and Labor 1967c, 36). By broadly classifying "pandering advertisements" to capture a large swath of material that exists at this borderline—between the not-quite-obscene and the not-quite-decent—lawmakers successfully invented a malleable legal mechanism of censorship. The category of "pandering advertisements" was hence created as a legal remedy to deal with the regulation of the blurry boundaries of the obscene through citizen-surveillance.

The *SOAS* similarly tiptoes around legal definitions of obscenity and censorship concerns by creating new categories of regulation. The *SOAS* carefully classifies "sexually oriented advertisements" not as obscene per se, but as "any

advertisement that depicts, in actual or simulated form, or explicitly describes, in a predominantly sexual context, human genitalia, any act of natural or unnatural sexual intercourse, any act of sadism or masochism, or any other erotic subject directly related to the foregoing” (*Postal Reorganization 1970*, 750). This more narrowly defined category was developed to provide a means by which to generalize the prohibitory process inaugurated by the PAS. At the same time, however, this new category carefully maintains relatively loose definitional terms that capture an array of “sexually oriented” but not legally obscene advertisements. House Representative David N. Henderson explained this classificatory strategy, stating that the SOAS “goes a step beyond the present antipandering law, but...avoids the bramble thicket of what constitutes pornography and obscenity” (Post Office and Civil Service 1969d, 269).

Tactfully eschewing legal questions about social value, prurient interests, or community standards that guide judicial standards for classifying obscenity, the category of “sexually oriented” gives citizens a legitimate tool to privately censor advertisements. At the same time, the SOAS avoids the pitfalls of “the censorship problem” by creating the Prohibitory Order List as an opt-in system of surveillance (Post Office and Civil Service 1969c, 35). However, by insisting that distributors externally label postage as “sexually oriented,” the SOAS expanded the reach of private postal regulation well beyond those who voluntarily elected into the postal registry. Through the categorization of “sexually oriented advertisements” as a blanket measure of anticipatory surveillance, the intermediary capacities of the category “pandering advertisements” were expanded under a broad, supposedly objective, standard of evaluation.

The Anti-Pandering statutes introduced taxonomies through which advertising materials that are perceived as sexually provocative but not legally classifiable as obscenity are subject to the powers of citizen-surveillance. And, more importantly, these categories render such materials as outside of the protections of free speech and the limits of acceptable sexual expression. While the categories of “pandering” and “sexually oriented” advertisements are superficially at odds with one another—with one defining unwanted mailings as up to subjective interpretation and the other as a matter of objective standard—the two are part of the same overall tactic to provide concrete means for private citizens to define and suppress advertisements at the boundaries of obscenity. The category of “pandering advertisements” was given meaning through individual prohibitory orders submitted to the Postal Service and provided the necessary tool for citizen-surveillance to functionally contain obscenity. Whereas, the definition of “sexually oriented advertisements” cast a wide regulatory net to fortify existing modes of surveillance. In both cases, “pandering” and “sexually oriented” were introduced as third terms to secure the boundaries of acceptable sexual discourse through the criminalization of pornography distribution and advertising.

Emerging out of a much longer history of privatized surveillance, the Anti-Pandering statutes introduced citizen-surveillance in response to growing fears about mail order advertising. To implement this system, the relatively mutable categories of “pandering” and “sexually oriented” were created in order to allow

citizens to censor their mail. While seeming to introduce a liberalized process of private protection, citizen-surveillance actively encourages the suppression of pornography advertisements. This system constructs the privacy of the home as achieved through the censorship of erotic media, rendering the individual's participation in postal regulation as a liberal right and democratic obligation. As the next section will further detail, government documents and popular news coverage promoted citizen-surveillance as a tool for defending and upholding the norms of the domestic household. In this context, the newly created taxonomies of "pandering" and "sexually oriented" were used to police gay and lesbian publications as threats to national morality. The introduction of these new taxonomies thus armed private citizens with the ability to not only suppress advertising, but to censor a variety of publications (obscene or otherwise) that fail to conform to heterosexual familial norms.

"Erotically Arousing or Sexually Provocative": The Prohibitory Order Form, Heteronormativity, and the Production of the Obscene

The PAS organized the terrain of obscenity and advertising through the granular and quotidian ways that prohibitory orders were implemented. While the creation of the law was indeed rooted in ideas about the dangers of the traffic in sexually suggestive materials, the implementation of the law effectuated a hierarchical system of value associated with morality and deviance through the routine process of issuing prohibitory orders.¹⁵ Much of the history of legislative and regulatory attempts to suppress pornography is told from the perspective of federal and state measures, missing how government bureaucracy and everyday citizens make sense of, implement, and give meaning to the expression of the law.¹⁶ Whitney Strub highlights this point in his analysis of the persecution of queer publications in Cold War Los Angeles by urging for scholarly attention to the "deployment of obscenity law" (Strub 2008). He insists that "regardless of the legal outcome," obscenity "charges served to both reinforce hegemonic perspectives and devastate queer community formations" (Strub 2008, 375). As such, it is not enough to solely trace the evolution of juridical approaches to obscenity in the mail, but one must also examine how changing mechanisms of censorship are depicted and utilized.

In the case of the PAS, the everyday postal customers that provided the ground-level means for the implementation of citizen-surveillance primarily interacted with this new mode of postal regulation through the prohibitory order form itself. The prohibitory order form, as interface between government bureaucracy and citizen, had widespread influence in the late-1960s as nearly half a million postal customers filled one out. In a little over the first two years after the passage of the *Pandering Advertisements Statute*, more than 460,000 prohibitory order requests were submitted to the Post Office, averaging over 13,000 complaints per month, and resulting in over 380,000 orders issued (U.S. Government 1970, 110).

The prohibitory order form, however, did not present the PAS as a neutral regulatory measure to protect one's rights to privacy and freedoms of speech. In-

stead, the prohibitory order form helped to shape and define normative sexual discourse by framing obscenity as a threat to family values and domestic piety. The narrativization of obscenity as source of moral corruption was increasingly established by the educational and application materials related to the SOAS. The popular press further sedimented this narrative by depicting prohibitory orders as a necessary measure for protecting the nuclear household. This popular promotion of the Anti-Pandering statutes gave way to the use of prohibitory orders to target gay and lesbian publications. Gay and lesbian publishers responded, however, by publicly challenging citizen-surveillance and the logics of domestic privacy.

While a large majority of prohibitory order requests were issued against a handful of distribution companies (U.S. Government 1970, 110), it is not insignificant that gay and lesbian publications were amongst the smaller businesses that faced legal prohibition.¹⁷ The Anti-Pandering statutes were created at a time when gay and lesbian life gained increasing visibility through literature and media (D’Emilio 1998, 129-148; D’Emilio and Freedman 2012, 288-295; Johnson 2019). In response to the increased circulation of LGBT media during this period, gay and lesbian publications faced suppression at the hands of citizen-surveillance as particularly feared sources of sexual perversion. As part of a longer history of government persecution, the relatively flexible category of “pandering advertisements” was adapted to shore up the limits of private domesticity and the rights of citizenship by likening gay and lesbian print media to obscenity. The use of prohibitory orders to prosecute gay and lesbian publication must therefore be taken seriously as central to the construction of citizen-surveillance as a mechanism for defending the nuclear family.¹⁸

Shortly after the passage of the *PAS*, the Post Office Department began circulating prohibitory order request forms as part of a four-page pamphlet entitled “How You Can Curb Pandering Advertisements.” Evidently intended to objectively explain the law and the seemingly neutral bureaucratic process of which it was a part, the pamphlet instead presented the suppression of pandering advertisements as wed to the protection of the domestic home space and the inherent immorality of obscenity. The opening lines of the pamphlet read, “a family receiving a pandering advertisement which it finds offensive has the authority under a new Federal Law to ask that its members receive no more mail of any kind from the sender” (USPOD 1968). In this initial framing of the prohibitory order, the informational pamphlet presents the *PAS* as primarily intended to shield the family. While lawmakers and government officials, like Post Office General Counsel Timothy May, argued for the necessity of this legislation as integral to “the fundamental responsibility, the duty, and the right of parents to provide for the moral training of their children” (*Creating a Commission* 1967a, 21), the law itself makes but only passing reference to the relationship between parents and their children. In describing the purpose of the *PAS* as explicitly intended to provide the family with a means to stop pandering advertisements from breaching the boundaries of the home, the Post Office’s publication presents citizen-surveillance as a means to enforce normative family life and sexual piety.

Furthermore, the Post Office's guide to the *PAS* seamlessly collapses between the individual interpretation of advertising material as "erotically arousing or sexually provocative" and moral reprehensibility. The pamphlet principally defines the intention of the law as a tool to target advertisements that families "find offensive or believe to be morally harmful to their children" (USPOD 1968). Such ideology was rigorously enforced by statutory guidance provided by the General Counsel of the Post Office Department that typified pandering advertisements as "objectional," "offensive," and "harmful" (Nelson 1970). At direct odds with the legal presentation of the *PAS* as a medium for citizens to stop advertising materials according to one's own standards, the institutional framing of the legislation narrated prohibitory orders as part of the moral defense of the family. By easily conflating materials of an erotic or sexual nature and moral decrepitude, the Post Office presented a teleological account of the *PAS* as predetermined to uphold hegemonic standards of sexual discourse. This construction of the *PAS* offered both an easy justification for various crusades against obscenity and provided moral cover for the requirement that one be erotically aroused or sexually provoked in order for an advertisement to be subject to a prohibitory order. Notions of moral harm and familial protection repackaged the *PAS* to publicly present prohibitory orders as the justified persecution of erotic materials and the unwanted reactions that they elicit.

The 1970 passage of the *Postal Reorganization Act* came with renewed government efforts to publicize regulatory interventions available to mail recipients as part of a moral imperative to protect against pornography. In memorandums and informational releases sent from the Postal Service to members of Congress and the general public, the *PAS* and *SOAS* were described as "important weapon(s) in the Nixon Administration's battle against pornography" (USPOD 1970). Through public documents that promoted the *Statutes* as designed to combat "unsolicited pornographic advertising," the Postal Service effectively constructed "pandering" and "sexually oriented" ads as inherently obscene (Congressional Liaison USPS 1971). The narrative of the invasive force of pornography was reinforced by the Postal Service's application form for one to be registered with the Prohibitory Order List. The application form promoted the law as intended "to protect you and your family," rendering the self-regulatory act of listing one's self with the Post Office as a matter of preserving the heterosexual family (USPS 1970). By narrating postal regulation as matters of moral duty and family protection, the various forms and official communications related to the *Statutes* did more than simply providing a means of citizen-surveillance. Instead, the forms themselves defined the limits of free speech and sexual expression by promoting the privacy of the home as necessary protection against the threat of erotic media.

The popular press helped cement the narrative that citizen-surveillance served as a mechanism to defend the normative American family from the danger posed by obscenity. Articles in a variety of publications—from prominent newspapers like the *Washington Post* to popular magazines like *Good Housekeeping*—declared the transmission of obscenity and pornography through the mail as an existential threat facing America's children, wives, and families. And, cor-

respondingly, characterized postal regulation as necessary protection; as one headline of *The Hartford Courant* declares, “New Mail Law Shields Family” (*The Hartford Courant*, April 29, 1968, 6C). A 1968 article in *Ladies’ Home Journal* entitled “Wake Up, America: A Plan to Keep Pornography Away from Children,” for instance, outlines a variety of adverse effects that pornography might have on children from increased crime rates to traumatic influences on a child’s psychological development. Significantly, the article highlights the need for increased postal restrictions on pornography as a means to preserve the sanctity of the home (Kuh 1968). Similarly, a 1971 article in *Better Homes and Gardens*, “Pornography: What Can We Do To Protect Our Kids?” praises the PAS and SOAS as means by which “concerned parents can take effective action” against “smutty mail” (Greer 1971). The promotion of citizen-surveillance was augmented by sensationalistic news coverage of obscenity in the mail, like one *Washington Post* article that described how “unsolicited, dirty mail” was being targeted at “bereaved and irate, widows” (Causey 1970). Articles like this depicted “unsolicited pornography” as more than an unwanted nuisance, but as a threat to the very tenets of heterosexuality and the social norms of marriage and family life.

Such journalistic coverage of postal legislation has striking resonance with the rhetoric of conservative anti-pornography organizations like the Citizens for Decent Literature. In the CDL’s 1969 May-June newsletter, the proposed *Postal Reorganization Act* is celebrated as part of the Nixon administration’s “strong stand for morality” (“It’s Time for—Cautious Optimism,” *The National Decency Reporter: Newsletter of Citizens for Decent Literature Inc.*, May-June, 1-2, 1). Later in the newsletter, the risk posed by “sex-oriented” material is represented by a cartoon that depicts the mail slot of “John Q. Public” as the “serpent’s entrance” through which “pornography,” “smut,” “nudity,” “filth,” and “perversion” enter into the American home (“Serpent’s Entrance,” *The National Decency Reporter: Newsletter of Citizens for Decent Literature Inc.*, May-June 1969, 5). Media attention and activist efforts, like that of CDL, gained public support for the SOAS and significantly aided the Nixon administration’s delegitimization of the liberal findings of the President’s Commission on Obscenity and Pornography.

Similar to Postmaster Summerfield’s anti-obscenity campaign from a decade prior, the effectiveness of the PAS relied on public will and active participation in postal regulation. The popular promotion of the Anti-Pandering statues played an integral role in encouraging citizens to file prohibitory orders, to sign up for the prohibitory order list, and to write to their local postmasters and political representatives about the receipt of unwanted mail order obscenity. Widespread media coverage of the Anti-Pandering statutes brought much needed public attention to this new form of postal censorship, leading to a record setting number of complaints in fiscal year 1969 (U.S. Government 1970, 110). Together, popular news coverage and activist organizations helped gain support for new forms of postal censorship, promoted the use of prohibitory orders, and reinforced the prohibition of unwanted obscene materials as essential to ensuring the preservation of heteronormative American morality.

The justification of postal regulation as a matter of familial protections and sexual piety gave way to the persecution of gay and lesbian publications through the use of prohibitory orders.¹⁹ Gay and lesbian community periodicals from places like Chicago, Detroit, Durham, and Sonoma County faced postal censorship throughout the late-twentieth century as citizens took to prohibitory orders as a means of suppression. The *Sonoma County Gay & Lesbian Alliance News*, for example, dedicated an entire page of their July-August 1979 issue to reprint the prohibitory order that had been recently levied against them (“NEWS ‘Panders’ to its’ Readers,” *Sonoma County Lesbian and Gay Alliance News*, July-August, 12). The independently published *Gay Liberator* of Detroit covered a similar news story of a case in Florida that involved the issuance of a prohibitory order against a gay rights activist for mailing out “copies of *Gay Liberator*, *Southern Gay Liberator*, and clippings from *Advocate* and *LA Free Press!*” (*Gay Liberator*, 1972). The title of the article defiantly asks “Does Gay Liberation Turn You On?,” poking fun at the fact that the complainant deemed such materials as “erotically arousing or sexually provocative” (*Gay Liberator*, 1972, 3). Likewise, an article from the March 1973 issue of *Lavender Woman*, a Chicago-based lesbian periodical, describes the paper’s receipt of a prohibitory order by sarcastically writing “*Lavender Woman* is pornography? According to some residents of St. Louis, the answer is yes” (*Lavender Woman*, 1973, 14). As both the *Lavender Woman* and *Gay Liberator* are careful to point out, their receipt of prohibitory orders was not only a matter of citizen-surveillance and government censorship, but was a social and legal mechanism by which their publications were categorized as obscene. Through the individualized system of citizen-surveillance, prohibitory orders were thus mobilized to police the boundaries of normative sexual discourse by equating gay and lesbian print media with pornography.

Rooted in a longer history of suppression at the hands of the Post Office, the gay and lesbian organizations that received prohibitory orders feared the threat of further censorship. For the Mattachine Society, such anxieties came to the fore after receiving a prohibitory order in 1969. In the months leading up to the issuance of the order, the Mattachine Society’s Book Service struggled to retain control over its mailing list after a pornography company began fraudulently selling materials under the name “Mattachine” (Great Western Services 1969). As a result, the Society received a prohibitory order from an unexpected recipient, launching intense internal debates about longtime member Albert de Dion’s culpability for “the improper handling of mailing lists” (Kotis 1969). Only mere years after the major federal case against the gay mail-order and information service, Directory Services Inc., the Mattachine Society’s Secretary Michael Kotis worried that the prohibitory order had “endangered the Society and its members” (Johnson 2019, 193-220; Kotis 1969). While this particular case did not lead to further punitive action from the Post Office, the Mattachine Society’s reaction illustrates the lingering power and threat of postal surveillance. Unlike prior state and federal censorship laws, the Anti-Pandering statutes had created a foolproof method for avoiding free speech protections, leaving gay and lesbian publications vulnerable to suppression.

While gay and lesbian publications faced serious concerns about censorship at the hands of the Anti-Pandering statutes, a number of publications nevertheless responded by publicly contesting citizen-surveillance and the notion of heterosexual domestic privacy. For example, the same 1973 issue of *Lavender Woman* included a comprehensive list of all locations where the publication could be purchased, imploring customers to continue buying and circulating their publication. By celebrating “bookstore distribution” as an alternative to mail-subscriptions, *Lavender Woman* not only openly defied the prohibitory order but circumvented the logics of private censorship (1973, 14). Other publications, like the women’s music retail catalog *Ladyslipper*, used humour to ironically respond to and problematize the heteronormative functions of prohibitory orders. In the 1991 issue of *Ladyslipper*, the reader’s comments section includes a quote from a USPS prohibitory order asserting that the publication constitutes “erotically arousing or sexually provocative” material alongside another quote from a disgruntled recipient deriding the publication as “you queers.” Integrating these quotes amongst a number of others from elated consumers of “woman-identified music,” the *Ladyslipper* catalog sarcastically dismisses such comments as inconsequential and undermines their validity (“Readers’ Comments,” 1991, 86). By publicly contesting and satirizing postal censorship, gay and lesbian publications highlighted how prohibitory orders were deployed to enforce the boundaries of nuclear household and, in so doing, challenged the moral justifications for citizen-surveillance.

The public messaging affixed to prohibitory orders constructed the problem of obscenity in opposition to the preservation of domestic heterosexuality, which resulted in the discriminatory targeting of gay and lesbian publications. The supposedly neutral and universal terms of free speech and privacy espoused by the PAS and SOAS were reconfigured to enforce heteronormativity such that the suppression of “pandering” and “sexually oriented” mailings was constructed as a moralistic endeavour to shield the American family from sexual depravity and perversion. The loosely defined and adaptable category of “pandering advertisements” allowed for these censorship efforts to expand well beyond materials that contained explicit displays of sex, allowing the system of citizen-surveillance to expansively police the limits of sexual expression. The prohibitory orders issued against gay and lesbian publishers are not an anomalous outcome of a system supposedly meant to target obscene advertising. Instead, they demonstrate how the promotion of citizen-surveillance relied on the idea that the home is a space of private protection in order to broadly suppress the distribution of pornography and queer publications during a moment of growing circulation, display, and consumption of erotic media.

***Miller v. California* and the Legacy of the Anti-Pandering Statutes**

The post-1965 era of loosened obscenity restrictions came to an end with the 1973 *Miller v. California* Supreme Court Case. Marvin Miller, the appellant in *Miller v. California*, was brought to the Supreme Court on charges of illegally distributing unsolicited sexually explicit material through the mail after several unwilling re-

cipients reported him to the police. In a 5-4 decision, the Burger Court convicted Miller in an attempt to resolve existing confusion about obscenity regulation by upholding and strengthening the *Roth* decision that obscenity is not protected by the First Amendment. The *Miller* ruling rejected prior standards that protected materials with “redeeming social value,” instead deciding that obscenity is determined by considering a work as a whole.

The revanchism of the *Miller* decision continued in the legacy of the Anti-Pandering statutes by rallying against the perceived threat of pornography distribution. The very premise of the case relied on legal concern about controlling the dissemination of obscenity and citizen involvement in surveilling the mail. The deliberations that eventually led to Miller’s conviction took place as massive public debates about the circulation of pornography were sparked by the advent of the porno chic era and the widely popular release of the full-length hardcore film *Deep Throat* (Blumenthal 1973). The Court’s conservative response, however, did little to ease conflicts between mounting public displays of sexuality and growing fears about the dissolution of the American family. Instead, the *Miller* ruling introduced tougher obscenity standards at the same time as more and more Americans began consuming erotic media, extending existing frictions between sexual circulation and the right to privacy.

The history of the Anti-Pandering statutes offers key insight into this transitional moment of obscenity law. Consolidating previous citizen-based censorship efforts, the Anti-Pandering statutes promoted privatized censorship as the means to defend the home from new and proliferating forms of erotic media. This policy strategy identified distribution and advertising as the key conduit between the prurience of public life and the privacy of the heterosexual family. Under this view, the *Miller* decision and the subsequent rise of the Moral Majority are not aberrations within an otherwise liberal era of sexual expression, but emerge out of ongoing tensions between private consumption and public circulation.

In our current age where censorship is alive and well—in the form of postal regulation, corporate online content moderation, and government suppression of online sexual subcultures—this history calls on us to examine the continued reverberations of the Anti-Pandering statutes. The right to privacy was a relatively new legal concept in the late-1960s, and yet the idea of private citizenship was used to justify and encourage the surveillance and criminalization of various publications. The legal and cultural legacies of the Anti-Pandering statutes reveal how privacy is often wielded as a moralistic guise for censoring the public dissemination of materials that fall outside the norms of domestic sexual morality. As contemporary battles are waged over the federal regulation of online sex work and access to reproductive healthcare, we must critically interrogate how and to whom the right to privacy is afforded as part of its continued use as a powerful tool for policing public discourse and promoting the defense of the heterosexual nuclear family.

Notes

1. For more on the history of postal regulation and obscenity see Beisel 1997; Fuller 2003; Boyer 2002.
2. For more on 1970s erotic media and the rise of porno chic, see Bronstein and Strub 2016.
3. For example: *Butler v. Michigan*, 352 U.S. 380, 77 S. Ct. 524, 1 L. Ed. 2d 412 (Supreme Court of the United States 1957); *Kingsley v. Brown*, 354 U.S. 436, 77 S. Ct. 1325, 1 L. Ed. 2d 1469, (Supreme Court of the United States 1957); *Smith v. Cal.*, 361 U.S. 147, 80 S. Ct. 215, 4 L. Ed. 2d 205, (Supreme Court of the United States 1959).
4. For more on the rise of the New Right and the emergence of political discourses about the home and family values, see Lassiter 2007 and Self 2012.
5. Prior to the *Redrup* decision, the *Roth* and *Alberts* cases guided jurisprudence in obscenity cases. The *Roth* and *Alberts* decisions collectively ruled that obscenity fell outside of all free speech protections, yielding federal and state obscenity laws as constitutional. Moreover, the rulings created strict standards for determining “obscenity.” As an unintended outcome, however, the *Roth* decision’s distinction between obscenity and sex ultimately allowed for a proliferation of sexual expression. For more on the history of the *Roth* decision, see Strub 2013.
6. The *Redrup* ruling notably led to a reversal in the 1967 *Potomac News Co. v. United States* case, allowing for the sale and importation of nude homosexual magazines. See Johnson 2019, 185–87.
7. For instance, “3 Religious Leaders Urge Ban on Smut Sent by Mail,” *The Sun*, August 29, 1959, 7; “City Residents Asked to Help Stamp Out Mail Order Obscenity,” *The Hartford Courant*, May 7, 1959, 8; “Mail Order Obscenity Draws Fire,” *The Hartford Courant*, August 24, 1959, 29; “Mail-Order Filth,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, June 1, 1959, 16; and “Rise in Mailed Obscenity Seen,” *The Sun*, November 25, 1959, 7.
8. For example: *United States v. Consolidated Productions, Inc.*, 326 F. Supp. 603 (U.S. Dist. 1971); *United States v. Lange*, 466 F.2d 1021 (U.S. App. 1972); *United States v. Slepicoff*, 524 F.2d 1244 (U.S. App. 1975); *United States v. Pent-R-Books, Inc.*, 538 F.2d 519 (U.S. App. 1976); *United States v. Treatman*, 408 F. Supp. 944 (U.S. Dist. 1976).
9. The use of censorship boards was ultimately deemed unconstitutional in *Freedman v. Maryland*, 380 U.S. 51, 85 S. Ct. 734, 13 L. Ed. 2d 649 (Supreme Court of the United States 1965).
10. For instance: “Parents Key to Fight Against Obscene Mail,” *Daily Defender*, October 27, 1959, 14; “Press Cited in War on Obscenity,” *Daily Boston Globe*, September 1, 1959, 3; James MacNees, “Children Get Pornography by Mail, Summerfield Says,” *The Sun*, May 13, 1959, 1; Tom Nelson, “Summerfield Hits ‘Barons of Obscenity,’” *The Washington Post and Times Herald*, April 24, 1959, 3; and Herbert B. Warburton, “You and the Law Vs. Smut,” *New York Herald Tribune*, September 27, 1959, 15.
11. For further discussion of *Rowan*, the *PAS*, the First Amendment, and the right to privacy see, Edmondson 1970 and Lowman 1971.

12. See, for example, Berlant 1997; Duggan 2003; Eng 2010; Mehta 1999; Wynter 2003.
13. See also, Berlant and Warner 1998.
14. For more on the relationship between surveillance and the normalization of deviance see Beauchamp 2019; Brown 2015; Foucault 1995.
15. See, Rubin 1993, and Cossman 2003.
16. For instance, Ernst and Schwartz 1964 and de Grazia 1992.
17. The disparity between the number of prohibitory orders issues against large manufacturers and smaller advertisers of gay and lesbian material is due, in part, to the fact that distributors of queer content often limited their advertisements to a select mailing list of recurring buyers. Whereas, large manufacturers of heterosexual content often used general mailings to reach a wider audience (U.S. Government 1971a, 165–167). However, the third volume of the *Technical Report of the Commission on Obscenity and Pornography* simultaneously notes that homosexual magazines ranked as the fourth highest source of concern for local communities out of all types of erotic media (U.S. Government 1971a, 200).
18. For more on the history of obscenity law and the censorship of gay and lesbian publications, see Strub 2008; Strub 2010a; Johnson 2019; Meyer 2002; Eskridge 1999.
19. Significantly, Hallie Lieberman points out that sex toy manufacturers faced similar such charges (Lieberman 2017, 101–2).

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Distribution, Bars, and Arcade Stars

Joe Anthony's Entrepreneurial Expansion in Houston's Gay Media Industries

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In 1969, attorney John J. Sampson interviewed various parties across the supply chain of American adult media industries in order to provide a comprehensive portrait of industrial relations for the “Traffic and Distribution” component of the presidential Commission on Obscenity and Pornography. Whereas the general theatrical feature market for independent exploitation, arthouse, and erotic films was widely discussed in the Commission via high profile informants including David F. Friedman and Louis K. Sher,¹ the coverage of the smaller industry of gay-oriented “male” films amounted to sprinklings of information such as, “perhaps two dozen or more full-length features were produced specifically for the homosexual market in 1969, and some theaters catered specifically to this trade” (Sampson 1971, 29). While both the *Report of the Commission on Obscenity and Pornography* (Lockhart 1970) and the expanded 1971 multi-volume *Technical Report* do not include citations for this estimate, the Commission records at the Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library reveal that the—likely sole—source on the gay theatrical film market was an unpredictable one. This key source was a father-son entrepreneurial duo, Joseph and Michael Anthony respectively, two figures who have up to this point escaped coverage in gay adult media historiography. Initially producing and distributing work for print and nontheatrical male markets, by Fall 1969 the Anthonys’ *Love’s Muscle; Troy* (1969) starring Michael and directed by Joseph was publicly exhibited at the legendary Park Theatre on Alvarado Boulevard in Los Angeles.

Sampson interviewed Joseph Anthony about the distribution of independent gay films and mail-order products, and on July 25, 1969 sent a thank you letter, consisting primarily of a generic form message, but briefly including the following personal note:

I certainly enjoyed meeting Chris and your son. I hope your resolve to supply me with the information we discussed when I met with you has not wavered. I am certainly looking forward to receiving your report. (Sampson 1969a)

While the identity of the individual referred to as Chris is unknown, other information can be surmised from related intertexts that following a discussion of gay media industries Sampson requested explicit documentation including a report on the workings of the industry and a list of subdistributor contacts (Sampson 1969b), to which Anthony appears to have agreed with slight reservations. It is unclear if Anthony sent the requested documentation, but shortly thereafter,

Joseph and Michael Anthony moved to Houston where they extended their adult media operations and eventually expanded into the management of gay bars in the area.

The Anthonys—both of whom were identified as gay in press accounts (Dryer and Reinert 1973, 58; McClurg 2009, 4)—overtly identified their numerous businesses with the historically emergent idea of a shared gay cultural identity. The Anthonys effectively developed “gay” as a locally meaningful advertising term in Houston, whether, promoting Coin-O-Matic as “Houston’s only gay owned and operated vending company” (Anthony’s Coin-O-Matic Advertisement, *Nuntius*, February 1971, 10), noting that “just for the record” their A&A bookstores constituted “a nationwide gay operated chain” (“Mr. Clean’ Congratulations,” *Nuntius*, September 1970, 20), or founding bars with names—including Mary’s and Gayboy—that unapologetically proclaimed the sexual identity of their target gay male consumer base.² Joseph Anthony even went a step further, mandating that his Gayboy International Club was “exclusively for the Gay Community, and the hets will not be welcome” (“Gayboy Opened by Anthony/Vecera,” *Nuntius*, June 1971, 4). Anthony boldly outlawed heterosexual slumming in his establishment, a move that reflected contemporaneous separationist and self-determining tactics of the gay liberation movement.

Alongside and sometimes within their retail establishments, the Anthonys produced and sold non-theatrical films, still photographs, magazines, and books. They also were vital to the development of Houston’s mini theatres, coin-operated loop machines that were installed within a set of privacy dividers. These enterprises comprised what I call gay useful media—media products that functioned in a utilitarian manner in relation to gay social life. While useful is not a qualifier previously applied to conceptualize gay media, many gay cultural histories focus on media utility and use. For example, presenting an account of the social and subcultural utility of gay communication networks from the 1950s to the 1970s, in *Contacts Desired* (2006), Martin Meeker uncovered at least four crucial uses of gay media including self-identification, community association, geographic place-making, and activist organizing (2006, 10–13). As Meeker argues the circulation of gay cultural products not only affected established gay social networks, but more importantly, created the possibility of constituting new collective formations where they did not previously exist (9). In Houston, which by the 1960s was considered “the homosexual playground of the South” (Sears 2001, 49), gay useful media were locally characteristic because they functioned as connective tissue that linked individuals to regional gay institutions, translocal gay community, and national gay communication networks. I define gay useful media from the 1960s and 1970s as gay cultural products that aimed to affect cultural change through their contributions to gay visual culture and their encouragement of once isolated individuals to find communities of collective acceptance. This definition of gay useful media follows Haidee Wasson and Charles R. Acland’s definition of useful cinema (2011, 4)—here adapted to a broader media landscape than film—to name a particular kind of relation between media and cultural infrastructures wherein products have a utilitarian value and function for the institutions they are nested within.

Gay useful media's divergence from Wasson and Acland's definition is not so much medium specific as it is determined by objectives toward which the media are used. The functions of useful cinema informing the concept in Wasson and Acland's book range among pedagogy, persuasion, and experimentation. These functions reflect the case studies' contexts that include educational institutions, propaganda and reportage, and consumer product expansion. Pedagogy, persuasion, and experimentation are revealed as the flavors of utility that new consumer and industrial grade film formats provided to already established institutions, as Wasson and Acland put it, "useful cinema has as much to do with the maintenance and longevity of institutions seemingly unrelated to cinema as it does with cinema per se" (4). On the contrary, gay useful media are not restricted to established institutions or even nontheatrical or emerging formats, but instead, underscore how past media formats (print, motion picture, or venue space) could be used to create new specifically gay institutions. As we will see, the Houston-based *Gayboy* franchise began as a magazine, which enabled the later establishment of a brick-and-mortar community institution, the GB International bar. Gay useful media historically developed toward the ends of bringing people together, whether that be in the physical place of a gay bar or through the dispersed sharing of an identity concept—like "homophile," "homosexual," or "gay"—within a distributed network of strangers. Hollis Griffin has reflected on this magnetic utility of media bringing gay men together in his expansion of the concept of media convergence to examine how local bar publications formed their publics (2017, 23–52). Griffin engages the collective definition of convergence—as in "coming together" (23)—to unpack the traditional media studies concept of convergence that usually refers to the processes of audience targeting and dispersion prompted by the historical transition from analog to digital production and consumption. In conversation with Griffin's investigation of convergence as "coming together," Ryan Powell (2019) has recently traced how postwar gay adult cinema elaborated multiple possibilities for gay men "coming together," a compelling double entendre that encapsulates the dual uses of gay adult media toward communal formation and collective sexual climax. In conversation with Griffin and Powell, I offer the term "gay useful media" to explore the array of qualitatively different uses that gay media historically permitted, uses that cannot be accounted for under the more restrictive terms "useful media" or "useful cinema."

The story of the *Anthony*s links together a number of stakes relevant to the broader fields of gay history and media history. This study gives evidence that a gay liberation ethos permeated gay media enterprises in Houston in a way that was congruent with the more well-documented gay cultural hubs on the coasts. At stake too is the history of gay kinship; for many gay men during the 1960s and 1970s the notion of coming out to one's father—let alone being accepted—was all but a pipe dream,³ particularly in a conservative southern state like Texas. The fact that a gay father and son were not only out to one another, but also actively collaborating in local gay culture provides a basis for imagining gay kinships that defied the pervasive bigotry epitomized by Anita Bryant's false opposition between gay men and families. Finally, the *Anthony*s' motion picture endeavors

trouble a rigid dichotomy between the terms “theatrical” and “non-theatrical” as they are employed in media history. While the pornographic loop machine would typically be considered a non-theatrical medium, the fact that Joe Anthony marketed one variety of his coin-operated machines as “mini theaters”—a term used elsewhere to denote adult storefront theatres—suggests these machines prompted an interstitial mode of exhibition between the theatrical and the nontheatrical. Whereas the gauge of Anthony’s mini theatres may have been synonymous with a nontheatrical format, their contexts of consumption within an adult retail store designated for cruising aligned with the “all male” theatrical mode of spectatorial cruising described by José Capino (2007).

Gay useful media have been well-documented in gay film and media history, yet underacknowledged under the terminology of “useful.” Yet, the story of gay media entrepreneurship has always been a story of use over form, with the function of gay enterprise reflecting social utility, individual desire, and collective political imperatives.⁴ Thomas Waugh’s seminal historical study of gay visual culture, *Hard to Imagine*, pinpoints how the advent of the photographic medium presented a critical turning point that enabled the modern form of homoerotic visual culture (1996, 3–58), and at the same time was understood for the medium’s utilitarian value that served “a self-appointed historiographic function” (II) of documenting anonymous gay life. David K. Johnson’s recent groundbreaking book *Buying Gay* (2019) has documented how physique publications exemplified pre-Stonewall gay rights efforts as gay consumer rights struggles, positioning the physique magazine as politically and socially useful precursor to gay liberation publications. Whitney Strub’s “Mondo Rocco” shows how the medium of film was an enabling agent for collective gay male occupation of public space, whether within theatres or in the public sphere with the emergence of gay theatrical policies. Yet Jeffrey Escoffier’s work has underscored how some gay media entrepreneurs, like the photographer-filmmaker Bob Mizer, saw nontheatrical mail-order products as more socially and financially lucrative endeavors than gay theatrical film (2009, 16–60). In defiance against heterosexual hegemony, liberation-era gay film and print media overflowed with softcore and hardcore gay content creating an increasingly public gay culture that simultaneously tied politics to sex media and proved to be the vanguard of “porno chic” (Capino 2007). In doing so, “adult” content constituted the primary format of gay visual culture in the 1970s (Hilderbrand 2016). On the other hand, regardless of their content gay media have historically been bracketed with pornography by anti-gay regulatory and legal regimes, useful to the bigoted cultural antipode of gay liberation.

This article offers a recovery history of a gay father-son media empire—historically exceptional in and of itself—that as a case study also exemplifies how gay useful media institutions have historically comprised direct-sale still photograph enterprises, theatrical and nontheatrical cinema, print publication operations, adult bookstores, and—perhaps surprisingly—gay bars. Adult media historians have marshalled the methods of historically rigorous case study in novel ways. Recently, these methods have been employed to (i) examine the ways archival policies have impeded lesbian adult media historiography (Embree 2019),

(2) recover how a socio-economically precarious softcore star has enabled the formation of a local industry with regional impact (Mini 2019), and (3) argue that microhistories—even when linked to economic failure—should be given equal scholarly attention as case histories of more profitable enterprises (Gorfinkel 2018). Inspired by such interventions, in this article I trace how Joseph and Michael Anthony moved from Los Angeles to Houston and in doing so expanded their gay media presence to include not only adult media distribution and retail, but also vending, live theatre, and gay bar management. The first section examines the Anthonys' early work in adult media distribution and retail in Southern California. In the second section, I detail the Anthonys involvement in the distribution and production of both theatrical and nontheatrical films during their operations in Los Angeles. The Anthonys then moved to Houston, as described in the third section, to expand the operations of a Southern California-based adult bookstore. The Anthonys' distribution conflicts with both law enforcement and a competing distributor are outlined in the fourth section. The fifth section reveals how the Anthonys entered the bar management arena, and how they developed a lifestyle magazine that functioned to cross-promote their bar operations. The research for this article was compiled through triangulating findings from a variety of institutional holdings including those of the ONE Archives, the Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library, public libraries in Newport Beach and Houston, and various agencies that hold public records. The lack of a centralized archival source on the Anthonys begs the question of how many other similar figures might be lost to history, a revelation reflected in the archival silences observed by researchers working on other marginalized forms of cultural production including the work of black women (Miller-Young 2014, 21–22) and lesbians (Embree 2019, 240–54). Retracing this history reveals the complex ways that gay media enterprises were able to expand, and offers an opportune avenue for considering the contours of gay useful media.

Production, Distribution, and Retail Operations in Los Angeles

Joseph and Michael Anthony's business endeavors were initially triangulated through four corporate entities Anthony Enterprises (sometimes listed as Anthony Studios, Anthony Productions, or Anthony Distributing), Golden West, A&A, and Anaco. In the gay press—and not including difficult to date physique publications—the earliest known reference to the Anthonys' operation was through an associated corporate name and logo that appeared in the first issue of Ken Green's *Gay West* from 1968. Among the advertisements included in the publication, one listed the Ken Green Group as a distributor for Anthony Studios' photographic stills (Green 1968). Evidence of the Anthonys' business operations in the more popular homophile newspaper *Los Angeles Advocate* begin in 1969, with advertisements featuring photographs of Michael Anthony under promotions for mail-order products of Anthony Productions and Golden West Productions. The first ad appeared in January and listed Golden West's mailing address as P.O. Box 4277 in the Irvine and Newport Beach area of Orange County. The ad proclaimed, "Presenting the Model of the Year Troy McDonald" (Golden West Productions

Advertisement, *Los Angeles Advocate*, January 1969, 22), one of Michael Anthony's numerous pseudonyms, and listed a set of eight 4 by 5 black and white photographs for \$3.50. Anthony Productions' initial address was Department 134 at 5466 Santa Monica Boulevard in Hollywood, an address that Golden West would begin to employ by April.

Anthony Studios and Anthony Enterprises appear to have been production and distribution outfits designed to associate products with the brand name. While "Anthony" may have been Joseph and Michael's real surname, it is notable that the name also created a nominative link to already well-known physique pioneers including Bob Anthony (who also had an outfit called Anthony Studios) and Richard Anthony (who also used the name Dick Fontaine). By May 1969, an advertisement designed to look like a business card was emblazoned with the name Anthony Distributing Company in order to advertise Joe Anthony's wholesale distribution services to retailers. In the ad, Anthony Distributing was billed with the—likely wildly overstated—tagline "World's largest distributor of Girl & Boy ART Mags" (Anthony Productions Advertisement, *Los Angeles Advocate*, September 1969, 15).⁵ Given the date, Anthony's distribution experiences appear to have emerged out of his involvement with two other poles of the supply chain,

retail and production.

The Golden West production, distribution, and retail operation was a general adult product entity that contracted with Anthony for gay-oriented product. Run by Joseph Reitano and his son, Golden West operated a mail-order service out of post office boxes in Newport Beach and Santa Ana and had a brick-and-mortar bookshop in downtown Santa Ana at 1216 South Main Street. In late 1970, the Reitanos were indicted for advertising and distribution as part of a larger pornography crackdown that included the high-profile physique entrepreneur Conrad Germain ("U.S. Porn Statute Ruled Invalid; Busts Continue," *Advocate*, November 25, 1970, 6). Other than Golden West, the Reitanos also used corporate names The Reel Thing and Collectors' Specialties, and managed warehouse space in Westminster and Fountain Valley that



Figure 1.

Adonis Bookstall Flyer. c.a. 1969. Studio and Distributor Marketing Ephemera Collection (Coll2012.170). Folder: Adonis Bookstall. ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives, USC, Los Angeles, CA. Courtesy of ONE Archives at the USC Libraries.

were raided the following year (“Police Raid Porn Dealer,” *Advocate*, June 9, 1971, 7; “Orange County Pornography Case: Appeal Set on Sex-Film Evidence Ban,” *Independent Press-Telegram* [Long Beach, CA], August 14, 1971, B6.).

A company called A&A and its associated distribution arm Anaco distributed some of the Anthonys’ products, though it is unclear whether the Anthonys initially held roles in these companies. However, following Joseph and Michael Anthony’s moved to Houston the two were thereafter referred to as heading the A&A company. Initially, A&A Bookshops emerged in Southern California in the late 1960s and eventually attained a larger retail presence than Golden West. In January 1969, the company opened the Adonis Bookstall at 708 South Alvarado, a bookstore attached to the legendary Park Theatre where two of Joseph Anthony’s films were later screened.

By November 1969, A&A boasted six locations in Los Angeles County: two in Long Beach, two in Los Angeles, one in Huntington Park, and one in Santa Fe Springs (Adult Bookshops Advertisement, *Long Beach Independent*, November 12, 1969, C16; A&A Books Advertisement, *Los Angeles Advocate*, December 1969, 14). Throughout raids on the Long Beach locations in 1970, the owner was reported as Martin Allen (Mader 1970, A3), but it was ambiguous in press reporting whether he was only the owner of the Long Beach locations or of the entire A&A operation in Los Angeles County. Advertisements in the *Los Angeles Advocate* for products distributed by Anaco initially listed the Long Beach address 1128 Saint Louis Avenue as the Anaco headquarters (A&A Advertisement, *Los Angeles Advocate*, March 1970, 26). A Long Beach directory from the same period listed this Saint Louis Avenue address to A&A’s Martin D. Allen and his mother Hazel V. Allen (Polk’s Long Beach City Directory 1969, 15–16). Keeping this address linking Anaco to A&A in mind, it appears that Anaco was likely a name derived from a fusion of letters from a stylized alternate spelling of A&A: A ‘n’ A Co. (wherein ‘n’ is an abbreviation of “and” and “Co.” an abbreviation for company). All available evidence considered, it is conceivable that A&A was perhaps run by both Martin Allen and Joseph Anthony with the two As in the company name possibly standing for the first letters of their last names. By 1970, *Advocate* ads for Anaco began to list a P.O. Box in Houston instead of the Long Beach address, and as we will see, a second phase of both A&A and Anaco appeared in Houston at the same time that Joseph and Michael Anthony moved to that city.

Nontheatrical and Theatrical Films

The Anthonys’ foray into motion picture media began with gay-oriented nontheatrical film designed for home consumption. The earliest advertisement in the *Los Angeles Advocate* was for a 200 foot 8mm film entitled *Naked Breed* in “flaming color” (Golden West Productions Advertisement, *Los Angeles Advocate*, April 1969, 12.). The advertisement represented the film with a censored nude still of Michael (billed as Troy McDonald), and listed it as distributed by Golden West Productions for a price of \$30. It is unclear how many short nontheatrical films Mike Anthony appeared in, but in a later interview in Houston he stated he had appeared in 21 short subjects from 1968–70 (“Portrait of a Model,” *Nuntius*,

September 1970, 24). In the interview he also mentioned that he had appeared in two “major motion pictures” (24) by which it appears he meant films publicly screened at cinemas and not necessarily feature length.

Joseph and Michael Anthony’s motion picture endeavors expanded into the theatrical realm with two productions that premiered on August 20, 1969 at the Park Theatre in Los Angeles and a week later screened at the Park-Miller in New York City. The two films were titled *Love’s Muscle; Troy* and *Over Easy*, and they were the theatres’ weekly main attractions accompanied by several previously released shorts: Joe Tiffenbach’s “heterosexual” short *Kiss* involving a nude male-female romance and several fantastical short films from Dimitri Alexis Svigelj including *Sunday Morning*, *Bedtime Fun*, *Wizzard of Azz*, *Afternoon of a Faun*, and *Rock-Hard Marble Boy*.⁶ Because they are not currently available to view, the content and structure of *Love’s Muscle; Troy* and *Over Easy* are relatively unclear, however, a few observations can be made. First, taglines used in the programs from the Park suggest that Michael Anthony (aka Troy), the star of *Love’s Muscle; Troy*, was already familiar to viewers, “you’ve seen him in all the magazines...now see him and his friends in action” whereas Tom White, the star of *Over Easy*, was an up and coming icon “a friend of Troy’s, and one of the true discoveries of ‘69.” Second, the program also confirms that Joe Anthony directed both *Love’s Muscle; Troy* and *Over Easy* (“Have a Cool Autumn ‘69, at the Park!” 1969, 3).⁷ Third, font size and film title ordering in the Park program and in popular press advertisements all privileged the former film as the centerpiece of the program and *Over Easy* as a secondary feature. Notably, the *Los Angeles Times* ad and program listing conflated the two films, the ad associating an image of Tom White’s face with *Troy* through visual proximity and the program listing amalgamating the titles into the single *Troy and the Over Easy Boys* (Park Theatre Advertisement, *Los Angeles Times*, August

22, IV–16; “Independent Theatre Guide: Los Angeles Neighborhood: Park,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 22, 1969, IV–16.). Out of the two Anthony pictures *Love’s Muscle; Troy* appears to be the only one definitively extant, and information on the surviving elements at the Kinsey Institute Library and Archives indicate a single 16mm reel exists (Anthony 1969), making it probable that the pair of Anthony films were screened together as headlining shorts rather than either being multi-reel features.

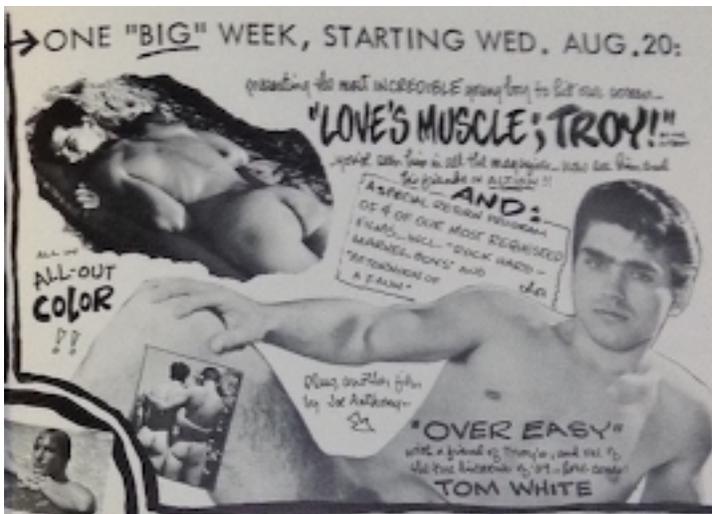


Figure 2.

Detail for Park Theatre program showing the premiere of *Love’s Muscle; Troy*. “Have a Cool Autumn ‘69, at the Park!” 1969. Park Theatre Program. ONE Subject Files Collection (Coll2012.001). Folder: Park Theatre. ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives, USC, Los Angeles, CA. Courtesy of ONE Archives at the USC Libraries.

Capitalizing on the publicity from the advertisement and screening of their films at the Park and Park-Miller the previous month, in September Anthony Productions released a 200 foot 8mm color short entitled *Troy and His Friends*. Priced at \$19.00, which included shipping and handling along with a free Anthony Productions 1969 catalog, the package was billed as a “Get Acquainted (sic) Offer” (Anthony Productions Advertisement, *Los Angeles Advocate*, September 1969, 15). The “Get Acquainted” line teased the prospect that the consumer’s act of purchasing was virtually a step towards becoming a “friend” of Troy, while also suggesting that the Anthonys’ mail-order distribution enterprise was just being introduced. Advertising stills accompanying the ad, were placed in a five-panel sequence bordered above and below by sprocket holes to visually emphasize the product was a motion picture film. The stills’ contents conveyed an all-male nudist retreat involving at least three individuals in a variety of outdoor scenarios including sunbathing, comradeship, and horseplay. Soon after these advertisements were run, the Anthonys’ emerged in Houston’s adult bookstore industry.

“A Nationwide Gay Operated Chain”: The Anthonys’ Move to Houston

In late 1969, A&A announced that two new locations—their first two outside California—would be opening in Houston. In November, Martin Allen filed an assumed name statement in Houston for the entity A&A Bookshop (Allen 1969, 3), with locations at 1216 Westheimer Road and 1006 North Shepherd Drive. By this time, the chain already had ten locations in California, four in Long Beach, one attached to the famed Park Theater in Los Angeles, and one each in Huntington Park, Ventura, and Bakersfield. The chain advertised the expansion as a gay-centric enterprise with the rhyming catchphrase “The Gay Way is to A&A” (A&A Advertisement, *Los Angeles Advocate*, March 1970, 26). “Way” suggests a nighttime thoroughfare with sensational amusements, akin to the Broadway nickname “the Great White Way,” and in doing so it not only celebrated the company’s growth in a glitzy mode referencing the sensational brilliance of nighttime business but also emphasized that A&A had a history of expansion—the addresses for each store in the chain were numbered chronologically by each store’s opening date—which could be linearly followed as if they were addresses on a singular “Gay Way.” By late 1970, the chain had opened three other locations—eventually each referred to by the store name Adult Library—at 1312 West Alabama, 609 La Branch, and 1203 Waugh.

While the exact dates of Joseph and Michael Anthony’s move to Houston are unclear, the Houston-based gay newspaper *Nuntius* mention that Joseph was “home again” (“Bar Hop with Nose and Hic: Like We See It,” *Nuntius*, September 1970, 14) in September 1970 and that “this gent has plans for his company and they include us” (14), indicating a strategic relationship between Anthony and *Nuntius* likely including at least an arrangement for Anthony to carry the newspaper at A&A stores. In fact, that same September issue featured a portrait of Mike on the cover page, behind superimposed article text. A profile of Mike in the issue mentioned that he had become the vice president of A&A Bookshops and that he could mostly be found at A&A’s central shop, the 1312 W. Alabama location.

In the coming months, A&A continued to expand rapidly with a new shop in San Antonio announced in October and a fourth location in Houston opening in February 1971. During that time the stores went through rebranding under the name Adult Library, and eventually the flagship location on W. Alabama became known as the Storybook.

Given that the A&A stores were the public faces of the Anthonys' larger business operations that included behind the scenes endeavors like distribution and vending, these adult bookstores became more susceptible to police raids, particularly as they advertised extended hours for cruising after the bars closed with a twenty-four hour policy and slogans like "everybody's here after the bars close!" (Storybook Advertisement, *Gayboy* 1, no. 4, 1972, 5). While the A&A company advertised itself as "a nationwide gay operated chain" ("Mr. Clean' Congratulations," *Nuntius*, September 1970, 20), it appears that the "nationwide" more accurately described its distribution reach than retail presence, which appears to have only included California and Texas.

Distribution Trouble

The above-mentioned Anaco distribution company was evidently a business alias because it was not registered with either the California or Texas secretary of state under that name. Therefore, it is difficult to tell how the company was structured without obtaining internal documents, and it is a complicated task to gauge individuals' involvement given that the primary available sources are a set of selective public self-disclosures (Caldwell 2009). It can be deduced from post office box numbers and locations along with the gay press' reporting on Anaco that the company was primarily a publishing and distribution arm of the Anthonys' enterprises. In September 1970, Anaco was described as "the sister company to A&A Incorporated" and a local gay bar personality and manager of the W. Alabama bookshop, Lynn Hudspeth, was hired as Anaco's distribution manager for all Southern States ("Mr. Clean' Congratulations," *Nuntius*, September 1970, 20). Whereas the California-based iteration of Anaco appears to have focused on distribution via direct mail, the Houston operation began advertising coin-operated technologies—branded under the name Coin-O-Matic—that could be installed in adult media enterprises either in open "arcade" settings or for "mini theatres" that allowed more private consumption. In October, Anaco announced that it was in the process of outfitting coin-operated mini theatres in numerous adult bookstores in the area including the two initial A&A shops, three other Houston stores, and one each in Waco and San Antonio (Anaco Advertisement, *Nuntius*, October 1970, 23). The flagship W. Alabama store itself included both an arcade and three mini theatres.

It was the presence of the coin-operated loop machines that led to raids on the Adult Libraries as part of a larger police siege on Houston's adult theatres in late 1970. On November 20, 1970, police arrested a total of ten employees of four adult establishments: two theatres, one "lounge," and the W. Alabama location of A&A. Whereas, other adult establishments had shifted to softcore following earlier raids, the four locations had allegedly incorporated hardcore footage into

or between softcore films and loops, a process of product differentiation that one vice officer referred to as “trying to draw their customers by running hard-core pornography on a hit-and-miss basis” (“Raids on Nudie Movies Will Continue, Vice Squad Says,” *Houston Post*, November 22, 1970, 28). The owner of the Zipper Lounge, Norman Duke, described the decision to intersperse softcore and hardcore—rather than running hardcore only—as a self-censorial adjustment “in hopes that the vice squad would leave us alone” (28), however, incensed by the new raids he promised to buck the softcore and return to running his “31 reels of earthy movies” (“Six Are Charged in Sex Film Raids,” *Houston Chronicle*, November 22, 1970, sec. 2, 4). Raids continued on November 25 with two locations of A&A sieged and employees arrested. In December, an owner of two of the A&A stores, Tom Vecera, filed a lawsuit in a federal district court that sought \$300,000 in damages and an injunction against further raids (“Adult Book Stores File Federal Suit,” *Houston Chronicle*, December 5, 1970, 1:3; “Suits Filed in U.S. District Courts: 7-H-1311,” *Daily Court Review* (Houston, TX), December 10, 1970, 7).

Besides the policing of retail spaces, the Anthonys specifically were targeted for their distribution operations. Shortly after Vecera’s locations were raided, an incident occurred involving the A&A bookstore at 1203 Waugh Drive run by Michael Anthony. On January 5, 1971 at a Delta Airlines location near Houston, one of four cartons shipped from H. Lynn Womack’s Potomac News Company to Anthony broke open, revealing adult materials. H. Lynn Womack was a legendary physique publisher known for appealing one of his earlier obscenity cases to the Supreme Court, which resulted in the landmark *MANual Enterprises, Inc. v. Day*, 370 U.S. 478 (1962), a decision that enabled “all the features of the magazines we associate with a post-Stonewall, gay liberationist era” (Johnson 2019, 187).⁸ While the cartons mailed to Michael Anthony were held in the chambers of a federal judge in advance of a pretrial obscenity hearing, Anthony filed a civil suit challenging two federal obscenity statutes against US Attorney General John Mitchell, his assistant Will Wilson, and Southern District Attorney Anthony J. P. Farris (“Seized Books Held By Judge,” *Houston Post*, January 7, 1971, 20; “Suits Filed in U.S. District Courts: 71-H-6,” *Daily Court Review* (Houston, TX), January 14, 1971, 7).

Federal government regulators were not the only ones who took notice of the Anthonys’ robust distribution presence in Houston; competitors also aimed to intervene. Most notably, one of their main competitors was Michael Thevis, an Atlanta-based adult media magnate who controlled a largescale distribution empire and had alleged links to organized crime (Nesmith 1972). While the extent of Mafia involvement in Houston’s adult enterprises and gay bars is unclear, in other cities such as New York the Mafia’s interest in gay bars and in-bar vending has been well-documented (Duberman 1994, 181–87; Crawford 2014). In larger cities in California, gay organizations like the Tavern Guild were formed to combat Mafia control of gay bars, but it does not appear that a similar organization emerged in Houston in the early 1970s. The Anthonys were involved with at least three business sectors where organized crime was assumed to have a significant influence (vending machines, gay bars, and adult bookstores), but other than the

following confrontation allegedly involving Thevis there is no indication that the Mafia had any interactions with the Anthonys. In April 1971, Joseph Anthony met with a representative of Liverpool Books, a major adult paperback publisher, and secured an exclusive distribution deal for the Houston area. The distributorship was previously held by Satellite News Agency, a regional wholesaler and local distributor based in Houston that was operated by Michael Thevis. Infuriated by Anthony's distribution deal with Liverpool, Thevis allegedly stated to the Liverpool agent, "Joe Anthony will not do anything more in Houston, Texas" ("Bookstore Operator Beaten/Robbed," *Nuntius*, May 1971, 2). The following day, the Anthonys were robbed and Joseph Anthony was severely beaten. Near the end of the decade, this story was capsulized by the federal government under the heading "The Anthony Extortion" as part of federal racketeering charges against Thevis where the government argued "the beating was administered by the enterprise to force Anthony to abandon a valuable pornographic distributorship which he held in that city" (*United States v. Thevis* 1979, 66). It is unclear whether the federal investigation of Michael Anthony, or the assault of Joseph Anthony majorly affected their adult businesses. However, by 1973 the two had shifted their focus from adult bookstores to gay bars.

"Well, Mary. Now that You Own the Bar, What Are You Going to Call It?"

Around the time that Anaco was marketing its Coin-O-Matic loop machines to adult bookstores, Joseph Anthony's company Anthony's Coin-O-Matic—a larger vending company providing and servicing the machines—was advertising a panoply of vending products to gay bars in the area. With its address listed as 1203 Waugh—one of the A&A bookstore locations—Coin-O-Matic advertised pinball machines, jukeboxes, pool tables, and vending machines for candy and cigarettes. Advertisements framed the company as "Houston's only gay owned and operated vending company" ("Anthony's Coin-O-Matic Advertisement," *Nuntius*, February 1971, 10). A bar news column in *Nuntius* described the company's specializing in sound equipment as well, enhancing jukebox and speaker setups in area bars, "a help to the gay in the immediate Houston area is the new Anthony's Coin-O-Matic—revival of good sound equipment in our clubs and bars—Our Thanks Joe" ("Bar-Hopping with Nose & Hic," *Nuntius*, May 1971, 6.). It was allegedly this vending and equipment connection to bars owners that led to Joseph Anthony's founding of Houston's famed Mary's Lounge.

As the story goes, Joseph Anthony was servicing a machine in a small tavern at 1022 Westheimer called Tommy's Lounge. Tommy's had been operated by a wife and husband, Tommie L. and David C. Musslewhite, since 1956 when they began leasing the building from the property owner (May 1961, 182). Tommie Musslewhite offered Anthony the business for \$6000 and Anthony reportedly paid it in vending machine money (Montrose Mouth 1982, 3; McClurg 2009, 4). Legend has it that the name Mary's originated from Michael Anthony's quip to his father following the purchase, "Well, Mary. Now that you own the bar, what are you going to call it?" (McClurg 2009, 4). Anthony subsequently increased the bar's size by combining it with an adjacent business area and extending the bar's

counter space (Darbonne 1990, 1). Mary's began advertising in *Nuntius* in March 1971, and the bar was California-themed and among the first in the area to include scantily clad and nude go-go boys.

Expanding on the theme-centricity of Mary's, Joe and Mike Anthony made larger plans for another entrepreneurial concept spanning across a variety of media formats that could cross-promote one another. Under the name Gayboy, the Anthonys planned crosspollinating media lines including a bar, a glossy magazine, a country club, and an annual convention. Modeled after the lifestyle-based Playboy empire of Hugh Hefner, the Gayboy enterprise aimed to capitalize on the emergent notion of a "gay lifestyle," a concept developing after Stonewall and centered around imagining how white middle-class gay men might create and interact within gay affirmative capitalist infrastructures. It should be noted that in 1965 H. Lynn Womack had planned a lifestyle-type magazine entitled *GayBoy* (Priam 1965, 14), however, it appears that magazine never came to fruition.

While there is some gray area of overlap, generally, gay lifestyle magazines (Hilderbrand 2013, 376-386) could be distinguished from other gay publications due to their particular mix of image and textual content. Different from both gay newspapers (like *The Advocate*, *The Blade*, and *Nuntius*) and gay bar publications (periodicals that featured event coverage and bar-related gossip like *Data-Boy*, *Magpie*, and *Voice of the Valley*), much of the textual content of lifestyle magazines did not typically focus on the particular historical circumstances directly preceding each publication, such as news reporting and recent bar chatter, respectively. Instead, lifestyle magazines (like *In Touch*, *Ciao!*, and *After Dark*) were composed primarily of essays on themes imagined to be central to white middle-class gay life such as exercise, travel, sex life, and other cultural pursuits including music and film. They also frequently incorporated space for short fiction to port into their claims to a literary cultural status. Gay lifestyle magazines were known for their pictorial content, scantily clad and sometimes nude men, a feature emerging out of the tradition of physique magazines and incorporated to a lesser extent in contemporaneous gay newspapers and bar rags. A final distinguishing feature of lifestyle magazines was their material construction, which reflected their class-elevated sensibility; specifically, these magazines were typically printed on glossy sheets of sturdy stock in dimensions approximating 8 ½ by 11 inches (larger than bar rags) and with at least a selection of full-color photo spreads.

Judging from the November 1970 advertisements for the first volume of *Gayboy* magazine in *Nuntius* and *The Advocate*, the magazine appears to have commenced publication in the last quarter of 1970. From the magazine announcements and given the various locations of editorial letter writers, Anaco distributed the magazine nationally ("Anaco Proudly Presents" 1970, 4). Initially planned as a quarterly, *Gayboy* later announced a shift to monthly publication and advertised a yearly subscription rate. However, extant archival copies and the lack of further advertisements in the gay press suggest that only six issues were published. From references to events in the magazine, the dates of the six issues can be estimated as November 1970, March 1971, and then March, April, May, and June 1972. Each issue was composed primarily of pictorial content; however, each subsequent

issue featured increasing textual content centered on lifestyle-oriented themes including nightlife, bodybuilding, travel, nutrition, and ecological activism. The magazine provided numerous opportunities for reader interaction including a section for general questions, a section for praise for the magazine, and a section for exercise advice. Reader letters show the wide distribution reach, instantiating coast-to-coast readership, and also reveal some snippets of business relationships, such as when Woody Daniels—owner of the famous Woody’s Adult Books on Hollywood Boulevard—wrote in to complement the magazine as “the hottest thing we’ve had in all the years I have been in business” (Daniels 1972, 7).

The magazine not only reflected industrial links, but also political affiliation. Notably, the first issue provided ample space to promote Houston’s Gay Liberation Front, a radical leftist group that *Nuntius* frequently villainized via redbaiting. *Gayboy*’s early communitarian focus prefigured Joseph Anthony’s later significant role in developing Houston’s first gay community center, the Montrose Gaze (“Montrose Gaze Needs You,” *Nuntius*, November 1972, 2). As Anthony expressed the following year in an interview with *Texas Monthly*, he imagined gay community interests and gay business interests working for each other (Dreyer and Reinert 1973, 58–60), not operating independently.

While the magazine was always compiled under the managerial editorship of Joseph and Michael Anthony and distributed by Anaco, by the middle of the magazine’s run there was a notable shift in personnel. For the first three issues, physique illustrator Ray Houston, of K & R Studios based in Brenham, provided a substantial amount of pictorial content for the magazine and also was credited in an editorial capacity. Area businessman and bar operator with an interest in the A&A stores, Tom Vecera was credited as the advertising director for the first three issues. In the final three issues Houston’s art appeared only sparingly and Vecera was replaced. Additionally, the final three issues credited a new story and copy editor, Gay Crystal, who had worked for area newspapers *Houston Chronicle* and *Liberty Vindicator* before she tragically passed away in 1975 as a result of a car accident (“Local Deaths: Willcox,” *Houston Chronicle*, February 10, 1975, sec. 4, 22). While the reasons for the shift in personnel are unclear, many of the personnel were involved with other components of the *Gayboy* franchise.

Tom Vecera and Joe Anthony announced the opening of Houston’s *Gayboy* International Club (later GB International) in June 1971, promoting the club as the gay answer to the *Playboy* Club chain. Waiters were referred to as “*Gayboy* Bucks”—the male analogue of *Playboy* Bunnies—and were dressed in revealing “European” attire with “small tails cunningly attached in the appropriate places” (“*Gayboy* Opened by Anthony/Vecera,” *Nuntius*, June 1971, 4). Initially, the club was announced to open at 2151 Richmond Street, which was previously occupied by the gay bar *Romulus*. However, following disagreements between Anthony and the bar’s previous owner and vandalism that disrupted the building’s air conditioning (“Thompson Loses Club,” *Nuntius*, June 1971, 21; “GB Sabotaged,” *Nuntius*, July 1971, 12), GB International opened in July at 1840 Westheimer, a location previously known as *Queen’s Haven* also run by Anthony.

The club's opening in July was an event centralized around a production of the popular show *Hair: The American Tribal Love-Rock Musical*, which was intended to draw gay customers to the venue to experience the site's new Gayboy concept. This Gayboy version of *Hair* was produced by Joseph Anthony and starred Michael Anthony, the previously mentioned popular press editor Gay Crystal, and a young Alex Devron who later gained prominence in gay publishing under his real name John W. Rowberry (Janis 1974). The production was so popular that it continued to run for several months and ended up becoming a traveling show, playing in Dallas and reportedly even as far as Los Angeles ("Notebook: New 'Hair' Version Here Deletes Words But Keeps Music," *Houston Chronicle*, January 14, 1972, sec. 2, 4).

Hair was a particularly key choice of a promotional event for the Gayboy franchise because of its dual cultural cache and controversial status, both potential publicity engines. As Mary Rizzo has recently uncovered, *Hair* was the central post-Stonewall musical that embodied a gay liberation ethos and acquired widespread popularity among gay audiences, yet for numerous reasons it is all but unremembered today in histories of gay liberation's cultural moment (Rizzo 2020). The Gayboy production of *Hair* reportedly ran for an hour and a half but was relatively pared down. Most dialogue was excised in order to underscore the songs for which the musical accompaniment was played from a tape ("Notebook: New 'Hair' Version Here Deletes Words But Keeps Music," *Houston Chronicle*, January 14, 1972, sec. 2, 4). This structure had the effect of emphasizing the play's components of spectacle, the musical numbers and nude sequences, which perhaps was a contributing factor to the production's vulnerability to police intervention. On January 18, 1972 during a performance at the Bayou Landing in Dallas, both Michael Anthony and Gay Crystal were arrested due to the musical's nude sequence ("4 Busted at Texas-Size Club," *Advocate*, February 16, 1972, 13), but in late-March the sequence was judged not obscene (Rizzo 2020, 19). Also, since mid-January the production was booked for an indefinite run at the Pavilion on Old Market Square in Houston, and on March 9 Michael and Gay were again arrested, yet, acquitted by the end of the month ("Despite Acquittal, More 'Hair' Arrests Promised," *Houston Chronicle*, March



Figure 3.

Image of Alex Devron accompanying a report on his appearance in Gayboy's *Hair*. Cover image, *Entertainment West*, no. 111 (1974). Photograph by Richard Fontaine courtesy of ONE Archives at the USC Libraries.

31, 1972, 1:7). On the one hand, law enforcements' siege on *Hair* appears to have chilled the Anthonys' interests in continuing the production. On the other hand, the Gayboy production of *Hair* succeeded in launching the Gayboy brand to a more widespread audience, gaining popular press coverage in both the *Houston Chronicle* and the *Houston Post* due to the raids, a feat not accomplished by the vast majority of contemporaneous gay bars in the city.

Aiming to continually expand the Gayboy franchise, announcements were made that additional Gayboy International bars would open and that a "Nude Dude Ranch" was in the works ("Looking Ahead," *Gayboy* 1, no. 3, 1972, 62).⁹ The Anthonys also planned the Gayboy Gay Days National Convention for July 1 to July 7, 1972 in Houston, an event marketed as the "first national gay convention ever to be held in Houston" ("Gayboy Comment," *Gayboy* 1, no. 4, 1972, 4). This convention was scheduled as a follow-up to Dallas' first gay pride parade organized by the homophile group Circle of Friends for the previous month. It is unclear whether the Gayboy convention actually took place because there was no report of it in *Nuntius*, however from its description in *Gayboy* magazine it appears to have been planned as a fusion of a gay pride event, a homophile conference, and a model contest in the vein of the annual LA-based Groovy Guy competition ("Gayboy Comment," *Gayboy* 1, no. 4, 1972, 4). By mid-1972, there were high hopes for Gayboy with readers comparing the company to Playboy ("Male Box," *Gayboy* 1, no. 4, 1972, 9) and Michael discussing a visit to the Playboy Hotel in Miami as an aspirational goal of his company ("Trippin' with Troy," *Gayboy* 1, no. 4, 1972, 29). The Gayboy franchise was the crucial link between the Anthonys' earlier trade in adult media—through direct-sale and brick-and-mortar bookstores—and their later association with the "adult media" enterprise of gay bars.

References to the Anthonys in Houston's gay press drop off by 1973. It is unclear whether they moved or aimed to attain a low profile, perhaps due to the federal seizure of their shipment, the Thevis incident, issues with the IRS, or for other reasons. However, by the early 1980s the two reemerged when the gay press reported on their new gay bars The Hole at 109 Tuam and Happy Trails at 715 Fairview. Business records filed with the county show that The Hole, Happy Trails, and Coin-O-Matic were owned by a J. M. Trail ("Coin-O-Matic Nut Company," 1978; "Happy Trails," 1982; "The Hole," 1982).¹⁰ Further, the Articles of Incorporation for Coin-O-Matic filed with the Texas Secretary of State reveal the board of directors to include a John Michael Trail and Joe Anthony Trail ("Coin-O-Matic" 1983, 2).¹¹ The presence of the names Michael and Joe along with the middle name Anthony appear to be more than coincidental, however, at this juncture it is unclear whether the listed names were Michael and Joseph Anthony's legal names. By mid-decade, the Anthonys were seldom mentioned again in the Houston gay press. Only Joseph Anthony's name would attain a legendary status as the first owner of Mary's ("Montrose Mouth," *Montrose Voice*, June 4, 1982, 3; Darbonne 1990; McClurg 2009).

Concluding Discussion

In sum, the Anthonys' business goals and advertising tactics aimed to promote self-sustained and self-contained gay markets both locally and nationally. In doing so, they extensively contributed to expanding the market for gay consumer products, which was developed by physique entrepreneurs decades before (Johnson 2019), into the local Houston gay scene. While certainly earlier gay-oriented newspapers, physique publications, and other media had been bought and sold in Houston, the Anthonys publicly proclaimed a 'buy gay' ethic focalized into a 'buy local gay' mindset specific to Houston and its surrounding localities. The Anthony's 'buy local gay' message registered in business and editorial decisions, such as a slogan frequently printed in their *Gayboy* magazine, "Made in Texas by Texans" (*Gayboy* 1, no. 4, 1972, Back Cover). This case study reminds us that gay social networks forged in adult media and enabled by capitalism were as much "a gay consumer rights revolution" (Johnson 2010, 884–88) as they were a revolution in advertising.

The circular loop of gay entrepreneurs generating products and services for gay consumers was also echoed in *Nuntius*' call for readers to patronize gay establishments with the paper's frequently printed slogans "Patronize Our Advertisers" (*Nuntius*, December 1971, 3) and simply "Buy Gay" (*Nuntius*, August 1972, 12). From 1970 to 1972 the Anthonys' were in fact one of the most prominent advertisers in *Nuntius*, wherein they promoted their adult bookstores (A&A and Adult Libraries), distribution company (Anaco), magazine (*Gayboy*), vending company (Anthony's Coin-O-Matic), and bars (Mary's and Gayboy International among others). Yet the Anthonys' extended their promotional tactics to benefit the larger gay community of Houston. For example, the Anthonys were one of the earliest supporters of a project to create a non-profit gay community center in Houston, the Montrose Gaze.

While they did have extensive self-promotional campaigns for their many enterprises, the Anthonys also implored their customers to patronize *all* local gay businesses. For example, in a local events column in their magazine, it was emphasized to readers: "there are no gay establishments, in Houston, that we could say are bad to patronize, as Houston has one of the most unique situations in these United States, because all the bars, all the gay businesses, and all the gay people work together in a very happy community" ("Gayboy Comment," *Gayboy* 1, no. 4, 1972, 4). It is unlikely that Houston's gay businesses landscape was as utopic as this quote suggests, given parallel reports in *Nuntius* of gay business-related clique formations, rivalries, and even alleged arsons. Yet, it is significant that *Gayboy* did not overtly engage with local rivalries, particularly when considering that—unlike *Nuntius*—*Gayboy* advocated patronizing *all* gay establishments and not just those from which it was deriving advertising revenue.

A consideration of the Anthonys' enterprises contributes to a history of the larger market for gay useful media. Gay useful media in this context could be understood as liberation-era cultural products that mediated gay group formations and facilitated the connections of individuals to larger gay networks. Functioning as counterpublic catalysts, gay useful media include theatrical and nontheatrical films, newspapers, live theatre, and even—perhaps surprisingly—

gay bars. In his groundbreaking social history of the relationship between gay cinema and gay sociocultural formations, Ryan Powell has recently unearthed an incisive rhetorical question posed by the New York City Gay Liberation Front in 1970, “Do you suppose the gay bar is gay media?” (qt. in Powell 2019, 66). As Powell has insightfully unpacked, the function and design of the liberation-era gay bar operated in the same capacity as a filmic *mise-en-scène*:

purposely organized to modulate and elaborate certain ways of patterning and seeing gay life. Just as the “gay bar” is a place, it is also an arena of mediated engagement, a cultural location not unlike a film, play, or stage performance wherein what one sees, hears, and feels in and around oneself can become an opportunity for self-reflection and group affiliation. (66)

Gay bars, like other gay useful media, have historically emerged as entrepreneurial gateways that embodied avenues for gay worldmaking and have facilitated alternative ways of existing in the world. As John D’Emilio (1983) argued in his seminal intervention in gay historiography, it is capitalism that shaped the possibility of gay community formations—and by extension gay life—because the accumulation of monetary means facilitated the emergence of self-sustaining gay infrastructures.

The local salience of the word “gay” and the associated development of a post-Stonewall gay consciousness revolutionized gay media industry endeavors as much as they were attached to revolutionary interventions—such as gay zaps—in establishment media industries. For the Anthonys and gay Houston, it mattered that a company not only catered to gay consumers, but that it was openly gay owned-and-operated. While the content and qualities of such companies’ products were surely taken into account by some consumers, it was the circular relational structure—for gay Texans by gay Texans—that made these products socially impactful and communally useful.

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Notes

1. David F. Friedman was a prominent postwar exploitation film showman-producer-distributor who ran the distribution companies Entertainment Ventures and later TVX. In the mid-1960s, he cofounded the legendary Pussycat Theater chain based in Los Angeles, and in the 1970s, he served as president of the Adult Film Association of America for several terms. Louis K. Sher founded the well-known Ohio-based chain Art Theater Guild in the mid-1950s, and was also involved in the production and distribution of prominent adult films through his companies, most notably Sherpix.
2. The term “gay” was employed previously as an advertising term in other locales, for example, George Chauncey has determined that as early as the 1930s a speakeasy in New York was employing a slogan “in the Gay 20’s” (1994, 19) that solicited gay patronage while also suggesting the speakeasy’s physical location on East Twenty-eight Street.
3. Film and television from the time grappled with these ideas of coming out to one’s father or son, see for example, *The Experiment* (1973) and *That Certain Summer* (1972), respectively.
4. For example, while their form suggested appreciation for male athleticism and bodybuilding, midcentury physique magazines have been recognized for their use value which nearly always took precedence over their form. Magazines like *MANual*, *Trim*, and *Grecian Guild Pictorial* were perceived by antigay forces as embodying the broad federal definition of obscenity, matter “intended or adapted for any indecent or immoral use” (quoted in *MANual Enterprises, Inc. v. Day* 1962, 508). Contrastingly, physique publications were used by gay men “as means of sexual self-identification and served as an entryway into the gay community” (Johnson 2010, 867).
5. Here “ART”—emphasized in all capital letters—was a euphemism for nudity or sexual content. Thomas Waugh discusses appeals to high art in the context of physique photography as the “artistic alibi” (1996, 223–224), and David Church refers to the deployment of the term “art” in framing heterosexual-oriented sexploitation films and magazines as one of sex media producers’ “defensively euphemistic strategies” (2014, III).
6. Of these five Svigelj-directed shorts, *Wizzard of Azz* is the only to have gained a contemporary rerelease (*Bob Mizer: Films of Mythos 1955-1971* 2014), and it follows a youth’s surreal daydream in which a bottomless magician hypnotizes the youth to do his every whim. *Rock-Hard Marble Boy* was a retelling of *Pygmalion* with the Galatea figure embodied as a young man. *Afternoon of a Faun*, Svigelj’s first breakout short, was likely a partial adaptation of Vaslav Nijinsky’s 1912 ballet *L’Après Midi d’un Faune* (Freibert 2020, 37). The contents of the other two Svigelj shorts on the program are unknown. For a biographical excavation of Dimitri Alexis Svigelj as an overlooked gay filmmaker and artist see my article “Spartacus: Architect, Artist, Filmmaker” (Freibert 2020).
7. Park Theater. 1969. “Have a Cool Autumn ’69, at the Park!” Park Theatre Program. ONE Subject Files Collection (Coll2012.001). Folder: Park Theatre. ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives, Los Angeles, CA.

8. Such features include erotic content involving semi-nude men, personals ads, reviews of gay films and books, community news, and information on gay travel, among others.
9. The planned “Nude Dude Ranch” appears to refer to either a ranch-themed club with nude male dancers or a venue for nudist retreats in a ranch setting.
10. “Coin-O-Matic Nut Company.” 1978. Assumed Names File 380017; “Happy Trails.” 1982. Assumed Names File 521000; “The Hole.” 1982. Assumed Names File 517151. Harris County Clerk, Houston, TX.
11. “Coin-O-Matic.” 1983. Texas SOS File Number 0064826700. Texas Secretary of State, Austin, TX.

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Harbord Street Histories: Feminism's Articulations of Porn

On Good for Her and the Ground of Toronto's Feminist
Porn Awards¹

BOBBY NOBLE

Introduction

It might be argued that this narrative is itself far too easy to write this way, but it is time to work through (Canadian) feminist porn imaginaries with the following assertion: what we imagine to be feminist porn in its most recent life was located with a very precise feminist genealogy on a strip of Harbord Street in Toronto, Canada. It begins with a bang. Literally. A very much *for real* explosion, something referenced in all of the interviews presented here. This bang puts the southwest strip of Harbord at Spadina east of Bathurst securely on feminist and historical maps. On July 29, 1983, the Henry Morgentaler abortion clinic, located at 85 Harbord Street, was bombed by someone presumed to be troubled by reproductive choice and the clinic's services—and the building was all but destroyed. One of Canada's largest feminist bookstores, the Toronto Women's Bookstore, was located at that time at 87 Harbord Street, directly next to the clinic. The force of the explosion and the ensuing fire damaged a great deal of the bookstore's stock, later resulting in a "Fire Sale" that generated enough revenue to allow the store to reopen across the street at its longest-serving and most recent home: 73 Harbord.

Such proximities, as we discovered while working on the Canadian Feminist Porn Archive and Research project, have produced the need for us to generate more collaborative and complex methodologies for how we study feminist porn in general—indeed, how we begin to study the locales which we agree cannot be dismissed. Originally, we had not intended to do interviews, but they actually proved to be very productive. We interviewed the owner and a number of employees of the Toronto Women's Bookstore, workers who also originated, organized, developed, and then ran the very first Feminist Porn Awards (FPAs), who developed the original criteria and who also put hearts, bodies, souls, and spirits into cultivating feminist porn cultures. All were actively involved in developing, curating, organizing and staffing the first few years of the FPAs; all were privy to *insider narratives* about the events even as almost all of them were actively engaged in promotional activities (so, were interviewed by the press of record in Toronto, across Canada, and in some parts of the US and Australia). All but one of my interviews were conducted in public spaces such as coffee shops in Toronto and all agreed to be identified by name especially given their already high public profile in both feminist and mainstream media as representatives and organizers of the FPAs.

Carlyle Jansen, queer feminist sex educator, owner of Good for Her, a feminist sex shop, and one of the original organizers of the Pussy Palace, Women and Trans People bathhouses in Toronto (sex spaces themselves raided in 2000) and of the Feminist Porn Awards, recalls that her sex store opened its doors at 175 Harbord Street in the late 1990s and has remained on this south block of Harbord Street, what we both identify as *a feminist strip*, for over 17 years now. The energies of this strip eventually merge with those of the University of Toronto but between the Morgentaler clinic, the beloved Toronto Women's Bookstore (TWB), and Good For Her (GFH), there has been a solid feminist presence on this block of what is now called the Harbord Street Village for the first two decades of the twenty-first century and close to the last three of the 20th century. This is a long history. The Feminist Porn Awards emerge out of this context as the brainchild of Jansen and GFH employees beginning as a very small event, but clearly reaching critical mass and credibility since.

What can be posited for certain is that the most recent incarnation, feminist porn, cross-cuts this very unusual street in Toronto, Harbord Street, and its feminist histories. Harbord Street is an east-west small street running parallel to Bloor between Bloor and College and intersecting across the city from Queen's Park circle through University of Toronto westbound to Ossington. Initially not much bigger than a laneway, it runs parallel but south of the very busy Bloor Street, north of the equally busy College Street, and passes right through the heart of the University of Toronto beginning at Queen's Park (University Avenue), ending as it intersects Ossington. Widened twice, this tree-lined street has become associated with university culture. Wikipedia, for instance, lists the street's primary demographic as University of Toronto students, professors, and University of Toronto fraternities. Such listings are, as always, dated and are no longer accurate. One local Toronto newspaper, *Now Magazine*, detailed the 2016 neighbourhood as an eclectic mix of off-leash dog parks, restaurants, bookstores, upper-class homes, and those of local University of Toronto and Harbord Collegiate (high school) students (*NOW Staff* 2016). So too does *blogTO*, detailing the neighbourhood as a lazy and quiet thoroughfare between the historically-then burgeoning University of Toronto downtown campus, several elite high schools, and the remainder of Toronto similarly undergoing development (Flack 2012). *Toronto Life* also notes the high regarded University of Toronto library, Robarts Library, and details the drastic changes made to this once-sleepy stretch of Harbord street, allowing for the construction of the library in 1973 (Aronovitch 2010).

Because of this proximity to the university and students, as well as its centralized location as noted above, this strip was chosen as the location of the Henry Morgentaler feminist abortion clinic (Dunphy 1998). The first iteration of the clinic opened in 1983 and faced both legal and political scrutiny from the beginning, raided by police in July of that year. They seized some equipment and charged Dr. Morgentaler and two colleagues, Robert Scott and Leslie Smoling, with inducing illegal miscarriages. On November 8, 1984, an Ontario jury, following its Québec predecessors, acquitted the two. This is the same clinic that was protested repeatedly and, eventually, bombed on June 15, 1983 (Kaihla 1992).

This pattern of harassment spread to the Toronto Women's Bookstore, primarily because of their address. Prior to the emergence of new obscenity legislation in 1992 and for a time after, TWB was regularly scrutinized, and packages destined for TWB were regularly seized and censored by Canada Customs, meaning that mostly queer and/or lesbian porn coming to the store was subject to constant search and seizure by the state. The larger impact meant that almost anything associated with that address was subject to holding, search, and eventual, although not always, later release (the further implication being that other bookstores not targeted could often get this material onto their shelves much faster than TWB). To our knowledge, and in the working memory of store owner Carlyle Jansen, GFH was not subject to these state regulatory practices. Again, to reiterate: the significance here is not that such stores, scholarship or litigation occur, but that they occur in what is specifically a Canadian and not American context. Too much of what constitutes "Porn Studies" is American. There's nothing essentially wrong with that—settler colonialism notwithstanding. But such nationalisms do begin to matter when American scholarship, geographies, or legalities, for instance, come to stand in as *all* scholarship, geographies or legalities. What gets unfolded here is uniquely Canadian—in terms of Canadian Porn Studies, Canadian geographies, Canadian legalities. Such nationalisms are as problematic as any and I do not offer them as remedy to their American counterparts. But they most certainly do offer examples of uniquely Canadian studies. For better or for worse, Canada is not just another American state but a settler colonial nation with its own structure, histories, and texture (despite sharing much with the US including a very long border). What follows is a discussion of feminist porn, Canadian feminist porn, and then a series of interviews that place the Feminist Porn Awards *on the scholarly map*, as it were.

Feminist Porn Wars Canadian Style

This work takes as its immediate object those Feminist Porn Awards organized by feminist sex store Good for Her, located strategically close to and with intent near the (former) Toronto Women's Bookstore on Harbord Street, a strip of feminist businesses running between Spadina and Bathurst in Toronto, Canada—space now gone even as Good for Her remains. Such proximities are important for a number of reasons. First, the SSHRC-funded Feminist Porn Archive and Research Project champions feminist porn and also the scholarship of feminist porn academics. Still, at the most recent (circa 2014) Feminist Porn Conference held at the University of Toronto (literally around the corner from the strip this project seeks to put back on discursive and feminist maps), we find ourselves exceedingly vexed to witness the many bright, engaged, articulate, and self-reflective feminist (and in some cases, self-avowedly non-feminist) porn workers, activists, and academics from the United States cross over the complex national and still-colonial border between the United States and Canada to tell stories about the American porn wars *to each other* without seeming to even realize that they'd indeed, crossed a border and were, by consequence, in the empire north of empire.³ By necessity, this work argues with other Canadian feminist and queer

scholars that the sex wars in a Canadian context were different from those and their timing in an American context (see, for instance, Kiss n' Tell 1990, 1994; Bell 1994; Ross 1995, 2009; Cossman et al. 1997; Khan 2004; Noble 2004, 2006, 2009). As part of different legal contexts for categories like obscenity, in Canada in particular (recent obscenity legislation is known as the *Butler* decision), the fact of feminist porn emerging within a Canadian context is significant—all the more so given this is a practice which calls for, at the very least, radical contextualization as methodology.⁴ This paper (and larger FPARP project) attempts such contextualization: that is, the writing of radical contextualization as both its aim and intention. In many cases radical remembering is as significant as it is vital in the face of the radical forgetting that can happen when countercultural publics are no longer remembered as part of “official” or hegemonic lived narratives.

Finally, as noted by many recent Canadian scholars theorizing the emergence of lesbian identities in the mid to late twentieth century, like the work of Becki Ross (1995; 2009), the production of such identities is related to the establishment of precise neighbourhood spaces in other locales.⁵ Liz Millward, for instance, in her *Making a Scene: Lesbians and Community Across Canada, 1964–84* (2015); Rebecca Jennings in her *Unnamed Desires: A Sydney Lesbian History* (2015); and indeed, as Davis and Kennedy do in their American-centric *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold* (1993)—so many of these works theorize the emergence of lesbian identities as unique in the twentieth century even as such practices existed prior to this century. One can extend this context beyond the formation of lesbian nations to butch-femme communities, drag king subcultures, etc.—these are all, at one time, also *urban neighbourhoods* in the making. Lynn Comella asserts as much in *Vibrator Nation* (2017), something corroborated by Kristen Hogan in *The Feminist Bookstore Movement: Lesbian Antiracism and Feminist Accountability* (2016).

To date, not one study that I know of tracks the specific thriving histories lived along Harbord Street in Toronto, Canada from Good For Her (nearer to Bathurst) to the Toronto Women's Bookstore (closer to Spadina). This work and these interviews map the proximities and historiographies of this feminist strip, which through its politics and in-person activities, often as a consequence of the *Butler* decision, resulted in both GFH and the FPAs and Feminist Porn Conference in the first place. That feminist strip is one which allows the feminist sex store proximity to its very important precursor and sister, the feminist bookstore and only a slightly removed feminist cousin, the Morgentaler Abortion Clinic, which was closed after being bombed in the 1980s.⁶ These are exceedingly intimate and uniquely Canadian historiographies of feminist porn that require not only radical contextualization as method but also a fierce commitment to cognizance and convergence on so many levels.⁷ One of the dangers of digital cultures and their methodologies is the danger of collapsing all historical time, nations (Canada as unique and separate from the United States of America), and capitalist time into a rabid and overdetermined *now*, one that cannot think with or through the very important histories which have produced that. Good for Her is located near what was the radical feminist bookstore to the east and it can certainly be argued that Toronto Women's Bookstore had a profound influence on the development of most

sex cultures in Toronto and in Canada too. The complex labours of self-making involving various kinds of transitions are the heartbeat of this neighbourhood, speaking both to its object but also to its own complicated remembering, bereavements, and subjectivities in feminist porn.

There certainly has been more scholarship emerging in the last fifteen years which does look at those remembering between the Canadian state and queer sexual practices, for instance. Cossman, Bell, Gotell and Ross in *Bad Attitude/s On Trial: Pornography, Feminism and the Butler Decision* (1997), also document a historically significant and rich Canadian moment where artists and activists alike were subject to state regulation and surveillance vis-à-vis both the raids of the women and trans persons bathhouse (known as the Pussy Palace) but also by the bizarre legalized crackdowns on the artistic work of Eli Langer by Toronto's Project P police (Kinsman and Gentile 2010; Cossman, Bell, Gotell and Ross 1997). Such Canadian events were accompanied by "sex scandals," for instance, around the artistic work *Drawing the Line* (1990) by Kiss n' Tell and also by the much earlier controversies in the Vancouver queer newspaper, *Angles*, around the Lesbian Sex Poster (Noble 1993). The Pussy Palace bathhouse raids are just one historical event which flag this contemporary zeitgeist and which overlap in significant ways with the later emergence of the FPAs and the feminist porn movement, a Canadian zeitgeist anticipated by the much earlier tolerance, then crackdown and closure of entire neighbourhoods of men's bathhouses in Toronto. Chanelle Gallant, one of the subjects interviewed here as a long-time employee of Good for Her and curator of much about sex and Toronto, notes these nationalized proximities. None of these proximities are overdetermined by the other but they do provide something of a context for the emergence of GFH, the ground of which was the same fertility for a thriving "market" of sex cultures in Toronto.

GFH's owner, Carlyle Jansen, made repeated references to watching niche "lesbian porn" only to be met with images of conventionally feminine women having sex with each other sporting "impossibly long and dangerous fingernails," something that seems to work against constructions of lesbian sex at that time.⁸ There was much at stake, as it were, in terms of sexual representation, and on the (urban) ground practices and uses of sexuality. We do not intend that these referents and/or historicities are comprehensive at all; but what is interesting is: one, the assumed relation between urbanity and queer cultures; and two, that there are no larger studies of female and eventually, trans-positive (where these don't always go together) sex cultures (including the explosion of feminist porn) of neighbourhoods in Toronto at the time of this writing despite the fact that much "everyday-ness" exists to be studied in a Canadian context.⁹

Harbord Street Histories was born out of a determination to un-map and re-orient the sex-porn contexts even as it must be acknowledged such un-mappings will remain incomplete. Still, this project is thick with the presence of vexation itself. Online orientations allow us very easily to potentially circumvent or ignore or forget such in-person and/or nationalist presences. No theorist can make absolute truth claims about objects or origins or losses even as the porn cultures written about here constitute indexable feminist presences and proximities, echoes and *carnal*

resonances (Paasonen 2011), with what Avery Gordon characterizes as hauntings—thick with both memory and forgettings, voice and silence, desire, longing and loss.¹⁰ However, most scholars in the field of Canadian feminist porn studies agree that sex stores, like the feminist bookstore, these proximities and *cases*, as it were, contribute to and provide physical space for complex understandings of pleasure and sexuality and of feminist sex cultures like those of the Feminist Porn Awards and attendant cultures, identities, and subjectivities.¹¹

The Interviews

We asked a series of fairly standard questions of those who organized the FPAs and were especially interested (for this part of the project) in hearing GHF folks talk about their memories and experiences about the political stakes of the matter. Our interview conversations ranged far and wide from the early days of the FPAs to the controversies in recent years as well as the ever-changing criteria of what even counted as “feminist” and/or “porn.” While this work is nowhere near social science data collection *per se*, the interviews were subject to a university’s Ethical Review Process. It was not our intention to interview for the purposes of *gathering objective data*. Rather, these interviews were conducted in order to get voices *on the Canadian scholarly record*; in other words, what was intended was to create opportunities for some of those directly involved to speak to their own experiences as GFH workers but also as the folks directly responsible for conceptualizing and organizing the FPAs. To those with allegiances to traditional disciplines and methodologies, such an approach to interviews will otherwise seem very odd, queer even. Eventually, it was decided that given that, the approach would be less that of an “objective” social scientist and more that of an *insider ethnographer*—seeking to write a complex and triangulated history of the present of feminist porn as it itself grew, changed, morphed, took shape in its current historical articulation at the time of this writing.

Four key people that were directly involved in organizing, staffing, and so also conceptualizing, feminist porn and the Feminist Porn Awards, were approached. Chanelle Gallant, Carlyle Jansen (owner), Alison Lee, Lorraine Hewitt (performer), were all folks that were extremely instrumental in organizing the first and all subsequent Feminist Porn Award events. Each agreed very openly to the interview. Each insisted on using their legal names, and each interview occurred either at the store itself (Jansen) or in coffee shops (Lee, Hewitt). One took place in a domestic setting (Gallant). All interviews were recorded and all transcribed and, as noted below, all interviewees were asked at one point to stop the recording in order to discuss, *off the record*, the same event which took place that remained controversial and, as it were, unresolved, perhaps even unresolvable. Our intention was quite straightforward: to get *on record* the accounts of the Feminist Porn Awards by the Toronto-based folks actually involved in their production and who, literally, laboured to make them happen. Without these folks, *feminist porn* as a countercultural movement or public would not be on anyone’s map in the same way.

Three main themes emerge from the interviews and conversations. First, of course, is the importance of feminist narratives and stories, both of the store and also about feminist porn. All of the folks involved in the actual organizing noted the deep ironies of the “success story”—noting, for instance, how much their truly deep labours were overlooked or diminished as the success of the FPAs took off. Admittedly, this emergence of feminist porn is a historical and cultural event. Linda Williams notes as much in both her 1989 monograph and in her edited collection *Porn Studies* that “a field that might be called pornography studies has emerged” (1989, ix). The pathway of the FPAs as narrated by the employees and owner of GFH and by the success of the event itself also speaks truth to this emergence as a feminist one. The history of GFH in proximity to the feminist booksellers, Toronto Women’s Bookstore, and to TWB’s histories fraught with customs conflicts, remains vital to the work that “porn” was accomplishing. The feminism of “feminist porn” sought to insert sexuality back into the feminist agenda despite feminist contentions on some fronts as well as those from the state. Facing down both (Canada) customs and *feminist sex war customs* remained integral to this narrative of porn.

These are also deeply nationalized narratives. The main source (but not at all the only source) of both porn workers and porn thinkers came up from the United States. None of my interviewees were Canadian nationalists; in fact, CG, AL, LH especially emphatically expressed the nationalist terms of Canada vs. the United States of America as being those of settler colonialism. It certainly is racist and colonialist to overlook this border as an effect of settler colonialism and the nations it created.¹² However, the FPAs and ensuing Feminist Porn Conference both attracted massive numbers of workers, activists, and thinkers from the USA who crossed a very complex border without seeming to notice such a crossing. The much-touted keynote address at the first Feminist Porn Conference, delivered by American scholar Dr. Lisa Duggan, made no mention anywhere in a very astute address of what it meant to not just cross such a settler colonial border but to inhabit for the duration of the conference, the Harbord Street strip, with its profoundly significant feminist histories, without a consciousness of being so located.

Moreover, all of these interviewees expressed a deep concern, deep cognizance even, about Harbord Street’s “Canadian” feminist histories (Frankenberg 2001, 91). These were registered by all as of significance and extreme importance to the origins of GFH and subsequently, of the FPAs. For instance, Lorraine Hewitt noted that even though the histories of feminism and porn were already vast, Toronto was going to be central, and this fact remained very significant.

LH: Yeah yeah, we did... and it wasn’t originally called the FPAs either... and um... but I would say it was instantly successful, everybody really connected with the event, um, what was really interesting too was that while we did get people visiting, which is amazing too for a first event, to have people come out, um, to Toronto, it was, there was also this huge local interest, and that is pretty incredible and, um, it remained that way throughout, that there was always a large local audience that was really

connecting with what was happening, um, kind of like spun through, kind of grew a porn industry here.

Chanelle Gallant and GFH owner, Carlyle Janson note this significance of location too:

CJ: ...Well if I'm going to do a store where am I going to do it? Where makes the most sense? And I was trying to think of neighbourhoods and my sister was like well you know there's the woman's bookstore. Which I had never been to, because again I was not like in that feminist world. There's the woman's bookstore, there's Parent Books, there's Wonderworks, and it felt like kind of a feminist strip. I knew of Morgentaler, but I don't know if I knew that's where this old building was that would have, the destruction of it. I'm not sure if I knew that at the time. But it just, it was like okay that makes sense. And I was looking for somewhere that was close to transit and close to the subway but not on a main street....

CJ: We used to be known as the feminist strip, I think now it's more known as restaurant row, but Parent Books is still here, and so, it just is what it is.

CG: The whole organizing I think honestly took two months. Like it was way, we had no idea that it would blow up. Um, you know I had a budget to bring people into town. Um, and that's about it. Uh, and so we knew we were gonna bring some, uh, pornographers together who identified as feminist. We knew that we were going to celebrate them. We thought it would be a small local thing. And then, and then it wasn't [laughs]. And then it blew up, and then we were on, you know MTV Canada, and, uh, interviewed by every single newspaper, picked up by the, you know, the wires, and when it went over AFP, that, you know AFP speaks to about a billion people. I mean I did that interview literally over the phone while I was running around all day doing errands, getting ready for the performances. Or for the awards. Um, and I, none of us knew that this would uh, would have such a cultural impact.

Relatedly, cognizance of feminist history and of intergenerationalities was profoundly present in the narratives and clearly, in the minds of those who organized the FPAs from GFH.

AL: Yeah, I think as a long-time feminist I had a kind of particular relation to porn, when I first came to feminism, the dominant narrative when I first started learning about feminism was anti-porn. I read Andrea Dworkin, and I did all the stuff, and you know I had arguments with my dad about porn.

Over and over again, these interviews were *thick with many presences*; they grappled with and reached for a vocabulary with which to talk about something that, back in the day, was not articulatable—feminists and a positive relation to porn, both in its making *and* consuming never mind in its organizing as a feminist movement in and of itself.¹³ The biweekly newspaper *Xtra!* published a feature interview in May 2006, on the eve of the first ever Feminist Porn Awards, with GFH manager,

Chanelle Gallant, who noted her own surprise in 2006 that this hadn't been done before:

As far as I know we're the first ones, says *Good for Her* manager Chanelle Gallant. "I couldn't believe it.... When I first thought it up I thought, 'I'll Google this and see 'cause someone else must have thought of this.' Nobody ever. We're it. And I thought, 'wow, 'cause there's a lot of feminist-oriented sex culture out there.'" So we're very proud that *Good for Her* is the first one to do it. (Garro 2006, 14)

Included with the interview is a timeline called "The Evolution of Feminist Porn" which, according to *Xtra!* could only be tracked to 1972, back to the controversy around the film *Deep Throat*, whose infamous star, Linda Lovelace, became an antipornography spokesperson (14). Predictably, this is a fairly standard pairing of feminist porn with anti-porn feminisms even as the article itself notes that the next generation of what were then called "baby dykes" might have trouble believing anti-porn feminism existed: "How do you explain to the baby dykes why porn was once considered so problematic?" (14). In this example, it seems very possible and important to assert that feminist porn functions to articulate and *speak back* to a history of feminist censorship inside its own communities as well as those histories of censorship from Canadian customs. Such views of relational and overlapping feminist histories were present in these interviews as well.

CG: ...I remember at the 2000—I think it was the 2006, maybe it was the 2007 awards, saying something like you know "women take over the means of production" and just really wanting to see more women actively engaged in presenting their own sexual representation. Whether it was authentic or not, because like I said since then I think I've you know shifted to an understanding of feminism as being more about self-determination than specifically about authentic pleasure.

AL: Right? Like that's what I mean. I think more than that though... it's...the porn that I was watching at the review place, it didn't treat anybody like a person. Very few exceptions. And I don't think that applies to all mainstream porn, to all non-feminist porn, but the specific stuff I was looking at, it was usually stuff that, I don't even know what they call regular internet porn anymore. There'd be this big site that had 30/40/50/100 micro sites, so you know, micro micro micro, girls with glasses, girls with pigtails, every category you could think of. So, this was before tube sites, I think tube sites really changed porn as well. But that's a different story...

Those recent controversies which, in the past number of years of the FPAs, various kinds of boycotts and internal tensions about who received what award, for what work, and why; something, that can only and always already be identified as "Sex Wars, Continued." That is to say, new incarnations of the Sex Wars emerged, which these labouring subjects identified as hellish, nightmarish, and devastating critiques mostly from "inside" American scholars and porn/industry workers. What we might call "off-the-record" or "turn-off-the-recorder" moments occurred in each conversation. To be sure, these are complicated moments and complicated conversations that suggest perhaps that the worst part of the sex

wars, the internal and as yet unresolved conflicts *inside* of feminism, remain alive and well, especially in a site like *Feminist Porn*.

AL:...The first year, the first event I thought was great, I have no criticisms of it all. But I also thought this is still on the table, the idea here is so much bigger than what this event was and we have to grow it every year. From the beginning, from my job interview probably, I was like “this is too good” to stay like that. So, the first year I was involved we introduced a screening, so we weren’t just having—and we moved the panel to the screening. Because I wanted the awards to be more of a party and a celebration, and the worst way to start a party is to listen to four people talking on a stage. So again, no criticisms, I think for the first year it was exactly perfect. But I wanted to put my own mark on it, to change it, to make it as big as it could be. So, the second year we still had it at the Gladstone, but we added the screening....

AL: Yeah, it was really hard. So, we did, with media, I think we did have to work on how we framed it. And so, at first we...it was called Feminist Porn Awards...we never entertained changing the name, for lots of reasons, also because people would be like “what?” but when we were talking to people, we spent a lot of time talking people off the ledge. Like of really softening it and trying to represent a range of things but also at the same time trying to make it really normal, which was a really hard line to walk.

To locate these conversations inside of our ongoing public histories and those of sites like the *Toronto Women’s Bookstore* and the Morgentaler Abortion Clinic puts flesh to metaphorical “bombs” and bodies injured on or around this block. They will continue to occur and as the time is right for these conversations to be public ones, they will become more public. For now, part of their potency happens precisely because they are not yet more public. The obviousness of the social and, relatedly, physical locales of it all—the store on Harbord Street relative to the neighbourhood (which includes *TWB*, access on a non-commercial mainly residential street, across from a massive Toronto high school, between two major intersections at Bathurst on one end and Spadina/University of Toronto on the other and for a long time, just down the way from *TWB* and its struggles) as well as the constant debates—remain absolutely vital to un-packing those sex wars as they continue to be ongoing albeit *differently*.

LH: Yes, as opposed to this, this whole interactive series of websites, and stuff, so yeah, a literal physical movie, um...and um...you know, it was fantastic to talk to the folks behind Comstock films. They were doing something that was so different from anybody else, and it...I found...had...such a great...impact on a lot of people, there was a lot of people who really like customers who wouldn’t watch anything other than their movies, right? Specifically because it was real couples and because they had—they gave that background of the couples talking about their relationship before any sex happened, including just all of those—it was really well edited, but it, included all of those things that really, um, showed the connection

between the people, right, and the authenticity of the relationship, um, and, it was amazing that again, that wasn't happening anywhere right, and it was something that people connected to really uniquely, and that fact that they marketed themselves in such a way, that they were able to be carried in mainstream stores like Blockbuster was really something (laughs). And uh, so, I found that, I found that really fascinating. At a certain point...too...Candida Royalle...uh...was attempting to expand her brand to be in more inclusive of women of color, and um, released a movie called Aphrodite Superstar that again was just really amazing and different and getting to—uh—interview the person that she brought on to create that movie, um Abiola Adams I believe, yeah, she was so fantastic to talk to, I mean, again, um, for me that movie was just amazing because I had not seen, specifically as a black woman, a movie that was meant for me, right. I feel like that was the first time that I saw a movie that was, you know, it had black women in it, but, where there was a black woman narrative perspective, that was my first time with that and I was just blown away.

It is clear that such histories are indeed the Canadian histories of physical neighbourhoods both in proximity to carnal cities like Toronto but also the queer and feminist spaces produced in the mid-twentieth century and beyond. Rubin certainly made the argument very clear back in the brilliant and potent “Thinking Sex” essay, reminding us that urban sites were (and remain) vital to the production and maintenance of “new sexual systems” (1989, 286). Extremely important and insightful critiques of urban-centric imaginaries notwithstanding (Tongson’s especially), Rubin suggests that industrialization and its need for labourers increased migration to cities, which increased opportunities for the development of “places” and “areas” of cruising, sex work and other such “occupations” (288). So too does Miller-Young when she argues that, in conjunction with obscenity laws (a long set of histories and conversations itself), other laws impinging on sexual commerce, including anti-prostitution laws, alcoholic beverage regulations, and ordinances governing the location and operation of “adult” businesses, were most certainly productive of porn cultures (Miller-Young 2014). Rubin notes these factors all “render...sex workers more vulnerable to exploitation and bad working conditions” (Rubin 1989, 289). These realities have not changed. Sex remains, as Rubin noted in 1989, a vector of oppression (293), although one with now dramatically uneven patterns both within and beyond porn, within and beyond intersectional experiences of oppression.

In the conservative feminist context, then, as noted previously by Jane Juffer, “to be a feminist [was] to be against pornography” (1998). With the FPAs and the feminist porn movement spawned by or around such affective dis-orientations,¹⁴ this has clearly changed. One of the things all four of these interviewees agreed upon was the fact that a great deal of feminist work (especially around sexuality but not only) can be, in fact, might need to be, accomplished in porn. Depictions of sexuality are neither removed from cultural influences nor are problematic in and of themselves. They often constitute the stuff of fantasy in a productive

way—perhaps even, as suggested here, in a uniquely *feminist way*. Gallant in particular is extremely committed to the idea that for white women, changing the nature of those feminist fantasies can directly impact notions of race and settler colonialism, including those of whiteness. Her questions linger as extremely profound for the way that porn and feminism articulate each other in very precise ways: not so much only in the FPA criteria per se but through its own evolution historically at the store and perhaps in the larger networks that the store and the FPA criteria drew on. In other words, this articulation of feminist porn seems to challenge the notion that identity and gender-based authenticity is vital in any feminist representation of “women’s” sexuality.

CG: And so, there was this, you know, it’s not a critique, it’s more just like a second thought about it. Is that it, um, it puts an expectation of authenticity and sincerity and genuineness on people who are performers.... And so, I don’t know that, I still think it’s a great idea, but I don’t know that it entirely makes sense to apply that to porn.... And, but porn is entertainment. And um, so um, I think there’s an argument to be made that good feminist porn does not need to depict, uh, the performers’ own authentic sexuality.... You know, activist cultural production. So, I don’t want to discount the importance of authenticity, um, but I don’t feel like it’s fair that sex work as a work place is seen as being, um, like having, being socially harmful if it doesn’t represent authentic sexual desire. And yes, of course, then you know the post-modernists are going to go deep into this about what the fuck does authenticity even mean, I mean I can’t even answer that question for myself. What does it mean for me to express authentic sexual desire? Like, uh, that’s kinda up to me.... You know, maybe, I don’t know, honestly, I’ll leave it to the philosophers to think about this. But maybe the question is really more about autonomy than authenticity.... I feel like there’s a couple things happening in the first, the idea of the Feminist Porn Awards. One, I think I was trying to slip two things into feminism. One was sex workers’ rights and respect for sex work, recognition for sex work as being a part of feminism.... And two, anti-racism as being a part of feminism. Um, and I wanted to claim both. And I think that’s what was a little bit audacious about it, and a little bit provocative, was making no apologies, no explanation for either of those things.

This argument—that *feminist porn is not reducible to identity*—is from workers who have been trying to meet the demand for better feminist porn for nearly three decades as well as its changing technologies (so, the engine of the matter: cameras, lighting, sets, but also distribution, from virtually no internet to now, in some cases, almost exclusive online distribution and what that change in form means to content). So, to “out” the evolution and changing nature of what is identified as a feminist porn, or a feminist porn movement, means exploring how either of these differentiate themselves (or not) from mainstream industries. That is, what are the differences between mainstream porn and feminist porn when sometimes the same workers are involved in both?

Conclusions

By way of conclusions, then, let me reiterate what I have intended in this paper from the start—to conduct interviews with folks who have been and remain the ground of feminist porn in Toronto. This was not intended to be systematic nor wide-spread in terms of coverage. Instead, it intended to record and document the stories of those organizers and workers at one Canadian sex store, Good For Her, who put together and hosted a very early event that morphed into a much bigger cultural event and one with a life that no one could have imagined. The Canadian organizers of the feminist porn awards all note, even at the time of the interviews in early 2015, that the FPAs have now morphed into something else and are already a thing of the past. All of the subjects interviewed here talked about the special significance of place, echoing Hogan’s argument for the feminist bookstores that place became strategy (2016, 7), making the *feminist case* very self-evident. Such configurations of a feminist neighbourhood—feminist spaces—Harbord Street in Toronto, as it came to shape and literally, ground, in its most recent reiterations, what has constituted feminist porn. There are long feminist histories on the east end of Harbord Street, near Spadina, and these histories as locals and *habitas*, have been the place from which the Feminist Porn Awards first emerged closer to the west of Harbord, near Bathurst. Feminist porn not only comes from these urban queer-feminist neighbourhoods and their struggle for articulation and self-definition, but from the very physical lives that shaped the product, the process, and the pornographic object in different ways.

Getting on the scholarly map literally and figuratively remain a vital enterprise. As we transition from brick-and-mortar locations like bookstores and sex shops to online and mobile technologies, we risk losing the very things that defined what we did, who we were, and what we became—ironically as a consequence in part of insisting on public and/or counter-public space.¹⁵ Hogan for instance notes how absolutely vital the bricks and mortar feminist bookstore has been (and perhaps continues to be), functioning not only as a place to buy feminist books and, back in the day, queer books with happy endings, but also as a site of discourse, as a structure, a legacy of a movement, a hub of mobility and conversation and theories and stories, a destination for way more than books. It is a complex web of emotional political alliances (Hogan 2016, xix). So too, then, is this feminist sex store reminding us that “place is strategy” as well as destination (Hogan 2016, 3–7). And indeed, so too is feminist porn. These are representations of social movements, literacy, legibility, countercultural grammars, accountabilities, and emerging vocabularies deeply embedded in capitalism (as we all are) and in the ongoing practices of colonization (xix). We need to be reminded by these interviews that place and physical (vs. digital) locales are also training grounds, destinations, physical sites of being, gathering, interconnectivity—vital ways of knowing and being *differently* even as *being differently* meant—and continues to mean—very different things. Social networking sites, hubs, platforms, and practices clearly offer a great deal more than what a brick-and-mortar physicality cannot. There can be no disputing these realities. And yet we at FPARP still add worry to vexation at what we are just beginning to index—and it’s always already

past tense. Works like Hogan's and others remind us of the very significant question that underwrites this project: *how do we listen for complex material and on-the-ground histories that we not only don't know yet but ones we do not yet know how to hear?*

To sum up, here are two anecdotes: At the risk of invoking the wrath of Toronto-based (and nasty) newspaper columnists who shall remain nameless, as an assignment in my first-year Introduction to Sexuality Studies course completed at York University, as professor I sent my one hundred first-year Sexuality Studies students on individual field trips to earn 10% of their coursework grade by visiting GFH as an example of that most important feminist accomplishment—the feminist sex store. All of the students undertook the project, some with trepidation (generated in part by just having to leave the quaintness of York's off-site Glendon campus—a fair distance from Harbord Street). Over half of my students wrote very astutely in their essays that they recall being very confused when their smart phone GPS apps directed them to a small, otherwise anonymous-seeming “store” across from a high school on Harbord Street, walking past *GFH* several times because they presumed it was a coffee shop and not the infamous sex store they were mandated to visit. Such dis-orientations between smartphone GPS instructions and students' physical presence in front of their incoherent destination are precisely the queer potentialities of transforming phenomenologies. Many were able to catalogue their own incoherence, disbelief, and dis-orientation once they mustered the courage to step into the nondescript store—something a few did, in part to ask for directions to the supposed “real” sex store to which they were sent. If Hogan is right about the *feminist shelf*, then this work presents us with the performative shelf, case, table and perhaps, house (the lesbian herstory archive famously sits in a similar lesbian house), built to literally put the relations of desire and/or sexuality fully on display in a public albeit countercultural context right out there in the open (xiii).

Second concluding anecdote: anyone reading lesbian poetry in the 1980s about the joys of countercultural spaces and sex is likely somewhat weary of “lesbian poetry.” But in the research done to date on this project, I came across a gem of a piece on longing and remembering, written by feminist archive theorist and cultural studies professor T. L. Cowan, called, appropriately, “Harbord St.” (2005). This is a poem about a young girl who, protesting the abortion clinic with her fundamentalist mother on one side of the street, chooses, when she gets old enough, to cross the street and visit both the bookstore and eventually, the sex store opposite the clinic (not the same one bombed). I won't recite the poem by an extremely bright and astute theorist of media and of the feminist theorist and cultural worker here, but its historical reference point, the 1979 abortion clinic on Harbord Street and the feminist sex cultures held by both TWB and GFH, is extremely telling of the value of embodied genealogies and effects, affects, and echoes, *the not always evident but thick presences* of Toronto feminist sex cultures past, present, and hopefully future. These are not to be forgotten as we become more sophisticated with our devices.

This paper ends with these very brief anecdotes as a way to posit—indeed, argue—that we lose if we go completely digital even as we’ve already gone there: productive disorientations for young queer bodies and minds in progress—indeed perhaps an entirely new generation lost—and perhaps all the better for being productively lost in a city that has imagined itself as having had already done and seen it all already. *Thick with presence young people* finding themselves literally at the feminist doorstep of, and, indeed, beyond the *feminist shelf*—one step closer to the *feminist case*. To be able to get lost in such spaces—with or without the phones and GPS—can be, as we know, a very good thing.

Notes

1. This paper acknowledges an unpayable debt to the feminist sex store, Good for Her, as well as to the SSHRC Insight Grant program, which funded the Feminist Porn Archive and Research Project (FPARP), without which this work would not have occurred. Collaborator Lisa Sloniowski (Faculty Librarian, Scott Library, York University) and I both acknowledge and are grateful to the York University Research office and staff as well as to the administrators of the Scott Library for their support of FPARP and their labour actively accumulating sexual representations across their libraries and holdings.
2. Since 2000, Harbord Street has come to be known as the “Harbord Street Village,” earlier known as “the Annex” because of its annexation as the city of Toronto grew. This more recent name was chosen and speaks to the changing vocabularies as a consequence of the increasingly layered gentrifications and, indeed, rebrandings, which occur in a major city like Toronto.
3. Obviously here I am reminded of Jody Berland’s extremely important book *North of Empire*, in which she argues that Canada is both “in ‘America’ and yet not” (2009, 3). Of course this is a complex conversation about settler colonialism fundamentally, but it is also about the hegemonic dominance of the USA. Berland’s collection of essays is vital to understanding the way these “empires” function relative to each other as settler colonial empires.
4. The Canadian obscenity legislation known as the *Butler* decision, was put in place in 1992, after many conversations and consultations with anti-pornography feminists. See Becki Ross’s account of this process in Cossman et al., 1997. Ross’s account is important as one of the feminist academics who testified in front of the commission implementing this legislation and by whose own account after the fact claims to have failed to convince the judiciary of the limitations and indeed, errors of the *Butler* decision, limitations that played out on anything shipping to the Toronto Women’s Bookstore address in particular. This led to a very public and controversial trial over lesbian porn, in particular, the American magazine *Bad Attitude*. We argue here that such judiciary histories are vital to understanding the deployment of feminist porn in a Canadian context (Cossman et al., 1997).
5. Amber Dean argues the same is true about perceptions of the Downtown Eastside Vancouver. While I do not claim equivalencies—these are important actually to separate as the murder and disappearances of Indigenous women

- cannot at all be considered comparable to the formation of what Ross identifies as a Lesbian Nation—the veracities of Dean’s book and argument most certainly verify the way that neighbourhoods come to have a perceived identity, all the more true for racialized, impoverished, or colonized subjects. While no one can claim that “lesbian” as a signifier is associated with any of those three things, Ross does document the way that lesbian subjects in the 1970s and 1980s lived a very different reality than those of the 2010s. The same is decidedly not true for Indigenous women, who continue to be murdered, disappeared, and impoverished in extremely alarming numbers.
6. The first incarnation of the TWB (what I call TWB 1.0) was a literal neighbour to the Morgentaler Clinic, so much so that a great deal of its stock and indeed, its structural home were both destroyed by the ensuing fire as a result of the bombing. The building itself was demolished and TWB 2.0 was built in the same location but in the new building that was erected.
 7. The idea of “deep cognizance” comes from the life and work of Ruth Frankenberg and her explorations of whiteness in feminism. See Frankenberg’s *White Women, Race Matters: On the Social Construction of Whiteness* (1993), as well as her essay, “The Mirage of Unmarked Whiteness” (2000).
 8. While no one can dispute the paucity of porn for lesbians pre-the sex wars, this assertion (that long finger-nails and lesbian sex do not go together) will come to be contested by feminist sex workers and queer femmes, who posit that, despite the reasoning behind this statement that 1: to be lesbian means to be masculine with short finger nails; and 2: that having long finger-nails means not being lesbian, something that invisibilizes not just femme-identified lesbians but bisexual women and many other women for whom penetrative sex (digits or otherwise) is not practiced. Finally, this is disputed by women who have penetrative sex with long fingernails and who are, as they say, very skilled at safe play so that long or short nails are neither the point nor the problem.
 9. Such a construction of an everyday is not new. Here I draw also on the work of Jane Juffer’s *At Home with Pornography: Women, Sex and Everyday Life*, in which she argues that the notion of the everyday, or what she calls “the reconciliation of the everyday with the erotic” (1998, 3)—something she calls domesticated porn (7)—is what makes the everyday different in the late twentieth century. It’s also what genders that domestication: “domestication involves an oscillation between public and private spheres...understanding [such] agency means situating women as consumers in a constant movement between public and private spheres” (8). This is also what it means to consume feminist porn after the time when “you [were] not a feminist unless you [were] against pornography” (1).
 10. Some of those hauntings became extremely visible as I also conducted a series of interviews with workers and organizers affiliated with the store Good for Her, a feminist store on a strip of a street in Toronto haunted by its own thick feminist histories. The *to and fro* motion of that strip and its various destinations are neither incidental nor accidental; they are very much one of

the things I seek to detail, document, analyze. See my 2009, “Trans-Culture in the (White) City,” in which I theorize the experiences of the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) bus that travels along Harbord Street and through the “gay neighbourhood.” This was especially important because a queer organization had purchased advertising space on the Harbord Street bus transfer, a fairly standard practice for the TTC at that time. The organization was denied. They launched a human rights complaint and won, in part forcing the Toronto Transit Commission to run the queer advertising on the bus route transfer long after said practice had ended. I still possess the bus transfer and write, in the essay, about the near riots which ensued.

11. That there is a link between brick-and-mortar sex stores and thriving sex cultures in urban settings is assumed as *a priori* axiomatic in this work. Jane Juffer also notes as much in her *At Home with Pornography: Women, Sex and Everyday Life* (1998).
12. Ever mindful of the fact that in so many cases, this border-making practice drove itself right down the middle of tribal lands, communities, and nations, I reference here, at the very least, one short story by Thomas King, entitled “Borders.” In this story, the American-Canadian border cuts right through the heart of a small town Indigenous family (2003).
13. Lots of folks, activists, academics, scholars, cultural workers, and porn workers themselves do not agree on whether feminist porn constitutes an event in feminism or a feminism, as in feminist movement, in and of itself. FPARP makes no interventions in these debates except to note that the having and consuming (and indeed, making and defining) feminist porn is a remarkable historical event in and of itself. See, for instance, not only *The Feminist Porn Book* but also the *Closing Address* (2006) by Courtney Trouble, the brilliant production work of Shine Louise Houston who, with Jiz Lee, coined the phrase *ethical porn*, the work of Madison Young, Tristan Taormino, Annie Sprinkle, Mureille Miller-Young, the feminist five (cf., Linda Williams)—all of whom indicate collectively and historically that indeed this might be far more than a singular *moment* or *event*.
14. While no one can account for the simultaneity of the feminist porn movement and the Feminist Porn Awards, it is certainly clear that in their simultaneity something occurred around one to, potentially at least, launch or sustain, the other. As noted in all interviews, the question of whether this was a feminist porn moment or a feminist porn movement remains to be determined by history. But the deep frustration with a lack of feminist porn initiated the appearance of—and continuation of—the Feminist Porn Awards and their huge success. That these take place, with the accompanying Feminist Porn Conference for at least two years, in Canada remains a very interesting feminist fact.
15. I risk the “we”-case very deliberately here even as I acknowledge that for many complex reasons—settler colonialism being one of them—such a “we” is never, ever straightforward or simple and it always already is settler colonial unless otherwise articulated.

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“A Particular Kind of Romantic Entanglement”

Kent Monkman’s *Nation to Nation* (2020) and the Limits of Canadian Political Pornography

ERIC WEICHEL

“As you self-isolate on our home and Native land with your true patriot love, stand on guard and see it rise, staying safe for you and me.
- Miss Chief Eagle Testickle” (Monkman 2020)¹

On Sunday, March 22, 2020, just as COVID-19 lockdowns were first beginning to reshape Canadian society, renowned Cree artist Kent Monkman released a view of his latest large-scale “history” painting, or monumental narrative piece in the western tradition.² The piece, entitled *Nation to Nation*, was accompanied by the above quote by Monkman’s alter-ego Miss Chief Eagle Testickle, who (as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, where Monkman has just mounted a new and critically acclaimed exhibition of two enormous paintings, describes her) is a “genderfluid...time-traveling, shape-shifting, supernatural being who reverses the colonial gaze to challenge received notions of history and Indigenous peoples.”³ *Nation to Nation* marks a return by the artist to the more explicitly sexual subject matter that catapulted his work to public attention. For example, Murray Whyte of *Toronto Star*, reviewing *Prick Island* (2001) at the exhibition “Hot Mush and the Cold North,” Ottawa Art Gallery (cur. Emily Falvey), described Monkman’s overtly homoerotic early work as “cheeky recreations of several of Harris’ pieces in watercolour, overlaid with text, and an addition or two—a cowboy and Indian, say, in a particular kind of romantic entanglement” (Whyte 2005, emphasis added). This cautious, glib language exemplifies much of the sexual prurience that continues, for all its theoretical tolerance, to overlay Canadian society within the conservative frameworks of (censored) heteronormativity.⁴ Nor has this language gone away: as recently as 2018, a respected collector outright refused to describe Monkman’s eroticism as pornography: no, he insisted, the sexual intimacy between men shown in one of Monkman’s provocative wallpapers was “like a flower” (Guardino 2018).

Kent Monkman, a member of the Fisher River Cree Nation in Treaty 5 territory (Manitoba), is not just a painter. His work interfaces between film, performance, installation, photography, and other filmic media, and is often concerned with the moving image (Bick 2014, 21). For example, in *Group of Seven Inches* (2004), Miss Chief Eagle Testickle “inverts the colonial representational equation by presenting herself as a painter studying two young white men and documenting their curious ways, all the while seducing her unwitting specimens with alcohol and titillation” (Cousineau-Levine 2017). Other examples of Monkman’s use of



Figure 1. “As you self-isolate on our home and Native land with your true patriot love, stand on guard and see it rise, staying safe for you and me.- Miss Chief Eagle Testickle.” Kent Monkman, *Nation to Nation* (2020). Instagram.

the moving image similarly collapse the traditional boundaries between various visual media, where painting, performance, film and installation are all used as a kind of *gestamtkunstwerk*, or total work of art. Indeed, Monkman's use of social media, such as Instagram, to reach a wider social audience than one allowed by the physical confinements of the gallery or the saleroom insists on the value of Indigenous social leadership within the sexual sphere.⁵ The pornographic content in *Nation to Nation* moves between two very different types of media: the ossified format of history painting, and the new social networks of vision, community, and fashion that coalesce around an app like Instagram. In this essay, I demonstrate how Monkman's work and its aura hybridizes digital and material space to allow for "fantastical authenticity" (Hurley 2019) where political and sexual agents express different identities and realities than those currently allowed by the repressive statue apparatuses of the Canadian nation state.⁶ As such, I hold that Monkman's pornographic content is political criticism of the sexual insularity and social complacency featuring so heavily in Canadian society. I argue that Monkman's work functions as a commemoration of the repressive policing which has long been visited on the queer male body, and specifically in Canada, in the context of outdoor "public" sex, that is, "cruising". Through a survey of Monkman's use of homoeroticism as a potent tool of both state and colonial criticism, I explore the work's modern relevance to post-pandemic surveillance policing, suggesting that Monkman's practice calls for the continuing relevance, vitality, and necessity for such spaces, which thereby become, to use a critical tool culled from social geography, a Place, with a capital P, or a kind of community territory (Massey 1994). I also explore critical reactions to another work in the same series, *Hanky Panky*, and suggest that Indigenous leadership can create a "fantastically authentic" space for queer liberation.

Context: Sex

Showing the erect phallus engaged in oral sex, as Monkman does in *Nation to Nation*, is, quite simply, highly pornographic, at least in the western tradition of visual art (Hammer-Tugendhat 2012). The centrality of the male gaze has left the nude, exploitable female body as the dominant erotic signifier, while the voyeuristic elements of control and scopophilia inherent in established (white, straight, male) modes of looking, as they have been canonized by visual art and film (Mulvey 1975), are seriously challenged by the presence of an erect phallus. Early critics of Monkman's painting were quick to note the power dynamics that feature so consistently in his homoerotic scenes. "Monkman wants us to spend some time in this territory to get a feel for its ambiguities," writes Richard William Hill, "Are these men fighting or fucking? Or perhaps a bit of both? (This is not the first time that sex and power seem impossible to untangle)" (Hill 2002). Hill's canny acknowledgement that sex and power are at the core of Monkman's politically-motivated pornographic painting suggests something of the difficulties with consent, abuse, power, and masculinity that are endemic throughout Monkman's oeuvre.

Monkman's work is highly art historical, in the sense that his production is very informed by the complex histories of traditional western painting. It is also historical in the sense that he recapitulates, or re-presents, history painting itself. A recurring theme is the pictorial subversion of the splendid 19th-century canvases of Paul Kane, George Caitlin or other settler-colonial artists working within the framework of "Manifest Destiny". The Cowboy's assumed virility, heterosexuality, and canonicity—a *de facto* symbol of the Wild West, admittedly one heavily-demarcated by later filmic representations—is called into question by Miss Chief's sexual dominance. Instead of an uber-masculine settler-warrior who makes his own Law, the Two-Spirit Miss Chief, very much in control of her surroundings, her accomplices, and her enemies, is the puppet-mistress. *Selflessly she gives herself for the promulgation of her kind* (2004) is a particularly successful example of a work by Monkman where highly charged erotic content both feeds into established modes of looking (the glittery imperialism of David's *Napoleon Crossing the Alps* meets the burnished pulp consumerism of Harlequin Romance covers) and simultaneously subverts these processes through the suggestive, rather than explicit (at least in the western, pornographic sense detailed by Hammer-Tugendhat) queer homoeroticism and tricksterism of the piece.

Many of Monkman's most explicit works are small-scale: the *fête-galante* format of these miniaturized scenes invites closer inspection and the process of connoisseurial looking.⁷ The costume worn by Miss Chief in *Nation to Nation* duplicates many of Monkman's canny, satirical re-presentations of Paul Kane's infamous *Fishing by Torchlight* image, with the thigh-high ruby-red boots a key signature of that (hugely homoerotic) colonial painting. Miss Chief also wears these distinctive "Kane" boots as accoutrements of power in Monkman's previous most stridently subversive, politically erotic work, the 2016 *Bears of Confederation*, which shows the so-called Fathers of Confederation, white patriarchs revered for their formative legislative role by settler-colonial society, dressed in the fetish harnesses of the "leather" subcommunity of gay men. As an example of semiological parallelism, in this instance, the "bears" are sexually mauled by real bears! *Bears of Confederation's* miniaturized figures do still belong to this *fête-galante* tradition, filtered through the heady sublime of the Manifest Destiny painters like Kane or Caitlin, but *Nation to Nation* is, by way of contrast, an epic history painting on a scale that sets it apart as monumental, insistent, and canonical.

A key to interpreting *Nation to Nation's* political content, as conceived by the artist, comes in his comments on some of these earlier, typically smaller-scale erotic works where the consensual sexual subservience of symbols of Canadian embodied masculinity to Miss Chief's sexual dominance is of prime narrative importance. "These images reveal a nearly 20-year long creative process... All works show a Mountie, a symbol of Canadian manhood, servicing an engaged and engorged member of the Cree Nation," Monkman writes in his caption for the 2002 watercolour *The Treaty of 1869*, which like *Nation to Nation* shows a Mountie on his knees before a standing Miss Chief, and which, also like *Nation to Nation*, takes the pregnant temporal point immediately before sexual consummation begins.⁸ Monkman continues, in his description of *Treaty of 1869*, that "Settlers

may find indigenous sovereignty difficult to swallow, but being on the receiving end of this exchange and taking in indigenous worldviews will prove mutually satisfying” (Monkman 2002). This quote is particularly telling in two crucial ways for how settler-Canadian audiences should read *Nation to Nation*: one, this is no idle use of pornography, but a motif that has been instrumental to the artist’s career success, which he and his studio have continually and self-consciously returned to throughout his oeuvre. Secondly, that these images of Indigenous sexual dominance over figures like the cowboy, the Mountie—or in some cases, such as in *Expelling the Vices* (2014), the priest—are represented specifically so that the settler-Canadian audience can “swallow” their awkwardness about viewing such explicit material and take in Indigenous worldviews about sex, identity, and place.

Authority: RCMP and Policing

The visual centrality of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in Monkman’s recent work is, perhaps, best illustrated by the major narrative series featured in his critically acclaimed “Shame and Prejudice” exhibition. From this series, *The Scream* (2017) unflinchingly displayed the RCMP’s active role in the genocide of Canada’s Indigenous peoples through the Residential School Program, highlighting the racist need of the nation state to deprive specific northern communities of their children and their culture as a form of resource warfare executed dually by its twinned military and religious forces. In Monkman’s series, the RCMP officer is a potent visual metaphor for the masculinized settler state. Critics and viewers from settler-Canadian media responded with a certain discomfort to the monumentalized dark truths painted by Monkman and his studio: “though his style is exaggerated, the events it depicts are real,” admits a journalist from the *Economist* (D. L. 2018). Indigenous writers and journalists were more explicit: Martin Siberok from the *Nation*, an Indigenous news service serving James Bay Cree communities, describes the police troops in *The Scream* as “participating in the removal” of a community’s children in a manner described as “gut-wrenching” (Siberok 2019). “Their removal was devastating and destructive—an act of pure evil,” Siberok states, in language considerably more precise, and more emphatic, than that of his *Economist* colleague (2019).

Broadly speaking, mainstream society in settler Canada still continues to cling, in more than just an ideological sense, to the repressive interpellative hegemony offered by Canada’s racist police force. Interpellation, the term coined by French theorist Louis Althusser in his germinal 1970 essay *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, suggests the constitution of the diverse (working) citizenry as civic subjects through a process of “hailing” by the forces, both repressive and ideological, of the (elite) state (Althusser 1971). Althusser famously gives the example of a police officer who hails “Hey, you there!” to a member of the public, who by turning to respond to the aggressive public act (the hail), “by this mere one-hundred-and-eighty-degree physical conversion...becomes a *subject*” (1971). For Althusser, as media theorist Cindy Nguyen notes, “this subjecthood is double: although he is recognized as a social subject by the law, he is also subjugated to

the law” (Nguyen 2015). As pandemic policing and enforcement have so stridently illustrated in 2020, through the glorification of the ideological and forcible power of the police, citizens become therefore “complicit in their own domination” (2015). Settler Canadian society’s valuation and mythologization of the same state-ordered security forces which violently abuse non-elite, working-class and Indigenous populations is a form of what Althusser calls the RSA, the “Repressive State Apparatus” (Althusser 1971). In comparison to a multitude of “Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs), such as the family, educational institutions, and media such as literature, radio and television,” the RSA, such as the RCMP, explicitly use force, domination and physical abuse to achieve their (elite, state-controlled, government) ends (Nguyen 2015).

In her essay “Mounties and Metaphysics in Canadian Film and Television,” Patricia Gruben reminds us that the filmic romanticization of the RCMP as a supposedly virile, heroic, and rugged colonizing army was and is endemic (Gruben 2014). More than 250 films about earnest, do-gooder (white) Mounties were made in the first half of the 20th century, while the valorisation of white heterosexual masculinity insisted by such films eventually became so legible, both in a domestic and international context, that the trope of the Mountie became a parody (2014). “When the RCMP are not depicted as comically virtuous,” Gruben notes, “they are usually competent, colourless detectives” (285). A watershed in filmic representations of the Mountie in Canadian media is perhaps the mixed comedy-mystery series *Due South* (1994–1999), where an officer is played by the “blandly handsome” Paul Gross. *Due South* was so popular in Canada that it ran for five years across two channels and two production partners, and its vision of the slightly parodic, but still virile, upright, *necessary* (and above all distinctively Canadian) police officer recapitulated the fantasy of power articulated by the rich filmic heritage of such celebrations. Indeed, Gross cemented his reputation as “one of Canada’s most recognizable actors” by playing a morally righteous Mountie, and his 2010 cameo in the feature film *Barney’s Vision*, long after the end of the series that launched him to fame, suggests an inter-textual recognition of his image’s association with the RCMP (Czach 2012). Monkman’s use of the sexually subservient Mountie is of course parodic, and is much in dialogue with the moving image of the Mountie valorised by *Due South*.⁹

And yet, of course, as Grueben notes, “recent real-life revelations about the RCMP continue to taint its Dudley Do-right image” (2014, 285). In just the first six months of 2020, in a very public raid on the Wet’suwet’en nation in overt support of the Coastal GasLink/TC Energy pipeline, the RCMP brutalized and arrested Indigenous elders, water protectors, traditional guardians and their intentional supporters on their own unceded territories (Bracken 2020). In a chilling contemporary reminder that the horrible realities depicted in *The Scream* are ongoing, the RCMP publicly dragged unarmed women and seniors away from the Unist’ot’en healing centre, ripping down red dresses that were exhibited as a reminder of the nation-state’s lip-service commitment to Reconciliation and to the much-needed inquiry into the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls in Canada (MMIWG).¹⁰

These iconoclastic acts of physical violence visualize much deeper rot at the heart of Canada's police forces, where systematic racism and discrimination are embedded into policing. "Anybody with his [Alberta RCMP Deputy Commissioner Curtis Zablocki] experience in the RCMP either knows it, has seen it, smelt it, or been around it," insists Brian Beresh, Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation Chief Allan Adam's legal counsel. Beresh here reiterates the systematic racism experienced by Indigenous peoples at the hands of the RCMP, who as Musqueam activist Audrey Siegl reminds a *Toronto Star* reporter, were "created to quash the Indian rebellions. The police were created to protect and serve the colonial state." (Morin 2020) Allan Adam, a respected Indigenous leader, was brutally battered by an RCMP officer in March of 2020. During an arrest in Fort McMurray, Alberta that originated over an expired license plate, and eventually embroiled his wife, Adam was left severely cut and bruised by police violence. As Robin Levinson King of *BBC News Toronto* reiterates, during his arrest, Allan Adam retaliated against well-known aggression with characteristic words, saying "I'm sick and tired of being harassed by the RCMP" (BBC 2020). For Beresh, who has forty-four years of experience practicing law in Canada, "police violence against indigenous people has been a constant issue" Beresh encountered "from the first day."

Adam's case is simply the latest and most high-profile example of a long and terribly tragic litany of abuses against Indigenous peoples by the RCMP, who, for all their filmic adulation and "blandly handsome" nationalist characterizations, have zero moral righteousness in this country, as is made very publicly evident by the images released of their takedown of the Wet'suwet'en water protectors camp. Those images, of brutalized women who were driven off their own land at the hands of majority white, male RCMP officers, are haunting in the extreme. Monkman's work acts as a kind of counter to this terrible tragedy, and deploys a kind of "fantastical authenticity," a concept developed by Media Studies scholar Zoe Hurley, where social media, and the publication of aesthetic images—however pornographic they might be in *Nation to Nation's* example—offer a digitized intellectual space for the conceptualization of a different kind of politically authentic, socially liberated public life. These acts of authenticity and fantasy, conceptualized visually and spread via social media, are acts of resistance that are, extending Hurley's model to this specific case study of Monkman's work, mediated and led by Indigenous efforts for sovereignty. Included within this "fantastical authentic" version of social possibility offered by *Nation to Nation* is a recognition of the value of outdoor public sex between queer men, or "cruising".

Cruising and Place

Cruising for gay sex in public parks has been an inherent component of western urban environments since at least the Renaissance, although due to the nature of furtive and preferably unrecorded interaction, specific corroborated documented evidence of sexual interactions between men is necessarily often found within the very discursive strongholds of oppression: police records themselves. Any history of an oppressed and targeted minority population whose records

therefore overwhelmingly come from the oppressor is, as Foucault has famously noted, highly biased and subject to manipulation. “Wherever there is power, there is resistance,” noted the famous French philosopher, whose writings are so concerned with power, law, authority, and repression (Foucault 1976, 95–96). The elision and the deliberate suppression or outright destruction of queer men’s bodies and histories has long been the purview of the police.¹¹ Ironically, police records of surveilling, targeting and entrapping men into arrestable sexual behaviour has involved the recording of their voices, names, habits, and their Places, some very few of which continue to function as outdoor cruising grounds.

Take one particularly formative early example: Paris. Of course, Monkman’s specific genre, that of academic history painting, is a type of visual discourse profoundly shaped by Parisian cultural life. The bi-annual exhibitions of the Salon at the Louvre, the decidedly Parisian-led popular reaction against official history painting, and the ebb and flow of particular artistic movements and styles, many of which were inaugurated by the avant-garde of the city or their many regional imitations: these are all phenomena that continue to heavily colour art history, as they coloured (quite literally) the development of contemporary art in that period. More precisely, in the type of eroticized history painting at play in *Nation to Nation*, Monkman draws from a wide range of (scandalous) precedents, notably including Manet’s infamous *Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe*, star attraction of the 1863 Salon des Refusés and veritable grandmother of Modernism. This painting, as is well known, deliberately situates (dare I say Places?) provocative erotic content within a specific Parisian park known for its surreptitious copulations. Monkman himself has stridently specialized in blending a heavily informed brand of art historical criticism with the moving image. Monkman’s beloved Romanticism, so cheekily celebrated in his film *Casualties of Modernity* (2015), where (spoiler alert!) the movement itself is deliberately incarnated as a homoerotic cadaver—miraculously resurrected through Miss Chief Eagle Testickle’s selfless powers—is of course an art style profoundly associated, through Delacroix and his many followers, with Paris.¹²

As historian Davitt Moroney reminds us, in Paris, long viewed as a foundational and much-emulated urban environment, the urban royal gardens were particularly crucial for the enactment of inter-class sexual activity between men, and are also significant in police history itself, “as it was not possible for a person to be arrested within them” (Moroney 2005). Eighteenth century Parisian police therefore used a *mouche*, or police entrapment collaborator (many of whom were themselves under duress) who had to lead his victims physically out of the gardens for security forces to be able to apprehend an individual. Moroney reiterates that of the various documented spaces where men had sex with each other in *ancien regime* Paris, “the royal Tuileries Gardens were the most popular (and had been since at least the seventeenth century), especially for noblemen looking for soldiers,” pointing out that as a homosexual Place with a capital P, “the Tuileries have attained an almost mythical status in Parisian gay history” (1027). The gardens of Tuileries continue to remain active outdoor sexual spots for contemporary Parisian gay men: one gay travel blog on Paris, which markets itself

as “Paris tour guides for all travellers, LGBTQ and beyond,” points out that in the Tuileries “a popular cruising spot among the shrubs (classy) is located right next to the Arc du Carrousel at the garden’s east end. *Not that we’ve ever been...*” (Gay Locals 2020, emphasis added).

The suggestive language (“classy,” “not that we’ve ever been”) used by the authors of *The Gay Locals* underscores the spatial (Placial?) continuity of sexual practices among men within one particularly evocative urban community: Paris. Such ironic and deprecatory language also suggests the self-policing notions of sexual interaction between men that continue to reverberate in popular gay discourse. Despite the Tuileries’ rich literary and cultural impact, social class is threatened by the mere notion of non-monogamous homosexuality; outdoor sex in this context is seen, even by likely participants (the authors), as a class-undermining performance/practice, be it undertaken in the eighteenth or the twenty-first century.¹³ Correspondingly, Monkman’s *Nation to Nation*, showing outdoor sex between Miss Chief and a cock-hungry symbol of the masculinized settler state, is all the more unsettling because of its recapitulation of *class*. Social class was of course central to the whole institution of the residential school system and, as the authors of the Truth and Reconciliation Committee’s final report on residential schools remind us, notions of social class continue to negatively impact the disproportionately high rates of Indigenous children forcibly placed in the care of the twenty-first century state (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015, 37). As such, *Nation to Nation*’s cross-racial, cross-class depiction of consensual oral sex between men is politicized pornography, and one that draws attention, through Indigenous cultural leadership, to the insidiously normalized classism so visible in Canadian society. In *Nation to Nation*, the class-transcendent social connectivity which fleetingly unites men of wildly distinct social backgrounds via anonymous oral sex is commemorated on the monumental level: the socially transfigurative possibilities attendant within “cruising” has been very, very rarely given anything like Monkman’s celebratory elite history painting.

Cruising Places, once identified (almost always negatively) as such in the minds of the non-homosexual public majority or law enforcement, are subject to alteration and suppression. Parks or other natural spaces in the city, which in theory should belong to all people at all times of the day, are closed and patrolled at nights, their hidden greenery razed, their dark spaces illuminated, their possibilities surveilled and captured on video. The hysteria surrounding public use of urban natural/garden space in the present COVID-19 pandemic is, perhaps, best metaphorized in Canada by the police wagons daily circulating with aggressive messages on loudspeakers through Parc La Fontaine in Montréal, or the egregiously smug social media messages of triumph and elation recently circulated by Toronto Police services, who had successfully tracked down and fined a man accused of taking a selfie in a cherry-blossom tree at night (Westoll 2020).¹⁴ Whatever the health risk of the misdemeanour, what an incredibly innocuous activity compared to the imminent union between Miss Chief and the Mountie in *Nation to Nation*! By extension, their union visually monumentalizes, in the format of the history painting, and publicizes, through the new media of Instagram, the

future: that of every man, and there will yet be many men, who risk discovery and humiliation for a fleeting moment of identity freedom preciously enacted through consensual anonymous public sex. Through visually commemorating that freedom, Monkman insists on the visual visibility, the “known-ness” of the phallus, the blowjob, the gay man, and the Two-Spirit cultural leader. The very media of his large-scale history paintings, which have been institutionally recognized as political tools of social and state criticism, here helps to suggest the sacral transcendence offered to both participants by the context of the garden, the public park, or the territorially claimed and fleetingly Liberated outdoor meeting place. As such, Monkman’s use of *Nation to Nation* on Instagram presents a “fantastically authentic” digital Place for the re-evaluation of grim Canadian political and social realities through eroticized fantasy (Hurley 2019, 8).

Instagram’s policing of sex workers of any kind, or any form of sexually explicit content, is well-documented. Pornography, Instagram says, is strictly banned, and yet large painted images such as *Nation to Nation* seem to be understood by Instagram as moving securely into the “artistic” realm (Fabbri 2019). This status grants them a legitimacy and authority, even if simply the ability to *exist* on the platform, that is outright denied to the purely photographic or filmic productions of lesser-known artists, sex workers, or private exhibitionists. As a documentation of outdoor queer sex that is public without being oppressive, Monkman’s work is a virtual fantastic, digitally authentic counter to the ongoing police repression of consenting male-male sex in the public outdoor spaces of this country. To give simply one (egregious) example, in the name of social distancing, four mature men, each over the age of 70, were slapped with heavy fines by the Sherbrooke, Quebec police forces, their crime a foursome in Parc Jeffrey-Gingas. Social distancing and other health measures enforced by the Canadian police were surely meant to protect the vulnerable, including septuagenarian men (however queer they might publicly or privately be!). However, if the vulnerable feel such a need for the kind of fulfilment that outdoor group sex affords them that they, knowing their risks, still decide to meet each other in a park cruising area—whose needs are really being met by police oppression? Those of the patriarchal capitalist state, investing in the policing of class boundaries? Or do not these actions by elder, consenting adults now mark out, demarcate and “Place” this space as one of future sexual interest for a wider public (Thibault 2020)? *Nation to Nation* gives us a mediated vision of a more honest world, one without the flagrant hypocrisy enacted by the Canadian police towards the Jeffrey-Gingas four, and one where the pornographic sexual subservience of a Mountie acts as an atonement for ongoing social ills.

As Monkman’s visual use of the nationally authoritative figure of the Mountie implicitly suggests, Canada, under Indigenous leadership, should allow for the flourishing, even encouragement of outdoor places for anonymous queer sex. The long urban functionality of The Tuileries Gardens, The Meatrack trail on Fire Island, or the Pier at Provincetown, and their canonization as Places where minds and bodies might make such consenting, anonymous sexual interactions as cruising affords, are vital reminders that cruising is not, even after literal centuries of policing, going to go away.¹⁵ Such gardens—and like many a Romantic history

painting depicting themes of sexuality, Monkman's canvas is positively festooned with flowers—become gardens blossoming with queer liberation, territoriality, and commemoration, which is precisely the reason they are rooted out with such ferocity and frequency by the RSA. The state depends on heteronormative capitalism to survive, while the anonymous outdoor cruising area suggests the potential destabilization of monogamy, social class, or social order. COVID-19, of course, is simply a less community-specific form of destabilization: perhaps that explains one Quebecois journalist's uncompassionate characterization of the Jeffrey-Gingas four as “pris une sérieuse option sur le titre de «Covidiots» de la semaine” (Thibault 2020).¹⁶

Reception

How is Monkman's *Nation to Nation* received? The comments that were posted on *Nation to Nation* provide valuable insight into how members of the public responded to the work, and to the limits of Canadian political pornography.¹⁷ The vast majority of the comments that had been posted, as of April 2020, were positive, including those posted by Indigenous leaders, who correctly noted its value as a political image. “I wanna make a sign out of this at the next protest,” commented one Anishinaabe (Odawa, Pottawatomi) artist¹⁸—who is a drummer, musician, activist, and entrepreneur—recognition of the didactic function of Monkman's history painting, and its aura's ability, in reproduction via protest ephemera, to act as a visual sign of social change, is quite telling. “Love all your work, thanks for representing us native americans,” writes a Cherokee commenter who studies at an art department in Arkansas. Other activist comments in support of *Nation to Nation* are similarly illustrative: “SUCK THE POLICE,” wrote one user, while another commented, “oh my goddd I want this to be in contemporary art classes asap”; another user responded by noting Monkman's integration into the curriculum in Canada: “Kent works in Toronto, so it makes sense we instruct about our locals. :) Significant painting!”

While artists, activists and Indigenous leaders all recognized the (necessary) political context of this painting, a few users, most if not all of whom do not appear, from their Instagram accounts, to self-identify as Indigenous, were critical of *Nation to Nation*'s pornographic content. “Yo this whack asf,” wrote one commenter, prompting the retort, among others, “I think SOMEONE wishes they were the Mountie”. “I think this picture is degrading to everyone in it!” commented another user, which highlights the difficulty many heterosexual people have in understanding consensual oral sex as a significant bonding event between men. More troublingly, a young queer man of colour from New York sees in the sexualization of the Mountie a certain complicit valorisation of the RCMP. “This not revolutionary,” wrote this user, “this is disrespectful to all who were killed by these monsters. Wtf bro.” This comment highlights the disjunction between the elite arts community in Canada, who might theorize and celebrate the iconographic uses of a pornographic subversion of the Repressive State Apparatus, such as represented in *Nation to Nation*, and the experiences of queer youth of colour on the streets across North America, where the experience

of violence is direct, immediate, and lived. Political pornography, even clever, iconographically fertile pornography like Monkman's art, has its limits.

More than simply illustrating a range of public reactions to Monkman's incorporation of "pornographic" imagery into a monumental history painting, these comments are also valuable for documenting an ephemeral expression of public consent. Shortly after the publication of *Nation to Nation* on the artist's website and Instagram page, Monkman became embroiled in a scandal concerning a later painting, *Hanky Panky* (2020), which is presumably from the same series as *Nation to Nation*. *Hanky Panky* represents, in large scale, the current Prime Minister of Canada, Justin Trudeau, about to be "fisted" by Miss Chief as a crowd of laughing Indigenous women and appalled former Prime Ministers (both living and dead) view the scene. The work's publication on Instagram and the artist's website has caused considerable controversy within the Canadian art world. In Austin Grabish's article for CBC news covering the fierce backlash to the piece, the broadcaster warned readers that "CBC News has cropped the original painting into separate images to avoid showing the nudity"—a statement which suggests much about the parochial and hypocritical attitudes to the nude in art, let alone provocative or explicit erotic content, views which are prevalent among the Canadian public. Monkman was criticized by a variety of activists, including Jaye Simpson, "an Oji-Cree Saulteaux queer artist and writer in Vancouver," and Danielle Ewenin, an elder from Kawacatoose First Nation in Saskatchewan (Grabish 2020). Both figures criticized Monkman for flirting with a monumental depiction of sexual violence. "He's taken the symbol and he's degraded it," wrote Ewenin, referring to the red-handed sex toy, which appeared earlier in the *Shame and Prejudice* exhibition and in his 45s short *Miss Chief's Praying Hands* (2019), but which is here interpreted as a reference to the red hand symbology commemorating Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIW) (Grabish 2020).

If Simpson and Ewenin, like select Instagram users, are condemnatory of Monkman's politicized eroticism, other critics and activists, such as independent Manitoba senator Murray Sinclair, see the artist's (pornographically-expressed) point. "[Monkman] has managed to get people worked up over the obscenity of the content, in startling contrast to the intellectual calmness with which people look upon how Indigenous women were treated," writes Sinclair, "I wish people were as shocked and angered at that visual as they are at Monkman's portrayal of it" (2020). Sinclair, the first Indigenous judge to be appointed in Manitoba and the Chief Commissioner of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, is a leader with decades of experience in civil administration. His former jurisdiction includes Kent Monkman's patrimony of Fisher River Cree Nation. Despite this and other support, Monkman was quick to respond to Indigenous criticism of *Hanky Panky*, as one excerpt from a larger and heartfelt artist statement post suggests. "As a cis-gendered Two-Spirit Cree man, I have always wished to prioritize the safety and wellbeing of non-binary, trans, Two-Spirit and women viewers," he posted on Instagram and Facebook, highlighting that, at least for *Hanky Panky*, his mission to use political eroticism had reached a limit (Monkman 2020). "I see that with

this work, I have failed. I wish for my work to resist the colonial traumas inflicted upon my own family and so many others for generations, not to perpetuate harm” (2020).¹⁹

On May 14, under a detail shot of *Hanky Panky* (2020), Monkman further added that because of “racist comments that have been directed towards community members on my social media platforms, I am temporarily disabling comments on some of my social media accounts and closing others where that is not possible for the time being” (2020). The comments I include above as examples of public interpretation of *Nation to Nation* are no longer visible. *Hanky Panky* itself was later offensively written about by Howard A. Levitt, a well-heeled employment lawyer who sometimes writes for the National Post. In an article published on May 30th, Levitt, after claiming to have purchased the work for a six-figure price he admitted was “no bargain,” revealed his intentions for adding the piece to his collection. “The ‘social justice warriors’ are proportionately ruthless in their criticism and even more prepared to turn on their own. If, for no other reason than showing my support of Monkman against this group of straw men (and women), I had to buy it,” claimed Levitt (2020). *The National Post*, seemingly less squeamish than the CBC, reprinted the controversial work in its entirety, without cropping out the (little) nudity the work contains.

Here, then, lie the limits of political pornography in Canada, or rather, the limit as defined by public consensus under Indigenous leadership. Fascinatingly, very little nudity is actually shown in the more controversial *Hanky Panky*: the buttocks of a recumbent Mountie are exposed to the viewer, as is the pale, supple shining rear end of a beaming Justin Trudeau, but Miss Chief herself is (for her!) quite demurely covered in the front. *Nation to Nation*, however, with the clear representation of an “engaged and engorged member” is decidedly the more pornographic image, according to the traditional definition of pornography within the established, scopophilic process of the male gaze that has defined western visual art and its histories.²⁰ The eager consent of the Mountie, and the tacit acknowledgement of the didactic and subversive political content of the work by Indigenous leaders, has however rendered this form of sexuality far more appropriate than *Hanky Panky*, which, by incorporating the likenesses of real Indigenous women and the controversial symbol of the red hand, is the more controversial work. The erect phallus, the depiction of oral sex, and the hierarchical notions of power, public cruising and anonymous sex that are implicit in *Nation to Nation* are no longer the flashpoints of public criticism. Instead, notions of consent, femininity, abuse, and even, hypothetically, a misunderstanding of the consensual nature of “fisting” as a sexual practice are brought to the forefront by a public whose notions of “pornography” are no longer what they once were. On May 21, 2020, Monkman underscored his recognition of these new and for him, likely very surprising, shifting priorities and tolerances, both in Canadian society and in Canadian art. After explaining that he would not be speaking to the media about the controversy the work had generated, Monkman reiterated his indebtedness to Indigenous cultural leadership. “I am prioritizing listening to the feedback from my community,” says the artist, via his (at the time of writing) last comment on

the work via his website, “I can say quite candidly that this experience will have a lasting impact on me and will influence my work in many ways.” (Monkman 2020).²¹ Hopefully, these limits will serve as further guidelines to young artists embarking on an exploration of related issues over the course of the next decade, who stand to either gain a respectful engagement with Indigenous community and ceremony, or risk losing political support from all but the ilk of Howard Levitt and his ossified brand of reactionary conservative “National Post” readership.

Why do the limits of political pornography in Canadian visual art and media matter, in the here and now of mid-2021? And why should Hurley’s notion of a “fantastical authenticity” be applied to Monkman’s work, thus suggesting the need for contemporary queer, gay, Indigenous and other viewing bodies to re-define sex and place? The answer, of course, is in the very nature of what has been already lost in this country, and what is yet under attack. As discussed above, one Instagram user acknowledged that Monkman’s base was in Toronto and that his work, including heavily eroticized or ostensibly “pornographic” pieces, formed a crucial component in a diverse body of visual arts pedagogies in the city. Monkman’s political pornography is thus a strident visual reminder that queer spaces and places in Toronto continue to be heavily contested and contentious battlegrounds—as indeed they are across the wider nation.²² As journalist and historian Tom Hooper notes, Toronto, and Canada as a (w)hole, have a long history of police surveillance, repression and brutality against men cruising for gay sex in parks, despite what he terms “lovers’ lanes” being regularly used for heterosexual activity with little enforcement (Hooper 2018). “There is a long history of police unapologetically targeting men having sex with men in Toronto parks,” writes Hooper, noting that some of the most vociferous opposition to the Trudeau (senior) government’s partial decriminalization of homosexuality came from the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, who argued that “the search by homosexuals for partners often leads to assault, theft, male prostitution and murder.” (Hooper 2017, 2018). The RCMP, so brilliantly lampooned in *Nation to Nation*, were simply the most visible face of a series of police forces and operations that institutionalized the harassment of gay men in Canada (Kinsman 2000). If the infamous Bathhouse raids of 1981 were so brutal as to galvanize public support for gay rights in this country—“I wish these pipes were hooked up to gas so I could annihilate you all,” notoriously raged one policeman—the Toronto Police Service’s lip-service apology for their actions in 1981 did not take place until 2016 and was immediately followed, only three months later, by a widely-criticized blanket raid on Marie Curtis Park, which saw “71 individuals cited for engaging in acts of consensual sex.” (Hooper 2018). The Bruce Macarthur murder trials, the tragic death of Tess Ritchie in Toronto’s Church and Wellesley village, and the firestorm of controversy ignited by the Black Lives Matter’s insistence that “there is no pride in policing” are just three of the most egregious contemporary examples of ongoing racist police harassment that parallel historic destruction of “cruising grounds” in High Park, Allan Gardens, or David Balfour Park, all spaces that were once as important “Places” to Toronto’s queer men as the Tuileries were, and are, in Paris.²³

Toronto's queer community needs Indigenous leadership to deconstruct a prurient, puritanical and toxic culture of placeless sexuality, and to commemorate what has been lost: Monkman's work provides this monumentalization, albeit in the virtual setting of the Instagram app, and potentially also in whichever future exhibition venue *Nation to Nation* finds itself (Clement 2018).²⁴ Indeed, Monkman's ostensibly 'degrading' and definitely pornographic, but insistently political, history painting *Nation to Nation* gives the settler-Canadian gay male community—and I use this narrowly specified position from my own subjectivity—virtual possibility to imagine a different world, one that counters what Scott Lauria Morgensen has called the “biopolitics of settler colonialism,” where Indigenous queer identities are forcibly erased by a class-conscious settler Canadian society hellbent on teleological progress (Morgensen 2011). As Morgensen has pointed out, institutionally racist bias inherent in GLBT organizing can be addressed through “neither erasing nor absorbing Native people, but by critiquing settler colonialism, and on that basis meeting Native people in accountable relationship based in anticolonial alliance politics,” thereby transcending even nationally-delimited boundaries (Morgensen 2011). In this fantastically authentic world, Indigenous leadership by Two-Spirit artists like Monkman renegotiates Canada's sexually conservative, prurient society, resulting in a re-claiming and recapitulation of sacred/sexual space as Place, including a recognition that outdoor cruising, so long as heteronormative capitalist social structures (such as compulsory monogamy) remain mainstream, is an Essential Service for the performance of “a particular kind of romantic entanglement,” that is, consensual cruising.

Notes

1. Monkman, Kent. Instagram. March 22, 2020. <https://www.instagram.com/p/B-DNREVgOIr/>.
2. The painting was released to public view on the social media platform Instagram.
3. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. 2020. “The Great Hall Commission: Kent Monkman, mistikôsiwak (Wooden Boat People)”.
4. A 2004 release, this one by a gay publication, suggests both the didactic value and the conservative nature of Canadian viewing practices: “Monkman reverses the ethnological gaze,” writes Gordon Bowness of the *Daily Xtra*, “turning white men into objects of curiosity and scrutiny,” but his erotic work would not be on show at the prestigious McMichael Canadian Art Collection in Kleinberg: it was “too realistic, too dirty” (Bowness 2004).
5. *Nation to Nation*, as of June 23, 2020, was “liked” by 13,120 users.
6. In what follows, I build on the model of “fantastical authenticity” first developed by Zoe Hurley 2019.
7. A process which itself of course is well-established in western art, famously in Watteau's *L'Enseigne de Gersaint* or Rowlandson's *The Connoisseurs*.
8. One object by the artist does show consummation of oral sex: *Bow Down to Miss Chief* (2018), copper leaf on hand carved lake-smoothed ancient Indigenous limestone,

- hand-picked by the artist as part of the *Miss Chief's Petroglyphs Porn* series, shows a similar composition, although oral penetration has already occurred.
9. And, to some extent, by its parallel, *North of 60* (1992–97), although more complex issues, including Indigenous-led policing, are more concretely, if still problematically, here represented.
 10. “MMIW” refers to “Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women,” reflecting the disproportionate number of Indigenous women in Canada and the United States who experience violence, incarceration, kidnapping, and murder. See Walker 2016.
 11. For a crucial early work on police repression of public sex, see Watney 1997, also *Dangerous Bedfellows* 1997.
 12. An acknowledgement of Monkman’s profound knowledge of influential Parisian exhibitions is also found, of course, in his monumental work *Welcome to the Studio: An Allegory for Artistic Reflection and Transformation* (2014), an Indigenized criticism of French painter Gustave Courbet’s monumental studio allegory of 1855, which the artist famously, and for art history seminally, had shown to a defiant public through an innovative, independent and much-lampooned private exhibition. For an excellent analysis of this work, see Scudeler 2015, 28–30, esp. 28.
 13. Proust’s literary characters went there, see Moroney 2005.
 14. Put these facts down in words, and they remind us of what future generations must certainly view with trauma, and terror, and grief: a man arrested for taking a self-portrait in a park at night with flowers! See Westoll 2020.
 15. There are, of course, many hundreds of more specific regional examples. Some of the most well-known include, historically, Pershing Square (Los Angeles), and now Stanley Park (Vancouver), Clapham Common or Hampstead’s Heath (London).
 16. Monkman’s *Nation to Nation* also takes note of the presence in cruising grounds of the military, of officers of the RSA itself. As noted above, soldiers were sought by noblemen in the Tuileries of eighteenth-century Paris. Mid twentieth-century American painter Paul Cadmus was continually inspired by sailors, although his homoerotic language is often couched in considerably more veiled terms: the Whitney Museum’s *Sailors and Floosies*, 1938, appropriates the famously homoerotic posture of the *Barberini Faun* to the figure of an idealized, supine, presumably unconscious drunken sailor. Cadmus is fantasizing, but it’s a fantasy grounded solidly in the reality of the time: the American navy’s association with homosexuality was firmly grounded in the public’s eye at least by the time of the scandalous Newport sex scandal of 1919, when the Army and Navy YMCA and the Newport Art Club were ‘outed’ as significant spots for sexual contact between civilian and military men. Monkman’s insistence on the subservient sexual role of an agent of the RSA carries a long pedigree of cultural history behind it, one where the glorification of masculinity promoted as *de facto* membership into the homosocial spaces of various types of police, military, or other institutionalized groupings (the jail) is accompanied by an almost inevitably queer, homoerotic or otherwise dissident expression of sexuality. These expressions have been

codified by many years of art historical representation. What's different in *Nation to Nation* is the context of Indigenous, Two-Spirit leadership.

17. In what follows in the two paragraphs below, transcribed comments on these works that were still available in April and May of 2020, but which were, for reasons outlined below, no longer made available by the artist (as of June 2020). See Appendix Material.
18. As the Instagram comments in question are no longer publicly accessible, the username of each commenter has been anonymized for the sake of maintaining users' digital privacy and respecting the right for personal information to be forgotten online.
19. Monkman, Kent. Instagram. May 18, 2020. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CAWuv6ugzVN/>.
20. If Mulvey's original postulation of the male gaze was one that directly excluded men being subjects of a normative and scopophilic process of compulsory heterosexual misogynist looking, many subsequent revisitations of her original model acknowledge that the "increased commodification and objectification" of male bodies in the media has led to an "expansion" of the male gaze, one that must acknowledge "many possible spectatorial positions," including a specifically gay-male gaze that is often deployed for commercial gain. See Brennan 2019, 130.
21. Monkman, Kent. Instagram. May 18, 2020. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CAWuv6ugzVN/>.
22. See Kinsman 2010, 102, 127, 203, 204. On the latter page Kinsman provides a well-documented map of sites of historic interest, many such forcibly abandoned, for gay male activity in Ottawa.
23. Three other, more historical examples of Canadian sexual prurience and violence against gay men include the sensationalized trial of early Toronto settler Alexander Wood, whose lands, formerly known colloquially as "Molly Wood's Bush," are now the physical location of the embattled gay village; the 22 June 1985 murder of Ken Zeller, librarian and teacher, by five youths who specifically targeted Zeller in "lover's lane" in High Park because of his sexuality, and the horrific "fruit machine" built by Frank Robert Wake, a psychology professor with Carleton University, designed in the 1960s to eliminate homosexual men ("fruits") from the state civil service and directly administered by the RCMP, one of whose senior members coined the "fruit machine" nomenclature in the first place. See Knecht 2018.
24. Clement notes: "In a study of cruising in a cemetery in London, Gandy (2012) similarly notes, "public discourse in relation to cruising activity frequently segues into a fear of crime or social disorder more generally" (2018, 732). To reframe this: fear is also about safety, where a fear of 'the other' accompanies the desire to ensure the safety of the public."

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“Flows of Desire”

“The Pleasure Principle” (2019), *Shakedown* (2017), and Pornhub’s Political/Libidinal Economy

JENNIFER MOORMAN

As a concept and a company, Pornhub may evoke a variety of associations. For most of us, thoughts of “feminist art” and “experimental documentary” would not be among the first called to mind. As a culmination of years of public relations strategizing, however, the porn tube site has indeed expanded its presence into these arenas. First, the company commissioned a feminist art show: “The Pleasure Principle,” exhibited at Maccarone gallery in East Los Angeles from September 21st through November 23rd, 2019. Then, throughout the month of March 2020, Pornhub hosted a streaming video, *Shakedown* (“Shakedown,” Pornhub, 2017, <https://www.Pornhub.com/shakedown>)—a film described by the Whitney Museum as an “intoxicating, dreamlike portrait of Los Angeles’s African-American lesbian strip club scene”—free of cost to all users (Weinraub 2020). Previously *Shakedown* had been exhibited exclusively at film festivals and on the museum circuit, including the 2017 Whitney Biennial, and since March it has been hosted by the Criterion Channel. Pornhub curiously occupied the exhibition space between.¹

As it turns out, these endeavors are commensurate with the company’s previous and ongoing corporate communication strategies, which also include philanthropic efforts, media stunts, and attempts to influence public policy. Surely these ventures into the art world emerged similarly as a result of criticism and/or perceived threats to the site or the broader adult video industry, but I will argue that the results are ambivalent—as culturally valuable as they are self-serving.² Many cultural commentators have noted that the study of pornography can generate insights about the development and adoption of home video and digital communication technologies. By analyzing the convergence of market logics, reputation management strategies, and individual corporate actors’ subjectivities that shape the political economy of this media giant from a hyper-surveilled industry, I will reveal how we might locate queer and anticapitalist possibilities in the unlikeliest of places at the intersections of sex and commerce.

Critiques or, The Problematics of Pornhub

Pornhub has been accused of many things, most notably reinforcing misogyny and racism, facilitating human trafficking, and initiating and perpetuating cycles of mimetic desire and violence. At a recent protest against the site’s 2017 pop-up shop in SoHo, for instance, Gloria Steinem claimed that “Pornhub is a hub of violence, it is a hub of danger to women,” and Sonia Ossorio, representing the

National Organization for Women, argued that “Pornhub sells the idea of sexual abuse of children, Pornhub sells racist slurs and stereotypes” (Rincón 2017). In addition to external attacks from antipornography activists, Pornhub and its tube site kin (most of which are owned by the same parent company, MindGeek), are also regularly denounced from within the industry for what has been called platformization. David B. Nieborg and Thomas Poell define the platformization of cultural production as “the penetration of economic, governmental, and infrastructural extensions of digital platforms into the web and app ecosystems, fundamentally affecting the operations of the cultural industries” (2018, 4276). They focus their argument on five platforms—Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon, and Microsoft—on which cultural commodities are increasingly dependent, but Pornhub also provides a worthwhile case study. Whereas the other platforms rely on censorship, excluding sexual content to varying degrees to manage their reputations, Pornhub must actively resist it—a worthwhile effort that destigmatizes sexual desires, behaviors, and identities, even as it benefits the brand.

As far back as 2010, three years after Pornhub had first emerged on the scene, producer LeRoy Myers told me that the industry was on the verge of crisis due to piracy and competition from free porn sites (Myers, interview with author, July 9, 2010). Prior to the tube sites’ entry into the market, pornographers had conceptualized the internet as a new distribution channel that could increase profit margins over DVD sales for industry professionals. Pornhub and similar sites like xHamster and YouPorn initially offered an alternative to viewers who didn’t want to pay for their porn: free, user-generated content, and pirated scenes ripped from DVDs. By 2012, performer/director Tasha Reign explained that MindGeek (known at the time as Manwin) had already “bought out all of the big companies in our business,” including Brazzers and Digital Playground, as well as several other tube sites (Reign, interview with author, 2012). Since then, MindGeek has developed a near-complete monopoly over the “traditional” porn industry—the collection of largely US-based production companies that create hardcore videos. This includes many small producers and a few vertically integrated studios, like Hustler and Vivid Video, and the handful of distribution companies, including Pulse and Anabolic, that dominate industry-wide DVD production. Their control over the industry has waned as online distribution renders DVDs ever more obsolete.

Reign noted that MindGeek’s business practices “[get] even sketchier. They go and they buy our testing facilities, and they’re like, you can’t work for us unless you get tested here at this testing facility.” She added that the company officially allows for testing anywhere but that, in reality they are “never gonna hire you unless you test here.” She expressed particular concern about this biopolitical control that exceeds the bounds of her paid labor and belies the site’s open-source ethos. More recently, in *The Butterfly Effect*, Jon Ronson reveals how the free, largely user-generated content available on Pornhub and other tube sites has dramatically devalued industrial porn production in general and specifically the labor of professional porn performers (2017). The user-uploaded content includes original,

amateur porn, which functions as competition for professionally produced fare, as well as pirated content stolen from professionally produced videos sold elsewhere. The latter violates Pornhub's user agreement, and the site will eventually take down any such content to comply with the Digital Millennium Copyright Act, but in order to do so, someone must first notice it and file a complaint. This can be time consuming and, for many content creators, is ultimately deemed a waste of time. Pirated or otherwise, the abundance of free pornography decreases the demand for professionally produced content. As a result, Ronson contends that industry professionals "are making a lot less money and are working much, much longer hours to make that money" (Bisley 2017). As of 2018, the trade publication *XBIZ* was reporting that content theft remained the industry's "biggest challenge," with tube sites among the worst offenders (Yagielowicz 2018).

Yet Heather Berg and Constance Penley found that, despite all of this, some performers have little concern for pirated content, because porn video sales only benefit production companies: "Were residuals and royalties standard practice, performers might make more of an effort to encourage fans to 'pay for [their] porn,' as the industry slogan goes. As it stands, it may be more efficient for performers to...focus their marketing efforts on the alternative income streams for which their porn performances serve as advertisement," such as feature dancing at strip clubs (2016, 165). In lieu of or in addition to working for porn production companies, however, many performers create bespoke videos for individual patrons and/or upload content to subscription-based sites like OnlyFans, for which tube sites remain a source of competition. Many producers as well as performers have therefore adopted an "if you can't beat them, join them" mentality and grudgingly entered into revenue-sharing agreements. Pornhub has addressed perceived disenfranchisement by encouraging performers to produce their own content and participate in the "Model Program" in any of several ways, including uploading free videos on Pornhub and earning a cut of the ad revenue that they generate; creating a subscription based Fan Club to monetize ancillary content (such as access to blog posts, personal emails, special discounts for pay-to-view videos) for 80% of the revenue; or posting their content for sale on Modelhub. For the latter option, the content producer (typically a performer) determines the cost to view the videos and keeps 65% of the sale price, relinquishing the other 35% to Pornhub (Modelhub 2019). Silvia Rodeschini describes Modelhub as providing a way to sidestep "the dense network of gatekeepers... within which performers usually negotiate their availability, their consent and their compensation" (2020, 11). Indeed, in conversations with forty industry insiders spanning the years from 2006 to 2015, I was told again and again that agents and distributors had been delimiting their creative control since the early days of the legitimate industry. While many different studios and small producers make porn DVDs, performers' rates are often determined and negotiated by agents, some of whom are incredibly predatory, and directors and producers make content for the distributor rather than for their intended audience. This mimics the Hollywood distribution model, but because porn producers are so prolific and working with

such relatively miniscule budgets, the distribution hegemony is, if anything, more all-encompassing. For instance, Diana DeVoe told me:

The distribution companies, and this is less and less as physical goods make up less and less of the market, have more to do with what's produced than the consumers do. Because...if they won't buy it, it'll never get to the store anyway. Like even with [my production company] DEF, we unfortunately don't create product for our fans. We create product for the salesman that works at our distribution company, because if he doesn't like it, he won't sell it.... So they have a lot of power over you, because those are the narrow channels in order to get things out. Which is what made it so lucrative, pre-internet. Now it's not so much that more people are getting rich; it's that everybody's fiefdom is just taking a little piece out of the establishment. But, you know, collectively there's a lot of money, but again, individually there isn't. (interview with author, October 19, 2010)

So the pre-tube site days were not necessarily less exploitative or creatively constrained, and in some ways were more so—Pornhub has not so much colonized a diversified market as tightened control by replacing an analogue distribution monopoly with a digital one. As Rodeschini notes, Modelhub eliminates the content filtration power traditionally held by distributors and offers a genuine, if partial, solution to the critique that Pornhub is devaluing performer labor, but it does so by subsuming its competition. MindGeek's market hegemony has sinister implications, allowing the company to maintain an exploitative revenue model that disproportionately harms small producers, including many that specialize in feminist and/or queer porn. For instance, most users presumably believe that, unlike subscription fees or purchase prices, all tips would go directly to the relevant model. In fact, Pornhub has followed the lead of certain actors in the gig economy in taking a cut. Whereas companies like UberEats and Grubhub have responded to public pressure and modified their policies to allow drivers to keep 100% of their tips, the exploitation of sex workers' labor—widely conceptualized as illegitimate and quasi-legal—does not inspire similar levels of mainstream outrage; as a result, Pornhub continues to quietly retain 20% of all “tips” or “tributes” that performers earn. This kind of profit extraction is hardly a case of workers seizing the means of distribution.

Furthermore, Pornhub's overwhelming market dominance means that performers have no choice but to participate, on Pornhub's terms. Many performers seem to see it as a necessary evil for any content producer seeking traffic and exposure, with the result that their consent to participate is at best coerced. For instance, Samantha Hayes (2019) notes that, like it or not, Pornhub will generate the top hits in any Google search for a performer's name. She concludes that, “As evil as tube sites are being such a toxic breeding ground for illegal content, if you do porn, you're on Pornhub. I've tested that search with several porn names, and Pornhub comes out on top. People are most likely discovering you there, and then deciding to follow you elsewhere. Before Modelhub, they'd have to go to your social media and browse your feed to see if you sell clips. Now, it's right there on the page with a familiar logo they know and love. The fewer clicks you need to

redirect potential paying fans to payment options, the better. The more places they're redirected, the more time they have to decide maybe they don't want to buy." So Pornhub provides the solution to the problem that it itself creates—it offers a fairly simple way for performers to generate revenue, yet they remain powerless to prevent users from illegally re-uploading their content. Like Amazon sellers, content producers have to make a deal with the corporate devil in order to survive the company's market dominance.

Art/Porn: Pornhub's Public Relations Strategies

It is out of these contexts that Pornhub's public outreach and philanthropic strategies have emerged. Alongside similar outreach efforts, the funding of "The Pleasure Principle" and the streaming of *Shakedown* appear as attempts to stave off the kinds of critiques outlined above, and to court legitimacy in ways analogous to Playboy's efforts in the 1960s. Via their charitable imprint, "Pornhub Cares," they have developed scholarships for women in tech, and created charitable campaigns supporting PETA, organizations supporting survivors of domestic violence, and various environmental initiatives. Many of these campaigns do not involve partnerships with specific organizations, and the charitable commitment remains vague. For "Save the Boobs," for instance, Pornhub committed to "donating 1 cent for every 30 videos viewed from our Big Tits and Small Tits categories ...to a breast cancer research charity ("Save the Boobs," Pornhub Cares, 2020, <https://www.Pornhub.com/cares/save-the-boobs>). The benefits of directing traffic to a site that derives most of its revenue from advertising are self-evident. But despite hosting these campaigns throughout the month of October for several years running, the site never specified which charities were benefiting from the stunt. In March 2020, Pornhub began offering free premiere access to European users under lockdown orders due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Company Vice President Corey Price framed this offer in a press release as service toward the common good: "With nearly one billion people in lockdown across the world because of the coronavirus pandemic, it's important that we lend a hand and provide them with an enjoyable way to pass the time" (Joshi 2020). This magnanimous gesture certainly seemed to pay off; a collection of "Coronavirus Insights" posted on Pornhub's Insights blog in late March (Pornhub 2020) reveals skyrocketing rates of traffic to the site after countries went on lockdown, which to their minds "clearly illustrate that people all over Europe were happy to have distractions while quarantined at home" (Joshi 2020).

All of these efforts are designed to generate publicity, legitimize pornography in general and Pornhub in particular, counteract or deflect from critiques leveled from within the industry, and in some cases to defend against critiques of porn/Pornhub as misogynist, racist, and exploitative. As Susanna Paasonen points out, "These gestures, like the cultural visibility and popularity of aggregator sites internationally, run parallel and conflict with anti-pornography agendas that have notable visibility in the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia and which have contributed to the framing of pornography as a public health risk, or crisis, necessitating stricter online policy, filtering and regulation" (2019, 169). Some of

these efforts directly address legal constraints by attempting to influence or work around antiporn public policy. In 2016, for instance, Pornhub offered Russian residents a free trial and discounted subsequent rate for premium subscriptions as a way to sidestep the country's ban on access to the site, which they were able to accomplish because the prohibition against Pornhub.com apparently did not apply to PornhubPremium.com (Pornhub 2020). At the same time, these public relations endeavors create buzz, and therefore revenue for MindGeek, as stories about the stunts circulate via news outlets and social media—notably places that otherwise exclude pornographic content. While Pornhub cannot directly advertise on Facebook, for instance, they can benefit from a kind of viral advertising when news items about their stunts circulate there. In this way, the charity campaigns “afford virtually free publicity while helping to frame the company as committed to making the world a better place. This further involves mainstreaming of Pornhub as a lifestyle and entertainment brand, and even a household name of sorts” (Paasonen 2019, 174).

Rodeschini notes that, “Pornhub is building a profile revolving around technical innovation, and its capacity to exploit digital distribution as a profit source guarantees it a market position that allows it to rewrite the rules of the game and to launch a campaign of corporate communications with new narratives that attempt to recode the social meaning of pornography consumption” (2020, 3). She argues that one of MindGeek's primary strategies is to deflect critique by disavowing its associations with pornography. In corporate communications, for instance, Pornhub founder and former CEO Fabian Thylmann³ positioned himself as “a tech geek who believed he had found a new sector where the return on capital had the potential to be particularly high” (3). In order to recruit computer engineers, data analysts, and other tech industry experts, he intentionally framed the work environment as “unrelated to the product distributed” and essentially identical to those available elsewhere in the digital sector: “unless you stumble onto the wrong floor, you wouldn't guess what they do” (Rodeschini 2020, 4). In this way, to maintain their social capital untainted by obscenity, the tech professionals who create and maintain the site architecture are distinguished from those who create the pornographic videos—they are, in other words, alienated from the means of porn production. Rodeschini outlines several other categories in the taxonomy of MindGeek's corporate communications. The most relevant for situating “The Pleasure Principle” and *Shakedown* would be what she describes as the “explicit and cool,” or, strategies for connecting the brand “to other products that are already considered cool in spite of, or because, of their explicit content”—in these cases, forging associations between Pornhub and queer/feminist art (5). These ventures into “legitimate” cultural arenas can be seen as attempts by Pornhub to clean up its image by reconceptualizing or rebranding pornography, positioning it on a spectrum of sexually provocative art forms rather than entirely disavowing it.

Regardless of what motivates their existence, I would argue that several of these corporate strategies have significant cultural value. In particular, the sexual health and education portions of the site provide information that, especially in

a country like the United States (in which twenty-six states currently mandate abstinence-only sex education in secondary schools and others neglect to mandate any sex education whatsoever), is simply not readily encountered elsewhere for many users. Pornhub's Sexual Wellness Center includes a range of informative videos and articles, in which licensed sex therapists and sexologists cover such topics as sexual communication and consent, basic sexual anatomy, alternatives to penetrative sex, STIs and reproductive health, navigating interpersonal relationships, and LGBTQIA+ identities (Pornhub, <https://www.pornhub.com/sex/>). The quality of these pieces varies widely, but useful information is not limited to the Sexual Wellness portal; Modelhub, for instance, includes a blog that has covered topics like the International Transgender Day of Visibility (2020).

Pornhub's sponsorship of "The Pleasure Principle" and distribution of *Shakedown*, along with current and future endeavors such as commissioning artists and experimental filmmakers to create provocative but non-pornographic work, are particularly substantive and worthwhile ventures that have brought visibility to marginalized artists, ideas, and communities, and challenged problematic binaries between art and porn, adult film and documentary film.⁴ Efforts like these do not, on balance, outweigh the site's problems, including its exploitative business model and increasingly monopolistic control over the adult video industry. I argue, however, that in combination with the site's productive potentialities, including the queer and sex positive aspects of its current web architecture, Pornhub's ventures into cultural production should not be dismissed.

Case Studies—Negotiating Contested Spaces On- and Offline

In a *Bloomberg* article featured in the "Pleasure Principle" exhibition press kit, James Tarmy notes, "The calculus behind a streaming-porn site sponsoring an exhibition of envelope-pushing, sexualized art is fairly straightforward. From a gallery's end though, the exercise could be fraught: Consensual sex work and pornography, by definition, raise complex questions of misogyny and exploitation" (2019). The press release for the show deftly sidesteps these questions by positioning pornography as itself a subset of sex-radical art, beginning with an epigraph from Juana María Rodríguez's *Sexual Futures, Queer Gestures, and Other Latina Longings*: "Most definitions of pornography have less to do with specific sexual acts and more to do with what pornography is generally defined against: art" (2019). This quotation is a provocation, to which the rest of the press release responds. Although it perfectly crystallizes the exhibition's mission, this invocation of a queer Latina theorist's cultural authority is questionable considering it comes from a gallery located in Boyle Heights. This historically working-class Latinx neighborhood has been ground zero for battles against gentrification in East Los Angeles in recent years. Art galleries have been a particular target for protestors' ire, as encapsulated in slogans like, "We don't need galleries, we need higher salaries!" (Delgadillo 2017). Maccarone was specifically singled out, having "received the most criticism from locals because of comments the proprietor made to the *New York Times*. The neighborhood 'still has a dangerous quality,' Michele Maccarone told the *Times*" (2016).

When I asked how she had responded to the protests, Maccarone told me that she ultimately chose not to engage for several reasons, describing the situation as a “damned if you do, damned if you don’t” quandary (interview with author, November 11, 2020). Although she sympathizes with the activists, Maccarone believes that she was the wrong target (2020). Indeed, the only acceptable response for the “Defend Boyle Heights” movement would be, in one activist’s words, “for all art galleries in Boyle Heights to leave immediately and for the community to decide what takes their place” (Nazarian 2017). While affordably housing the people of a community should take precedence over commercial land-use, there is something to be said for Maccarone’s suggestion that the landlords (and, I might add, local government officials) rather than the gallery owners should be the primary target of anti-gentrification activism. This may be a convenient deflection, but there is also validity to the claim that, in practice, the landlords would not simply donate the buildings to the community if the current residents were to capitulate to the protests and move their galleries elsewhere. There is an interesting parallel here to Pornhub’s colonization of the porn industry, positioning itself as open-source while extracting profits from every angle. Just as MindGeek controls the business model, taking power and self-determinacy away from laborers while Pornhub offers free porn to users, it is the landlords that buy up property that might otherwise be controlled by the community so that galleries can offer free art-viewing in lieu of housing. And it is capitalism that motivates and facilitates monopolistic business practices and their effects, including the ever-escalating rents that price artists and galleries out of other neighborhoods.⁵ In the end, both situations can be true: Maccarone Gallery and Pornhub are complicit in perpetuating inequalities, but ultimately they are symptomatic—individual actors with varying levels of power, whose choices are constrained to varying degrees by many of the same systemic forces that contribute to the exploitation of laborers and community members.

Meanwhile, “The Pleasure Principle” has received additional criticism for its overwhelmingly white lineup. The representation of artists of colour was limited to Nao Bustamente’s 1992 performance piece *Rosa Does Joan*, Renee Cox’s *Garter Belt* (2001), and several works by Narcissister, including the 2019 installation *The Face (Performing male facial features)*. All of the artists were born and raised in the US or Western Europe, but several are marginalized in other ways—for instance, of Jewish heritage and/or LGBTQIA+. When I asked Maccarone about the racial homogeneity of the lineup, she told me that the original list of artists that she had approached was considerably more diverse, but that in the end she had to exhibit work from the artists who agreed to participate (2020). Although she couldn’t speculate about most artists’ reasons for declining participation, she believes it is possible that the Pornhub sponsorship may have played a role. It is also possible that some artists of colour would intentionally avoid working with the gallery as a result of the anti-gentrification protests. In the end, while a more intersectional intervention could have been more valuable still, the exhibition nonetheless offers a productive contribution to conversations about gender, sexuality, and bodily autonomy.

The show's press release frames it as providing a platform for renegade women artists to push the proverbial envelope:

'The Pleasure Principle' highlights a pan-generational group of artists who challenge the censorship of sexual imagery. The show focuses on visionaries who have taken a stand against respectability politics, pushing the limits of imagery one might expect to find in an art gallery. The male gaze has always dominated popular erotica, but these artists disrupt this long and troubled history by carving out their own erotic space.... Collectively, the featured works divorce the erotic body from its objecthood as a pure means for sexual arousal and gratification. The impetus of 'The Pleasure Principle' is to disrupt the historical status of the carnal form as passive object of pleasure. The exhibition space is a platform for unfettered artistic expression, similar to the zone Pornhub has created for uninhibited sexual content on the Internet. Maccarone appreciates Pornhub's initiative to commission a curatorial dialogue between pornography and art, a conversation not commonly acknowledged in the current cultural climate. It is an innovation for a porn-tech superpower trafficking in the glut of online visual content to facilitate an aesthetic IRL experience. (Artfacts 2019)

This framing is shrewd and insightful in its entirety, but I would like to hone in on this phrase: "the zone Pornhub has created for uninhibited sexual content on the Internet." I had suspected that the copy that follows was added at Pornhub's request, but Maccarone suggested that an employee, Lukas Hall, had written the copy in collaboration with other members of the gallery team, and that "Pornhub was not involved" (email correspondence with author, November 4, 2020). While the framing in the press release may seem calculated to legitimize Pornhub, Maccarone believes that individual corporate actors were genuinely invested in the project for personal reasons. She told me that her contact at Pornhub, Alexzandra Kekesi, had "studied women's studies in college," and that Kekesi's role in commissioning "The Pleasure Principle" came "from a place of incredible sincerity" (interview with author, November 11, 2020). She believes the exhibition was a pet project for Kekesi, borne of a genuine interest in feminist art, rather than a crass corporate PR strategy. Of course, these motivations are not mutually exclusive. Despite its praise for Pornhub's "innovation" in facilitating "an aesthetic IRL experience," the closing sentence of the press release suggests ambivalence toward "a porn-tech superpower trafficking in the glut of online visual content." On the one hand, it certainly serves Pornhub's interests to challenge porn's distinction from and inferiority to "legitimate" art. The site is positioned alongside—indeed equated with—sex radicals "who have taken a stand against respectability politics." In calling out the male gaze, the description also anticipates and circumvents antiporn feminist critiques of Pornhub and pornography more broadly. And yet, a closer examination reveals a concession to those same critiques, which amounts to a subtle dig at the show's primary sponsor: "the featured works divorce the erotic body from its objecthood as a pure means for sexual arousal and gratification." This implies that the simple act of



recontextualizing sexual imagery may be sufficient to avoid the more exploitative tendencies of much hardcore pornography.

A perusal of the exhibited works, however, reveals far more complexity. Alongside such art heavyweights as Louise Bourgeois and Cameron, filmmakers like Doris Wishman, and cultural icons like Annie Sprinkle (whose work has been bridging the supposed gap between art and porn since the 1980s), for instance, Ann Hirsch’s work emerges as particularly productive for thinking about the interventions accomplished by the show. In *Cuts* (2017), a seven-channel video installation, Hirsch repurposed clips found on Pornhub by adding incongruous voiceover narration. Each channel features a compilation of brief, thematically linked clips. In “Lily White (For Women),” for instance, she begins by drily reciting scientific facts about the colour white—“an achromatic color, a color without hue, light with a spectral composition that stimulates all three types of the color-sensitive cone cells of the human eye”—while a nude, blonde, white woman sits in an all-white room at a white vanity table and contemplates putting on a sheer pink (nearly white) teddy. The commentary continues, accompanying a series of clips featuring notably white *mise-en-scène*, almost exclusively white performers, and the unmistakable aesthetics of “porn for women”: soft focus, high production values, “romantic” elements such as gentle caressing and passionate kissing. Some clips feature a cis man with a cis woman; others feature two cis women; others, like the woman sitting at the vanity, are solo scenes. The critique becomes increasingly overt, as we hear that white represents “innocence and is the symbolic opposite of black.” Immediately thereafter, we see the first nonwhite performer—a Black man with a white woman. Significantly, this is also the

Figure 1.

Still from “Lily White (For Women)” (2019), courtesy of Ann Hirsch and Maccarone Gallery.

moment when the voiceover reveals that surveys conducted in the United States show that “white is the color most often associated with perfection, the good, honesty, cleanliness, beginning, the new, neutrality, and exactitude.”

In this way, Hirsch’s ironic commentary denaturalizes the symbolic order underlying white supremacy and calls attention to some of the ways that it operates within the relatively benign subgenre of “porn for women.” As Mireille Miller-Young points out, in addition to relying on racist tropes in its representational repertoire, Black labour is devalued in countless ways within the porn industry (2014). Although these practices may change in response to the proliferation of Black Lives Matter protests (which, though focused on police violence, also called out racism and white supremacy in various industries) and the recently formed Black, Indigenous, and People of Color Adult Industry Collective (BIPOC-AIC), it has been standard practice for Black women performers to earn lower rates than their white (and typically also Asian and Latina) counterparts, and conversely, for white women to charge higher rates to appear in scenes with Black men versus white men.⁶ Feminist porn, as a subgenre and mode of production, frequently involves intentionally egalitarian labor practices as a corrective to industry conventions, but “porn for women” is a much broader category that functions first and foremost as a marketing tool on sites like Pornhub. Whereas feminist pornographer Tristan Taormino describes her porn as “fair trade,” for instance, and Candida Royalle defined her “porn with a female sensibility” as foregrounding women’s pleasure, Pornhub’s “porn for women” and “female friendly” tags simply encompass videos that woman-identified users watch (Tristan Taormino, phone interview with the author, August 14, 2011; Candida Royalle, phone interview with the author, June 7, 2006). The “porn for women” landing page includes a heading with the following description: “Porn for women takes many forms, and there’s no single genre that fully defines ‘porn for her.’ That’s why we’ve compiled all of the porn videos that are most-watched and most-favorited by real women. Female-friendly porn isn’t one-size-fits-all—here, you’ll find everything from story-driven, passionate softcore porn to hardcore gangbangs. The one thing they all have in common? Real women actually prefer them.”⁷ The category therefore includes a similar mixture of videos as can be found anywhere else on the site. Its description relies on a plethora of questionable a priori assumptions; data mining reveals that users who were determined to be women chose to watch the videos—the extent to which women users actually enjoyed them is much more difficult for an algorithm to determine. What “porn for women” does provide is a veneer of safety and respectability. In practice, as the site copy acknowledges, Pornhub’s conception of the genre category is so broad and vaguely defined as to be essentially meaningless. By calling out the meaninglessness of “porn for women,” Hirsch’s installation recalls other ways that experimental filmmakers and video artists have engaged with the conventions, rhetoric, and visual iconography of porn to critique how the genre can reinforce heteropatriarchal cultural norms.⁸

Most of the artworks, however, did not engage the racialized dimensions of sex, desire, or pornography. The central focus of the show was explorations of (white) women’s sexuality. In conversation, Michele Maccarone situated porn

within a history of “sexy imagery” that includes “half naked women” in films from the silent era and paintings of “a sexy Madonna with her tit out,” which she sees as “iconography as an excuse to make a sexy picture,” and insisted that, in general, “the impetus for art is sex” (interview with author, November 9, 2019). She therefore finds it absurd that people are “looking down on the medium” of porn and laments that the art world continues to be constrained by the larger cultural “sense of heterosexuality and family” (2019). The show was designed to counteract these hegemonic ideologies, by centering women’s subjectivity, incorporating queer and polymorphously perverse imagery, and engaging the provocations of overtly sexual artwork.

When I asked if she had personally experienced any censorship, she said she had not per se. For this show, for instance, she hadn’t encountered direct censorship but did confront what she called “obstacles.” She said, “We approached a lot of artists. Obviously, there are a ton of artists that are appropriate for this exhibition, and we got a lot of ‘No’s—because of the sponsorship, because of Pornhub” (2019). When I asked whether the artists who turned down participation in the show did so because they didn’t want to be associated with porn in general, or with a corporate site like Pornhub in particular, she speculated that, “I think it was a little bit of both, but I don’t think it was necessarily the corporate-ness of it; I think it was literally the porn-ness of it” (2019). She revealed, however, that for one prominent artist (whose name she asked be kept off the record), “it was specifically Pornhub.” Maccarone admitted, “I kind of wore her down at a certain point. I mean she’s in the show. But I didn’t get the work from her; I borrowed it from her gallery. And so she felt like there was that kind of safe distance” (2019). This suggests that optics, rather than ethics, may have been underlying this particular artist’s hesitation. Maccarone views these concerns as symptomatic of larger cultural shifts. In fine art circles, she explained, “people don’t buy sexually explicit work these days. I think it was different at some other point in history, but these days I feel like people are buying safe work that’s more commodifiable, that will increase in value.... The art world is very economically motivated and has very recently become incredibly corporatized” (2019). In describing a distinction between art and porn, she arrives back at an overlap—as they grow ever more accessible through the vicissitudes of the web, both cultural forms become increasingly commodified, corporatized, and consolidated.

“The Pleasure Principle,” then, is designed to make porous the boundaries between these spaces. In a write-up of the show for *Cultured* magazine, Dean Kissick argues that, “As hardcore pornography moves closer and closer to the mainstream, art might perhaps give it some gravitas and context. But the art world has much to gain and to learn from pornography also” (2019). He suggests that, for instance, “Artists might also look to pornography to take the mood of the time.” And yet, echoing analyses of the porn industrial complex’s intersections with big data, he cautions that, “We might also wonder to what extent our desires are our own, now that we’re tied up in these huge, complicated desiring machines that pull us in every direction and encourage us to make ourselves into pictures and objects for the consumption of others.” This is yet another way in which porn

cannot be meaningfully distinguished from the art world, which, as Maccarone pointed out, is increasingly “economically motivated” (interview with author, November 9, 2019). Under capitalism and in the information age, greater access to art and porn alike means that, more and more, the consumers become the commodities. Earlier in this text, I referred to the notable affinities between the marketplaces of tube sites and art galleries. The press release for “The Pleasure Principle” emphasizes the commercial nature of the exhibition, in which most of the artworks were for sale. Much like Pornhub, of course, galleries subsidize free content for most viewers by advertising to potential buyers—as with the free thumbnail videos enticing Pornhub users to click through to premium content, the average gallery visitor can take advantage of what can be viewed for free because others will be willing to “pay to play.”

If “The Pleasure Principle” draws connections between the artistic and pornographic realms of commerce by creating an “IRL viewing experience” sponsored by a digital porn conglomerate, *Shakedown* creates continuity between different but interrelated kinds of sexual labor, bringing the offline niche community of the Black lesbian strip club into Pornhub’s online megalopolis. A single location, the greater Los Angeles area, unites the gallery, *Shakedown* (both club and film), and the porn industry proper. Their disparate relationships to urban space illuminate hierarchies of power. *Shakedown* depicts a series of moments from the eponymous weekly party, initially hosted at the Horizon nightclub in Los Angeles, featuring queer Black women performing exotic dancing for an audience of primarily queer Black women. No mere interloper, Weinraub was herself a part of the scene. Like Michele Maccarone, club promoter Ronnie Ron rented the space for *Shakedown*. A key difference, however, is that *Shakedown* was created by a member of the community that it was also designed to serve.

Without Weinraub’s cinematic archiving, the now-defunct *Shakedown* parties might have been lost to history. Having operated underground in the pre-digital era, the party’s marketing efforts, such as flyers and posters, have left no easily accessible traces online. *Shakedown* reveals how underground parties catering to a queer Black clientele can—like the balls featured in *Paris Is Burning* (1990)—provide a space for minority subjects’ community, connection, and joy, and a respite from what José Esteban Muñoz has described as “the phobic majoritarian public sphere” (1999, 4).⁹ On one level, then, the film is incredibly valuable as a document of a particular community occupying a particular time and place, but it is equally productive as an experiment. Loosely organized around the conceptual categories of “Money,” “Love,” and “Power,” the film employs an innovative but appropriately lo-fi aesthetic to explore what is at stake for the women of *Shakedown*. The theoretical framework evokes adult filmmaker Shine Louise Houston’s contention that pornography is “a place where money, sex, media, and ethics converge” (qtd. in Rich 2001). The convergence of money, love, and power is briefly glorious for the dancers featured in the film, but ultimately their power is revoked by hegemonic white heteropatriarchy, embodied in the film by several police officers who raid the club. Arguably it is the confluence of

money and sex—in the context of heteronormative expectations that sex should accompany monogamous romantic love—that makes pornography (and sex work more broadly) so disturbing to its opponents. Certainly, capitalism provides the impetus for exploitative labour practices across the board, but in resisting stigma, activists remind us that sex work is indeed work, and should be treated as such: most of us sell our bodies, one way or another, but only sexual labour is singled out as always automatically exploitative. The refusal to engage with the specifics of the work is precisely what enables exploitation to persist and even thrive. As Melissa Gira Grant writes, “An image of a woman in porn can be seen to stand in for ‘all women’, whereas an actual woman performing in porn is understood as essentially other. So ‘defending women from images of women in porn’ is a project that’s understood (by some feminists) as a broader political project, whereas the labor rights of women who perform in porn are considered marginal” (2014, 62).

As “the first-ever non-adult film” to be screened on Pornhub, *Shakedown* resists this tendency through its assemblage of moments from the dancers’ daily lives. Although it is in no way didactic, the film serves a pointedly pedagogical function simply by spotlighting a community and a culture with which most people—and most Pornhub users—are unfamiliar. Like the gallery exhibit, though less directly, *Shakedown* envisions art as a tool for achieving and enacting freedom of sexual expression. By “mapping out economies of pleasure rarely seen onscreen,” director Leilah Weinraub centers Black lesbian desire in a decidedly non-pornographic manner (“Shakedown,” Events, The Whitney Museum, 2017, <https://whitney.org/Events/LeilahWeinraub>). Although *Shakedown*’s depiction of sex workers could be seen as porn-adjacent, the film’s political and aesthetic goals are largely antithetical to Pornhub’s top-down corporate business model. The film does include nudity, grinding, and some overtly sexual behavior, but in service of envisioning the strip club as a space of sexual liberation and grassroots community building as well as commerce. Over the course of its seventy-one minutes, the viewer is introduced to a diverse cast of characters and granted access to what is normally a cautiously guarded space, yet the film resists easy understanding. Weinraub incorporates older archival footage from another LA club—Jewel’s Catch One—alongside footage that she shot inside Horizon Night Club and interviews conducted in dancers’ homes at indeterminate times. Some interviews seem to have been conducted during the club’s heyday; others clearly after the fact. Eschewing mainstream documentary conventions, names or other identifying information never accompany the images of the interview subjects. The resulting sense of disorientation deflects and complicates what Mark E. Reid describes in a different context as “the hegemony of an erotic colonialist and heterosexist gaze upon the black body” (1997, 79). Instead, we experience scattered glimpses of life at *Shakedown*—a queer, messy, empathetic gaze.

Viewing *Shakedown* more than a decade after filming was completed, I was struck by how rare images of working class Black lesbian communities continue to be. In an early scene, dancer I-Dallas tells the straight men in the crowd to back up: “If you straight, you don’t need to be at the front!” This centering of queer subjectivity and community is central to the film’s mission, along with challenging

the idea that strip clubs are inherently immoral and merely transactional spaces. We learn that *Shakedown* provided a supportive environment for dancers and patrons alike. At one point, for instance, two patrons wait outside the club as one explains its significance: “It’s not that many clubs where you can just go and be yourself and that’s in the hood. It isn’t Hollywood or Santa Monica. It’s like, you need somewhere that’s in the hood.” The club’s locality is what makes it simultaneously so valuable and so vulnerable to surveillance from the carceral state. Near the end of the film, we learn that a final police raid due to insufficient permitting has precipitated the dissolution of *Shakedown*. The spectacle of white male cops arresting queer Black women—invading this space created by and for them—evokes the twin spectres of white supremacy and heteropatriarchy. This begs the question of how these ideas circulate in a space like Pornhub: if recontextualizing pornography in an art gallery can open productive conversations, what happens when the situation is reversed and a film from the museum circuit is invited into the porn site?

Distributors are the gatekeepers of media, allowing potential profits to determine which films can be widely accessed. Weinraub is using one such powerful channel in order to reach a new market for her film. And why shouldn’t she? Moderation standards would exclude the film from many more “legitimate” streaming services—platforms like YouTube, Netflix, and iTunes—with policy clauses prohibiting the hosting of “objectionable content,” including sexually explicit material.¹⁰ I would argue that the film shares certain preoccupations and investments with pornography—overlaps that enable it to expand the horizons of the average porn viewer. Whereas respectability politics are mutually reinforcing of sex negativity, this film’s overt sexuality is central to its theoretical force. Pat Califia argues that, “a desire that cannot be named or described”—or, I would add, depicted—“is a desire that cannot be valued, acted upon, or used as the basis for an identity,” acknowledging the political urgency of public sex and sexuality (1994, xxi). In this context, *Shakedown*, its distribution via Pornhub, and even Pornhub more broadly are all sites of profound political potential. In a review for the film, Whitney Strub argues that its distribution via Pornhub provides “a productive genealogical remapping. It’s not pornographic, not even close; Weinraub’s interests are in people, labor, and the tension and release of sexual commodification beyond the traditional male gaze, not stripping itself per se (though neither does she shy away from covering some unflinchingly raunchy acts in graphic detail)” (2020). In considering how Pornhub’s site architecture shapes the viewing experience, he argues persuasively that the film evokes classic gay porn by the likes of Fred Halsted and various queer sex films that evince a strong sense of place, ultimately concluding that, “running [*Shakedown*] through the lens of a porn tube site helps resituate it into a broader cinematic, cultural, and sexual tradition of queer communities forming expansive erotic imaginaries in tightly constrained material conditions, a testament to the power and resilience of queer desire” (2020). Historically, gay and lesbian porn has been overtly politicized in a way that straight porn never has; because LGBTQIA+ bodies and sex acts have been subject to the biopolitical control of legal regulation and censorship in a way

that straight, gender-conforming bodies and heteronormative sex acts have not, showing queer sex on screen was from the beginning a radical act. *Shakedown*'s association with pornography, then, emphasizes rather than undermines its sex radicality.

In the last decade, scholarship focusing on queer and feminist porn as sites for community building has proliferated, but even otherwise mainstream sites like Pornhub can provide such spaces. This can result in either the centering or mere co-optation of marginalized voices or, perhaps most often, a combination of the two. Weinraub attempted to skew this collaboration toward the latter, by contextualizing the film in several ways. *Shakedown* was hosted separately from actual porn videos on its own page, designed specifically for the film with Weinraub's input. The description reads: "a time based work of art by Leilah Weinraub that depicts a real eutopic lesbian strip club in Los Angeles. Black-owned and operated, by women" (2020). This framing differs dramatically from the typical descriptions of Pornhub videos through its emphasis on "art" and concepts such as "time based" and "eutopic" as well as its reference to Black business ownership. As such, in combination with its segregation from the rest of Pornhub, it functions as both a filter and a sketchy road map for potential viewers. During the month that *Shakedown* was streaming on the site, Weinraub and several dancers featured in the film regularly signed in to participate in live chats, which provided additional context for the film. The chat remains available as of this writing, in November 2020, with users occasionally adding comments, for instance, encouraging others to find the film elsewhere or asking if and when the film will be available on DVD.

A perusal of the chat reveals that, for many people, this particular screening did seem to facilitate a meaningful form of connection and community building. Comments from users included, for instance, "just wanted to say never felt so seen" (guest_Colt March 19, 2020), "what a vision to see an underground architectural hole become a space where black women seek pleasure with each other" (guest_Madelyn March 26, 2020), and "So glad to finally see this documentary! This film is so important because there is not enough documentation of people like us – Black, queer, sex workers/performers & it felt very honest and was so empowering to see!" (beyonddeep March 9, 2020). Several users explicitly thanked Weinraub for making the film, and others struck up a conversation about similar clubs around the country after user Naptimehacker offered: "Nice to see this as a counterpoint to the clubs in Atl" (March 16, 2020). On several different days, users attempted to find community: "where my studs at" (guest_Howard, March 16, 2020) and "who here is an actual lesbian tho" (guest_Holden, March 9, 2020). Remarks like this confirm the importance of making the film more accessible to people who, for any number of reasons, lack the opportunity or the interest to attend a screening on the arthouse circuit.

This is not to suggest that the chat provided an entirely positive experience; the system was prone to glitches and susceptible to hostile attacks. Users did not have to register or login to Pornhub to participate in the chat. Although individual users could opt to modify their username if they so chose, all were initially



assigned a randomly generated username on the model “guest_Name”. That anonymity arguably allows for more inclusiveness but also fails to provide any sort of protections or accountability. Without any identity verification, Pornhub is unable to block or ban abusive users—a situation that leaves bigots feeling empowered to invade live chat spaces. This situation mirrors complaints from antiporn activists that the site does not adequately filter out content featuring minors, non-consensual sex acts, overt racism, and other offensive, unethical, or even illegal behavior. More benignly, users frequently complained that they were being blocked from typing certain phrases or words. Weinraub expressed similar frustrations: “yea its blocking me too...i cant really type anything” (March 16, 2020). A few days later, Weinraub wrote, “please come chat on Saturday ... should be fixed by then,” but the problem was never resolved (March 19, 2020). In her final appearance in the chat, Egypt complains, “For some reason I am not able to say what I want without this board saying I am cursing” (March 29, 2020). Several actual curse words, however—including racial slurs—did make it through the chat filters. Whether it was the result of Pornhub’s lack of care or intentionally placing constraints on Weinraub’s control over the distribution process, these oversights severely limited the functionality of the chat, resulting in merely the illusion of the free exchange of ideas, much as some would argue that the entire site presents the illusion of democratic porn production and distribution. Maccarone claims that she enjoyed complete creative control over “The Pleasure Principle” exhibition and its marketing, and, based on the description of *Shakedown* featured on its landing page (see figure 2), Weinraub was likely free to frame the film however she chose. Pornhub’s posturing as a neutral intermediary is neither accidental nor benevolent, but rather constitutive of its branding as an open-source haven from the heavily moderated environments of other streaming video and social media platforms. The site has the capability to enforce communication standards—for instance banning the use of racial slurs—but instead Pornhub washes its hands of responsibility, leaving the burden of this labour to the artist and users.

Figure 2.
Shakedown landing page (Pornhub).

Regardless, the chat became, however narrowly and briefly, a space for connection and community building. As user *sun_water_love* put it, “This film/art/community brought us all here, to appreciate and share with and hear from you all” (March 29, 2020). Weinraub had specifically insisted on incorporating the chat mechanism “as a way to simulate the sort of community one might find in a theater” (Ryzik 2020). It also enabled the text to expand beyond its discrete borders, in ways lightly reminiscent of Third Cinema screenings designed to reconceptualize the cinema as a two-way medium created in conversation with audiences.¹¹ When user One asked if there are “any other projects or films on this subject,” for instance, Weinraub promised to “make a list and put it on the films website” and added a few titles in the chat: “stud live, pariah, rize, paris is burning ... man made, chocolate babies, young soul rebels.” Through this expansion of the film’s pedagogical function, Weinraub positioned *Shakedown* within a larger tradition of queer Black cinema (March 23, 2020). Some meaningful conversation was facilitated, as when user Max chimed in to say, “I’m a man, I hope that’s OK.” Egypt responded that, “everyone’ welcome here, love,” but shortly thereafter Weinraub replied, “i prefer for cis men not to be here, egypt may have her own opinion” and a brief debate ensued, with Weinraub implicitly deferring to Egypt by not ultimately insisting that the cis men leave (March 23, 2020). The conversation picked up threads from the film about whom such spaces, and such art, is for. Weinraub’s response echoes I-Dallas’ insistence (documented in *Shakedown*) that straight men move to the back of the club. The disagreement over this point between Egypt and Weinraub is an additional reminder that Black lesbians are not homogenous, and that contradictions and discontinuities should be engaged rather than elided. This in turn reinforces the need for many more depictions, so that we might begin to scratch the surface of the complexities of this community and others like it. This is, of course, the corollary to the contention that any given film is just an advertisement for other films (and ancillary products); every worthwhile depiction of an underrepresented group lays the foundation for more.¹² Weinraub shared with Melena Ryzik of *The New York Times* “her theory of utopias: ‘These little bubbles have to end, for them to kind of pollinate a bigger culture,’ she said. ‘It feels sad, but it bursts at some point’” (2020). In light of this idea, we might read the poignant ending of *Shakedown* (and of *Shakedown the weekly party*) as planting a seed, which might be cultivated and hybridized by viewers, beginning with conversations generated in the live chats hosted by Pornhub.

Meanwhile, a perusal of the chat suggests that Weinraub avoided answering any questions about her motivations in collaborating with the site that was hosting the live chat. Like some of the artists who opted to participate in “The Pleasure Principle” and many of the porn professionals who choose to join Modelhub, Weinraub perhaps envisions Pornhub as a necessary evil.¹³ When asked in an interview for *Vanity Fair* why she agreed to let Pornhub stream the film, Weinraub notes that she had experienced difficulty in funding the project, and particularly in finding distribution beyond the museum and festival circuits: “Where is the machine that helps me get from finishing the film to showing it to

people?” (Collins 2020) Pornhub was a natural choice; this was not Weinraub’s first time collaborating with the site. In 2016, in her capacity as CEO of clothing brand Hood by Air, she partnered with Pornhub for a New York Fashion Week runway show.¹⁴ In a *New Yorker* profile, Cassie de la Costa reveals that there may be philosophical reasons as well. Weinraub had been contemplating,

the question of labor as it relates to privacy, of how one can have a space to create, experiment, and explore without the burden of working just to live.... Privacy is currency, and the way that it’s often discussed—in relationship to technology or as a way for upper-class white women to write novels—ignores the way it has operated in the United States: as an engine of well-being in a capitalist society, and one that has been systematically denied to black people from the moment that white people arrived on the coast of Ghana to begin shipping slaves west. (2018)

Certainly, access to privacy, leisure, and “a room of one’s own” removed from spaces of commerce and capital is vital. In order to thrive, communities must be free of surveillance, yet nor should they be relegated to the shadows. Making the personal political, the private public, is equally important. Particularly in relation to sexuality, marginalized groups are routinely excluded from the public sphere, and that exclusion is both a primary cause and a notable effect of sex negativity. In that context, pornography emerges as a productive site for marginalized bodies and identities.

Conclusion—Decoding Desires

Pornhub’s political economy remains a fraught phenomenon. The site’s parent company, MindGeek, has strong-armed its way into a synergistic monopoly that combines many of the worst capitalist excesses of the porn and tech worlds. Pornhub’s commissioning of “The Pleasure Principle” and distribution of *Shakedown* are meaningful cultural interventions, while also fitting comfortably within a larger constellation of self-serving strategies designed to resist general antiporn rhetoric on the one hand and specifically anti-Pornhub rhetoric from within the industry on the other—all of which serve to tighten the company’s stranglehold on the industry. Pornography, like capitalism itself, is riddled with and thrives on such contradictions.

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari offer, in *Anti-Oedipus* (1996), a theoretical framework for conceptualizing these contradictions, one in which political and libidinal economies are understood as two sides of the same sticky coin. The regulation of sexual urges and (trans)actions is coextensive with the regulation of capital exchange, or as Paulo Correa puts it, the “repression of [the] sexual economy maintains, produces and reproduces the capitalist model of political economy,” and vice versa (Correa 1979). In the framework of *Anti-Oedipus*, “the general theory of society is a generalized theory of flows,” of everything from capital and commodities to populations, somatic fluids, and desires (Deleuze and Guattari 1996, 262). A society’s primary function is to code these flows—assigning meanings, values, and functions to every movement and exchange—to the extent that the “terrifying nightmare” of any society would be a decoded or uncoded flow

(139–40). Pornhub exemplifies this tendency, simultaneously coding, recording, and monetizing every conceivable desire. And yet obscenity is so heavily regulated and the porn industry so heavily surveilled because unbridled, public displays of sexual desires and behaviors—even when commodified on sites like Pornhub—present a notable challenge to the status quo. To maintain social order, individual desires must be constrained and repressed. For Deleuze and Guattari, the pleasure principle is the enemy of established orders:

“If desire is repressed, it is because every position of desire, no matter how small, is capable of calling into question the established order of a society: not that desire is asocial, on the contrary. But it is explosive; there is no desiring-machine capable of being assembled without demolishing entire social sectors. Despite what some revolutionaries think about this, desire is revolutionary in its essence. (126–27)

Brandon Arroyo evokes Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of “flows of desire” to locate queer potentialities in the very architecture of porn tube sites, suggesting that the browsing experience of “constant clicking is less a sign of impatience than an expression of desire—a desire to find something beyond the text, to feel something that the text cannot give us. The best realization of queer porn up to this point may not be a text, but a movement wherein we move past a text” (2016, 3). Although he adds that we should not “dismiss this experience as simply an exercise in enticing viewers to buy memberships to sites,” this exploratory browsing benefits the corporations in ways that go beyond enticing users to purchase paid memberships—in addition to advertising revenue, tube sites thrive on data mining (2016, 2–3). As Patrick Keilty puts it, “The longer viewers browse the site, the more data viewers produce.” (2018, 2) And yet, none of those self-serving marketing functions fully accounts for the value of *Shakedown* or “The Pleasure Principle.” By inviting users to venture into art galleries and view art films, Pornhub is indeed facilitating an extratextual flow, from overtly pornographic texts to porn-adjacent art and vice versa. As with the site’s genuinely useful efforts at promoting more accurate and inclusive sex education, introducing Pornhub’s regular users to ideas and images that they would not likely have encountered otherwise can encourage critical reflection and expand ideological horizons. In some small and perhaps temporary ways, this could enable what Deleuze and Guattari might describe as a “deterritorialization” of the user’s worldview.

Much as porn has driven technological developments, it has provided a model for collective struggle. In response to the industry’s marginalization and their own marginalization within it, porn laborers are organizing spaces to share strategies and building mutual aid networks, such as the BIPOC-AIC collective and online forums where performers share strategies, for instance, for how to protect themselves from online stalkers or how best to monetize their videos on Pornhub.¹⁵ More broadly still, pornography—as a category encompassing the deviant and the denied—remains a vital tool in the struggles against gender, sexual, and class-based oppression; one which would arguably cease to be either legible or necessary in a queer postcapitalist utopia. As Keilty notes, “pornography is a US\$97 billion global media industry (Morris 2014). As the primary platform by



which people interact with pornography today, online pornography companies wield enormous influence over the ways viewers learn about, play with, explore, and construct sexuality and sexual desires” (Keilty 2018, 1). Pornhub, as the most profitable and heavily trafficked porn site, reflects, elucidates, generates, and circumscribes our desires in a multitude of ways; or, to return to Kissick’s insight, “We might also wonder to what extent our desires are our own, now that we’re tied up in these huge, complicated desiring machines” (2019). The flipside of Pornhub’s industrial hegemony is its notable challenge to the previous industrial hegemony, in which porn is itself constrained by what is presumed to be profitable or commodifiable. The paradoxical coexistence of the genuine freedom enabled by the open-source model and also capitalism’s ability to subsume and profit off of its competition can perhaps achieve no clearer crystallization than Pornhub hosting a video of antiporn feminist Gail Dines’ lecture deeming pornography a public health crisis, surrounded by pornographic video thumbnails (see figure 3).

Although algorithms do circumscribe visibility for individual videos, the open-source tube site model has indeed democratized and decentralized porn production by devaluing studio-produced content. The traditional porn industry has taken a hit, but many individual performers and content-producers have adapted and even flourished as a result. One unintended consequence of the digital porn revolution is that more women in porn arguably have more control over their own images than ever before, now that creating their own content is as or more profitable for most performers than working for a production company.

And, as I have discussed, Pornhub is much more than a compendium of pornographic videos. I do not mean to overstate Pornhub’s radical or even

Figure 3.
Screenshot of video “Pornography and the Crisis of Violence Against Women.” Pornhub.

progressive tendencies. Rather, the goal, in terms of queer liberation, should be to dismantle the entire industry along with the capitalism that sustains it, without condemning sexual imagery to the shadows of culture. As such, we should continue to defend its legitimacy as a cultural form and acknowledge its ongoing pedagogical functions, while also critiquing its specific manifestations and looking forward to its obsolescence. The question is how to channel the revolutionary essence described by Deleuze and Guattari, how to offer a true version of the freedom and openness teased by Pornhub. Despite the corporation's fraught positionality within the porn industry, US culture, and globalized capitalism, Pornhub's recent PR efforts effectively challenge the binaries separating art from porn, the mainstream from the margins, and that is in itself a resolutely queer phenomenon. Recognizing that our innermost desires are inextricable from our positionality under capitalism, and moving beyond rigidly individualist frameworks to envision porn consumption as interaction with collective "flows of desire," we can begin the process of decoding our desires (Deleuze & Guattari 1996).¹⁶

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Notes

1. A few other sites, like BoilerRoom.tv, apparently streamed the film simultaneously, but I was unable to find publicity about anywhere other than Pornhub.
2. In the months since completing this manuscript, several developments have suggested concrete motivations for Pornhub's attempts at rebranding via the PR strategies discussed here. In December 2020, a *New York Times* report alleged that Pornhub had failed to prevent the hosting of illegal videos depicting underage and nonconsensual sexual activity (see Kristof 2020). Subsequently, Visa and Mastercard began refusing to process payments for the site. In June 2021, the Canadian Parliament's Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics released a report recommending that Pornhub and similar platforms be held "liable for any failure to prevent the upload of, or ensure the timely deletion of child sexual abuse material, content depicting non-consensual activity, and any other content uploaded without the knowledge or consent of all parties, including enacting a duty of care, along with financial penalties for non-compliance or failure to fulfil a required duty of care." For more information see the Standing Committee on Access to Privacy, Information and Ethics (2021). For a critique of the proposed legislation, see Sullivan, MacDonald, and Webber (2021).
3. Rodeschini refers to the Pornhub founder as "Adrian Thylmann," but is presumably speaking about Fabian Thylmann.

4. Information about current and future collaborations with artists and experimental filmmakers was provided by an informant on condition of anonymity.
5. It is also worth noting that even other anti-gentrification activists took issue with the focus and tactics of Defend Boyle Heights, to the point that one such organization actually created a Facebook group called “Defend Boyle Heights from Defend Boyle Heights”. Ironically enough, one of the primary criticisms of DBH is that it was an example of “white hipsters” coopting the movement.
6. For information about industry responses to recent critiques, see Dickson 2020.
7. Thelandingsitecanbefoundat<https://www.pornhub.com/popularwithwomen>
8. See, for instance, Carolee Schneeman’s *Fuses* (1964–7), Abigail Child’s *Mayhem* (1987), Peggy Ahwesh’s *The Color of Love* (1994), Machiko Saito’s *Premenstrual Spotting* (1997), and Kadet Kuhne’s *XXXperimental* (2014).
9. Indeed, one of the women featured in the film, *Mahogany*, is described on [Pornhub.com/shakedown](https://www.pornhub.com/shakedown) as “the legendary mother of the scene.” In the film she reveals that she had, through her role as mother of House of Fish, in fact hosted a ball.
10. For more information about content moderation see, Paasonen 2019 and Rodeschini 2020.
11. See, for instance, Solanas and Getino, 1970–71.
12. On films as advertisements for themselves, see Adorno and Horkheimer.
13. I contacted Leilah Weinraub to conduct an interview, so that she might convey her perspective in her own words. She agreed to participate but was unable to propose a time to speak me prior to this article’s publication deadline. As such, I can only speculate based on her published interviews.
14. Hood by Air was launched by Shayne Oliver. Weinraub developed several collections and, in 2012, became CEO and partner.
15. See, for instance, <https://www.bipoc-collective.org/> and <https://www.ambercutie.com/forums/threads/Pornhub-model-payment-program.28009/page-8>.
16. This phrase is repeated often in the book, for instance, on pages 33 and 35.

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Gay Amateur Porn on Twitter in the Philippines

Primitive Aesthetics and Affect

RUEPERT JIEL DIONISIO CAO

Introduction

Technological developments have always affected sex, including new modalities of representations that bring it closer to reality. The rise of online pornographies also spelt the diversification of bodies and identities that pornography renders visible. Different forms of porn arose, and continue to do so, which invests porn with new uses, such as subverting heteronormativity and patriarchy (Hambleton 2016), providing education on sexual pleasure (Albury 2014), and rendering the bodies of sexual minorities visible (DeGenevieve 2007). But as pornography escapes the traditional confines of porn sites and spills into social networking sites, inevitably, porn develops another set of functions and new visual aesthetics. Porn research highlights how technological, political, legal, and cultural factors influence why and how specific forms, functions, and affects of pornography emerge (Williams 1989; Paasonen 2011). The explosion of diverse forms of porn on the internet allows diverse forms of porn to circulate in different platforms and elicit different emotional and bodily responses from viewers (Jacobs 2007; Paasonen 2011). Yet, porn studies as a field has remained steadfastly focused on Western contexts and continues to ignore the booming porn production, circulation, and consumption in other geocultural and geopolitical sites (Jones 2020; Jacobs et al. 2020; Wong 2020; Baishya and Mini 2020). Similarly, the field has not yet sufficiently addressed issues of emotion and affect (Paasonen 2011).

This research responds to these gaps by considering the case of pornography in the alter community in the Philippines—a network of producers and consumers of self-made pornography on Twitter. While not exclusive to gay users, the alter community is widely popular among gay Filipino internet users (Punongbayan 2017). This study has the following aims: first, it provides a descriptive account of qualities and visual aesthetics of porn, as well as the narratives of sex and the everyday that circulate in the alter community. Second, this research analyses how the relationship between Twitter as a sociotechnical space and the aesthetics and narratives of sex in the alter community contain and circulate emotions and affect. In fulfilling these objectives, this study draws from original works in porn studies, Philippine studies, internet research, and the works of Sara Ahmed, and by using a virtual ethnographic approach to generate data. I follow Garcia (1996 [2009]) in defining Filipino gay identity as a homosexual identity that responds to, and arises from, the pervasive and heterosexual male macho culture. This means that Filipino gays usually desire straight-acting men or strive to keep their

homosexual identity in the closet (Garcia 1996 [2009]; Manalansan 2003). Like in other countries, the internet provides powerful venues where sexualities can be expressed safely and where political-legal and sociocultural forces maintain a rhetoric of conservative sexual attitudes (see Jones 2020 for the case of South Korea; Jacobs 2012 for China; and Baishya and Mini 2020 for South Asian pornographies).

To the best of my knowledge, this study represents one of the first focused on pornography, especially online gay porn, in the Philippines. After discussing the methodological framework, I begin by giving a brief overview of the concepts of sexuality, gender, and gay identity in the Philippines, as well as a sketch of pornography in the Philippines. Like Jones (2020, 304), I consider Twitter “an informal domestic porn industry” that responds to Filipino constructs of gay masculinity. Next, the paper uses a legal and technological analysis of alter community porn that draws from Linda Williams’s (1989) analysis of stag films and compares the primitive aesthetics that emerge in the alter community. The paper then discusses how porn in the alter community functions, contains, and circulates different kinds of affect and emotions and not simply feelings of sexual arousal. I then conclude by offering the key insights proposed by this paper.

Methodology

This research is part of a larger virtual ethnographic project on the alter community—a group of anonymous Filipino Twitter users that produce, distribute, and consume porn on Twitter. Virtual ethnography appropriates an ethnographic approach to examine the embeddedness and impact of digital and online technologies in our lives (Hine 2000, 2015). Virtual worlds provide new concepts of interaction, time, space, navigation, and access compared to doing ethnography in physical spaces. It can be used to examine experiences, interactions, and cultures formed solely within the virtual world. While different ethnographic methods such as participant observation and interviews can be conducted, implementing these methods may require some adjustments as to what can be observed and how research participants can interact.

Virtual worlds may not be conducive to conducting participant observation because everything is mediated and more traditional methods of data generation and analysis may be employed (Hine 2015, 172). In the alter community it is considerably easier to look at the interactions made on Twitter in relation to the circulation and discussion of pornography. This can be gleaned by observing the architecture of Twitter, paying close attention to the communication channels available there as well as the character limitations in the platform. However, Hine also believes that observing in virtual worlds may not be productive and must also employ autoethnography to establish the researcher’s emotional and intellectual response to the architecture of the medium and the interactions happening there (97–99).

I have been lurking in the alter community for around four years now and in those times, I made very little interaction with other participants and only watched self-made porn videos there. My own use of and visits to this alter

community have been shaped by my need to watch pornography quickly. But as I spent time there, my academic interest in it grew. Although my engagement with the community began in 2016, my ethnographic exercises began in October 2019 when I took a doctoral class on pornography. In the course of the fieldwork, I conducted interviews to serve as preliminary interviews for my PhD research. For this paper, I incorporate some of these interview data to bolster the claims of this research.

It was very difficult to recruit participants for this study. I first tried to recruit key informants directly by sending them a direct message via Twitter, explaining my interests in the alter community. Out of around ten that I invited, only two responded. I also have a friend who knows a few gay pornographers in the community, and she could recruit one for me. To gather more participants, I posted a call on my Facebook profile, and three friends responded with their own respective recommendations, and one friend used to be an active pornographer in the community. In the end, I had seven participants with whom I keep a regular (although not daily) contact. To safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of my participants, their personal information are anonymous, and names and identifying information have been removed from screenshots featured here.

Because of the difficulty in recruiting participants, I took advantage of what Hine calls the “unobtrusiveness” (2000, 160) of participant observation in the alter community by examining profiles of ten prominent pornographers whose followers range from forty thousand to around a hundred thousand. I analyzed their text and video posts. I also followed some pornographers within the community (around a hundred more profiles) and I took note of the tweets that transpired through my newsfeed. If I find tweets and videos interesting, I retweeted them or took a screenshot as a form of documentation for further analysis. I kept a diary where I wrote down some of my observations when I accessed Twitter on a particular day. Generally, I try to log in on the alter community to look at my Twitter feed or examine profiles three to four times a week.

As an observer, I classify myself as a critical outsider. As proposed by Lewis and Russell (2011), ethnographers are embedded within the communities they study to carefully observe, interact, and participate in community life. But they remind us that critical outsiders also maintain some distance from the field to rationalize, decode, and reconstruct cultural practices and social organization. In conducting this study, I follow Voros (2015) in acknowledging that the data that I analyze and my reading of the narratives the community members tell may reflect my own sexual tastes.

Pornography and Gay Sexuality in the Philippines

The Philippines is the bastion of Catholicism in Asia. With 85% of the population and nearly five centuries of Catholicism in the country, the church has a powerful influence in the discourse of sexuality there (Cornelio 2016; Cordero 2018). Scholars point to the Spanish occupation and the subsequent conversion of the indigenous populations to Catholicism as pivotal points in shaping gender and sexuality in the country as we know it (Sobritchea 1990; Garcia 1996 [2009]). Patil

(2018) argues that the adoption of (Western) gender and sexual identities and theories are part and parcel of Western imperial projects and relationships with other countries. In his brief historical account of gay culture in the Philippines, Garcia (2004; 1996 [2009]) argues that while the indigenous groups have a clear conception of sex roles in precolonial Philippines (i.e., to the first half of sixteenth century), men and women are free to adopt a sex role of their own regardless of their biological sex. With the arrival of Catholicism, sex and gender became complimentary and those who do not conform suffer from abuse and are labelled as sinners or immoral (Garcia 1996 [2009]). Even today, scholars note how *bakla* (i.e., effeminate/transvestite men who identify as women) are desexualized, overly dramatized, and are treated less respectably than the heterosexual or straight-acting men (Soriano 2014; Inton 2018). Garcia further explains that because of the complementarity of sex and gender, the *bakla* consider themselves as women. Hence, gay identity in the Philippines is predicated on performance (and even adoption) of gender roles, identities, and/or sex acts rather than simply objects of sexual desire (Manalansan 2003; Rodriguez 1996).

The early 1990s was important in changing the singular notion of homosexuality as the effeminate *bakla*. Cañete (2014) argues that the economic, technological, and sociocultural conditions in the Philippines after Marcos's dictatorship gave rise to different modalities of masculinity. Because of globalization and the proliferation of cinematic works that emphasized male bodies and male-to-male eroticism, Cañete argues that homosexual men now encompass men who have sex with men who do not necessarily identify themselves as women. The term "gay" now has become a useful handle for non-heterosexual men who have sexual relations with other men. The formal introduction of the LGBTQ framework in the country came with the first Pride March in 1994, which, since then, is held annually to celebrate diverse queer identities while advocating for legal protection and genuine acceptance of queer populations (Soriano and Cao 2016). But, following Manalansan (2003) and Garcia (1996 [2009]), this diversification of gay masculinity produced a hierarchy that closely resembles traditional heterosexual masculine order (Turgo 2014). Gay men, or those who act like straight men, sit atop this order. According to Michael Tan (1995), gay men's desire to protect themselves from discrimination, homophobia, and "economic dislocation" compels them to maintain a "straight" face or public image (88). This means that the effeminate *bakla* sits at the bottom of this gay/queer order and the straight-acting and more affluent gay men are deemed to be more desirable.

Gay men in the Philippines face immense pressure, not just because of the discrimination and lack of legal protection for non-heterosexual populations. Filipino masculinity itself carries myriad societal expectations. Men are expected to be skilled at hard labour or are expected to take up professional jobs in order to sustain the needs of their families (Sobritchea 1990; Turgo 2014). Furthermore, men are supposed to sustain their lineages by founding a family and ensuring harmonious relationships among its members (Angeles 2001). Thus, Angeles argues that men are supposed to be paragons of obedience—obedience to tradition and heading a family. Gay men are now faced with convoluted choices—

to express their sexuality at the expense of discrimination and foregoing their societal duties, or to fulfil their societal duties at the expense of denying their sexuality.

Apart from sexual identities, the country's attitude towards sex is also conservative, at least in appearance. Gumban and colleagues (2016) argue that sex remains a highly sensitive topic, even amongst family members. They argue that this pushes young people to learn about sex by talking to their friends or through other secretive methods, such as watching pornography or having pre-marital sex. With the increasingly liberal attitudes of young people towards sex, conservative religious scholars such as Cordero (2018, 46) adopt moralizing tones in their research to portray such developments as a crisis.

This sexually conservative attitude is cast into doubt by the overwhelming popularity of porn in the country. The Philippines is one of the world's major consumers of pornography, according to the research conducted by Pornhub Insights (2019). It is within the top ten in terms of time spent on Pornhub (second place) and in terms of daily traffic per country (eighth place). Pornhub (2020) claims that it has 120 million daily visitors globally. But while the Philippines is an active porn consumer, it has no established porn industry. Articles 200 and 201 of the country's Revised Penal Code bans the production, distribution, and exhibition of immoral and obscene materials, including pornography. Different localities, such as the cities of Cebu and Manila, also have limited powers of legislation and have enacted ordinances that ban the production and circulation of obscene material (Inquirer 2020). In a well-publicized legal battle, the Philippine edition of FHM Magazine lost its case in the Philippine Supreme Court when it challenged the City of Manila ordinance banning the publication of obscene materials. In the Supreme Court Decision, the Court maintains that "obscenity is not a protected speech" because "[n]o court has recognized the fundamental right to create, sell, or distribute obscene materials" (G.R. No. 184389, 15).

Despite the legal obstacles, Filipino gay men express their sexuality by constructing their sexual selves online, making pornographic videos, and writing sexual narratives. Many scholars noted how the internet gives rise amateur porn that represent diverse bodies and sexualities (Jacobs 2007; Paasonen 2010, 153). As scholars celebrate the proliferation of amateur porn outside the boundaries of porn sites (and into the more public virtual spaces), they argue that amateur porn is instrumental in how sexual minorities represent and claim their own sexual identities (Mondin 2017; Paasonen, Nikunen, and Saarenmaa 2007, 1). Amateur porn presents a powerful opposition to professional pornography which promotes masculine pleasure at the cost of feminines experience of pain and humiliation (Dines 2010; Hambleton 2016; 2020). Specifically, social media sites, alongside underground sites, are instrumental in giving access to pornography in contexts where the state discourages, or even bans, access to and production of pornography (Jones 2020; Jacobs 2012).

In the Philippines, a network of gay Twitter users produces, circulates, and consumes gay porn and sexual narratives as a way of facilitating a "shared experience" of and claim to their sexuality (Jones 2020, 310; Piamonte et al. 2020,

8). Like South Korea (Jones 2020), the Philippines has no porn industry, and the society maintains a sexually conservative stance. In the following sections, I describe the alter community, which is a largely understudied phenomenon in the Philippines. I proceed to discuss the aesthetic qualities of alter community porn by comparing it with stag films, a form of porn with which alter community porn shares many similarities. This will be followed by a discussion on how the aesthetics in the alter community emphasize this form of porn's affective dimensions. I conclude by offering insights on the impact of alter community porn to gay masculinity in the Philippines.

The Alter Community and Primitive Aesthetics of Porn

Stag films are the forerunners of modern pornographic videos that were produced in the early twentieth century (e.g., 1910s to 1950s), usually portraying sexually explicit visuals and narratives, and were distributed clandestinely to generally male audiences (Schaefer 1999, 7; Waugh 2001). Because of its emergence together with silent films, stag films possess aesthetic characteristics distinct from modern forms of pornography. Williams writes that stag films are:

[of] short length, usually filling a single reel (a thousand feet, up to fifteen minutes) or less; silence and lack of color; and frequent lack of narrative coherence, thus resembling films of the actual primitive era (roughly 1896–1911). Stag films remained primitive in these ways long after the legitimate primitive films had developed into feature-length sound narratives. (Williams 1989, 60)

Williams writes that many of these stag films use title cards and discontinuous editing. In various examples provided by Williams, surviving stag films are edited like silent films wherein there may be drastic changes in narrative elements or sex positions performed by the performers. She cites the example of *Am Abend*, a stag film made in 1910, featuring “discontinuous” segments containing different sexual positions (Williams 1989, 61). In terms of narratives and settings, Williams also notes that stag films usually possess skeletal narratives occurring in nondescript locations.

These aesthetic qualities of stag films are directly influenced by film technologies available at that time, including early camera models that were static and had no audio recording functions (Williams 1989; Waugh 2001). As new technologies arrive, aesthetic and narrative qualities of films also changed. Historians, for example, unanimously point to the introduction of sound in filmmaking as one technological development that drastically affected the aesthetic and narrative qualities of films. On the one hand, Sparshott (1971, 27) notes that sound technology added another dimension to the visual elements of film which intensifies the emotional charge of the images. Schatz (1996), on the other hand, argues that sound obliterated the use of title cards, which made it possible for films to narrate in spoken dialogue. Obviously, spoken words can be controlled to show different emotional intensities compared to written words.

Many scholars have also noted how the aesthetic qualities of amateur porn directly result from the technological resources available to amateur

pornographers. The lack of industrial-grade cameras, lights, and microphones results in grainy visuals and poor sound quality (van Doorn 2010; Jacobs 2007). Like in stag films and amateur porn, the audiovisual quality of alter community porn is directly influenced by the technologies at hand. Pornographers use a single mobile phone to capture both sound and video. There is no professional lighting, and the sound captures all the noises in the room and the surrounding areas. But whereas access to professional technologies in the case of stag films were restricted by the illegality of obscene materials and the monopoly of cameras in the early days of filmmaking (Schatz 1986), the case of the alter community is different. While industrial cameras, lights, and microphones are definitely expensive, there is no actual need to purchase these pieces of equipment because mobile phones can perform the production, editing, distribution, and consumption of videos. Many phone cameras are capable of shooting in high definition with relatively clear sound. Many alter community pornographers simply rely on available lighting when shooting their videos. This corresponds roughly to stag films' lack of colour.

The length of stag films is also directly related to the quality, price, and capabilities of film reels at the time. In the alter community, the length of videos is determined by Twitter's architecture, which only allows 160 second long videos. This limits what can be shown on a single video. Many alter community members simply do not cut their videos into different shots (also because they only use one mobile phone anyway). The pornographers simply select a hundred and sixty second clip of a single sex act (e.g., just anal sex or a single position in anal sex, or just oral sex). To entice more followers or to better express their sexual narratives, community members take advantage of Twitter's limited text features which they use to express their feelings or weave narratives about the porn clip they uploaded. Most likely, pornographers simply create a series of two-minute videos and upload these successively, complete with the progression of a story or a continued narration of their feelings. Whereas stag films use title cards as an attempt to tie together non-coherent shots, alter community porn uses these textual details as a way of weaving personal(ized) narratives and expressing their feelings and emotions and not simply arousing viewers. For example, one HIV-positive participant narrates that having safe sex with other alter community members who know his status makes him feel better about himself and helps him in living a normal life. Others write captions about how they met their sexual partners—either through dating apps or in spontaneous physical encounters. Furthermore, the series of videos are uploaded in a way that follows the conventional flow of sex as seen in professional porn. This means that pornographers first upload foreplay such as kissing or nipple stimulation and end in ejaculation (the middle parts differ in sequence, but they usually go from oral sex to anal sex).

The videos, however, are not always static. This is similar to these videos' early narrative film counterparts, stag films, which largely mimic theatre aesthetics rather than establishing cinematic aesthetics, and this can be attributed to the lack of cameras and the incipency of film as an art form at the time (Allen and Gomery 1985). Because mobile phones can be handheld or placed on tables, videos

can show the point of view of the top or the bottom. Ejaculation may not always be visible and at times we can only see bodies twitching and hear loud moans as a result of ejaculation. I develop this argument in the next section, but I want to mention here that the lack of focus on the penis indicates the complex affective potentials of the alter community.

Perhaps the most interesting intersection between stag films and the alter community videos is the anonymity of the participants. In the case of stag films, moral and legal contexts are also complicit in their aesthetic development and quality (Sheaffer 2014, 368; Williams 1989, 84–91). No wonder that most of the performers and producers of stag films used pseudonyms—stag films were illegal. Thomas Waugh (2001, 275) illustrates that performers and producers adopted sexually suggestive screennames, such as in the case of the stag film *Wonders of the Unseen World* (1927) which displays, “Seduced by A. Prick / Directed by Ima Cunt / Photographed by R. U. Hard.” These pseudonyms are obviously aimed at arousing viewers, if not providing some sexually charged humour to audiences.

The anonymity in the alter community is realized by removing real-life identifiers. The users craft sexually suggestive IDs that refer to their genitals or sexual activities, such as “@lilbumhole” (slightly tweaked for privacy). Some refer to themselves in general terms such as twink, *bagets* (i.e., young guy), daddy, or bear. Others use dirty, self-deprecating words (such as using the words “cum” and “slut”) to lend erotic charge to their profiles and names (Paasonen 2011). The identifiers, on the other hand, are removed by digitally putting a sticker that tracks the face, so the participants stay unidentifiable. Following Jacobs (2007), the composition of porn in the alter community, which tends to avoid the face of the participants, speaks of a conscious effort to enforce anonymity. These deliberate attempts to erase identifiers so as to allow each person to participate in this sexual circuit.

In general, anonymity in the alter community is prompted by sociocultural attitudes towards sex and the gay identity in the Philippines. Many tweets in the community emphasize the primacy of anonymity, saying that “coming out is a personal decision” and that anonymity allows gay men to have “freedom” to express themselves. Two interviewees, Gabriel and Daniel (not their real names) believe that Twitter only becomes a safe space for sexual expression if they practice anonymity. Gabriel states that if family members and co-workers could identify him, then he could be terminated from his work, be disowned by his family, and be labelled as sinner and as a “sissy” by his friends and family. In Paul’s (not his real name) case, he allowed his face to be seen while performing (sometimes effeminate) sexually suggestive or explicit acts and this drew flak from his extended family members, who readily condemned his parents as irresponsible. Indeed, one pornographer said that anonymity is part of their identity as a community. It is not simply a stylistic decision that aims to highlight everyday, ordinary bodies (van Doorn 2010), but a visual quality that arises from a sociocultural orientation towards sex and sexuality. Community members tweeted warnings to carefully delete their own and their partner’s identifying features such as faces and names in their videos because being discovered has real-life consequences.

Given the sociocultural attitudes towards sexuality and the laws governing portrayals of sex in the Philippines, anonymity becomes a stylistic choice that is aimed at protecting one's identity, given the repressive sociocultural attitudes towards sex and sexuality. Despite the safety afforded by Twitter's architecture regarding sensitive media (Twitter only allows the circulation of sensitive media within those who gave their consent), participants and community members are aware that it is entirely possible that their identities can be exposed. Thus, anonymity not only serves as protection, but as a stylistic choice that allows participants to express their sexuality and subvert sociocultural attitudes that prevent them from expressing their sexuality. Anonymity has also been imbued with symbolic meanings and functions, such as respect to other alter community members whose exposure can lead to real-life issues. The mutual observance of anonymity, then allows the users to subvert not only potential state prohibitions on pornography, but also the sociocultural attitudes that condemn sex and gay sexuality.

Alter Community and Circulation of Emotions

Many porn scholars laid the foundations of porn studies using the lens of politics and ideology, but the shadow of emotions and feelings is always present in the discourse of porn. At its most basic and reductionist, porn is meant to *sexually arouse* its viewers (assumed as mostly male) which results to feelings of lust: the hardening of the penis, the tensing of muscles, and even the releasing of pre-ejaculate fluid, i.e., precum (Tarrant 2016; Williams 1989). Meanwhile, scholars state that masculine pleasure comes at the expense of feminine pain and humiliation (Hambleton 2016; 2020). It was Susanna Paasonen (2011) who argued that online porn can stir different emotions and bodily responses of varying intensities that are rooted in our personal encounters and experiences with porn. She proposes that viewing porn as a text to be read but not examining its materiality and emotional impact does not provide a full picture of what porn actually does. By moving away from grand ideas of patriarchy, capitalism, and heteronormativity, Paasonen is able to disrupt the critical consideration of pornography to investigate how porn produces different emotional and physical reactions and drives us to perform other actions.

Indeed, Sara Ahmed argues that emotions move us to action. She proposes that emotions drive our social interactions—they can drive us to socialize with some but not with others. Ahmed writes that the way we are moved by emotions “connects bodies to other bodies: attachment takes place through movement, through being moved by the proximity of others” (2004a, 11). The intensity of our encounters with the world (i.e., affect) leaves us in different emotional states and can affect us in different ways, including performing certain actions (Massumi 1995; Ahmed 2004b). But Ahmed does not advocate an abstract and philosophical understanding of emotions. Instead, she proposes that emotions do not float freely, but rather they attach themselves to words and images and circulate across bodies. It is through rhetoric and images that emotions circulate and therefore stimulate us to act, or to not act.

What I raise here is the entanglement of emotions with a specific environment, an idea which constantly appears in Ahmed's and Massumi's arguments, as well as in aesthetics of porn in the alter community. Following their arguments, I consider the architecture of Twitter and the aesthetics of alter community porn as important elements in the circulation of emotions among Twitter users. By following Ahmed, I propose that emotions circulate through porn videos and texts, as well as the architecture of Twitter. Papacharissi (2012, 2001–2002) explains that the storytelling and performance of the self on Twitter are emotive and affective expressions that embed fantasy in the everyday. As part of the public space, Twitter's characteristic emotive and affective storytelling changed the way its users engage in an otherwise-rational public sphere wherein emotions play an important role in the virality and "spreadability" of contents (Papacharissi 2015, 310).

Because of highly personal musings and opinionated posts on Twitter (Marwick and Boyd 2010, 110), porn has become entwined in a complex circulation of emotions and affects. Whereas porn on porn sites symbolizes excessive masculine virility, porn in the alter community is situated in a complex network of affects such as joy, shame, anger, and others. In other words, porn in the alter community becomes a nodal point where a complex web of affect and emotions are circulated. In one remarkable example, an HIV-positive pornographer states how his porn videos show that he is still desired by other gay men in the Philippines despite his condition. While his videos contain the usual erotic charge, the presence of very personal confessions charges the porn with a complex affective dimension. At once, this pornographer's entire tweet expresses hope and joy because other gay men find him sexually attractive. The presence of the confession alongside the video changes the emotions that this pornographer's videos circulate, making it sexually arousing and inspirational at the same time. In this context, the pornographer is able to overcome the hardships, limitations, and stigma of HIV. Furthermore, the anonymity in the video makes it easier for these emotions to circulate because the absence of faces means that it can be anyone's story. Indeed, many of this pornographer's followers comment that the porn videos and sexual narratives from his profile are a source of sexual arousal and an inspiration for the idea that HIV can be overcome. In yet another user's videos, the pornographer frequently engages in diatribes against other pornographers. His profiles and porn videos do not elicit the same erotic yet inspirational charge that the HIV-positive pornographer includes in his videos. Instead, these porn videos feel like they are simply aimed at getting more followers and attention. Indeed, some of this user's followers remark that they only follow him to follow his tirades or watch his porn, but I hardly encountered anyone saying that his tirades are inspirational. Some community members even discuss these kinds of behaviours as "unbecoming" of being an alter community member.

The presence of different emotional narratives together with porn renders it more than just a medium for sexual arousal. Gabriel states in our interviews that the alter community is his "lifeline" to the gay community in the country. Because he has no gay friends, and he fears his family may disown him, the alter

community became a space where he can watch porn and read stories of gay men about their sexual experiences and difficulties in their daily lives. It also became a space where he can produce porn, write stories, and make friends. Gabriel tells me that it is through the tweets and conversations in the alter community that he learns how it is to be a discreet gay man. This allows Gabriel to establish an emotional relationship with the alter community that is predicated on an experience of emotional relief. It is in the alter community that he fully expresses his sexuality and it allows him to carry on the societal expectations thrown at him, including earning a living for his family. Furthermore, to many alter community members, their emotional attachments highly vary according to the social relations they cultivate.

But to some, the anonymity represents a complete disavowal of their sexuality. Many community members emphasize that anonymity allows them to leave their sexual adventures, narratives, and feelings inside the bounds of the community. Daniel says, “Anonymity removes my accountability. I don’t get associated to what I say or do here.” Hearing this and looking at his tweets stirred different emotions in me. I wonder if it was shame that he was feeling. I also had an impression that anonymity allows participants to have their cake and eat it too—anonymity allows them to retain their masculine privilege outside the alter community by isolating their gay sexual identity (this may warrant another article altogether). To Daniel and to some members of the alter community who made it clear that anonymity allows them to disavow their gay sexuality, anonymity is supposed to circulate a feeling of security. In their social position as men, the anonymity makes them feel secure from the threat of being discovered.

Van der Nagel and Frith (2015) and Hogan (2013) suggest that anonymity facilitates open and playful interactions and more spontaneous presentation/construction of the self on the internet. Furthermore, anonymity is a powerful stylistic practice that can establish boundaries and allow users to organize their online and offline lives (Boyd 2014). In the context of the alter community, anonymity, as well as the inclusion of nondescript locations, are important in investing gay porn with affective dimensions that evoke different emotions at once. The narratives and images of sex and everyday life melding together in the alter community situate porn in a web of emotions, allowing these texts and images to contain and circulate emotions.

The primitive aesthetics of porn in the alter community highlight and evoke different emotions that give porn new uses. These primitive aesthetics present in alter community porn videos, as well as the structure of Twitter, enable what Sara Ahmed (2004a, 119) calls “affective economies.” Stories evoke different emotions like joy, pain, sadness, even anger. Porn videos, of course, arouse viewers sexually in different intensities, while the short duration of these videos elicits a sense of directness and craving for other sex acts. The anonymity of the participants and the nondescript locations make it easier for these emotions in the porn videos and sexual narratives to flow, circulate, and stick to others because anonymity signifies that these stories and sexual experiences can happen to anyone. Not only does porn make it easier for emotions to stick, it also lubricates these emotions so they

travel more easily. Moreover, the engagement features of Twitter (i.e., commenting and retweeting) are important in the circulation of these emotions throughout the community. Once an alter community member shares (or annotates) a tweet, the reach of this emotionally charged content is furthered. Thus, all these aesthetic and narrative elements of the alter community allow the circulation of emotions that bond people together. In other words, the circulation of emotions in the alter community is what makes it a collective.

Conclusion

This research proposes that the aesthetic and narrative properties of porn in the alter community emphasize the affective dimension of porn. Contrary to the commonplace debates in porn studies that align porn within the discourses of patriarchy, heteronormativity, and neoliberal capitalism, this paper draws from technological, aesthetic, and affective discourses to further investigate the question (Paasonen 2011; Williams 1989; Ahmed 2004a; 2004b): what does porn do? Furthermore, the paper shifts the discussion from the discourse of sexual arousal and presents the idea that amateur porn can be a complex text capable of containing and circulating various emotions and affects, therefore inducing different effects in the producers and consumers of gay pornography. As Ahmed (2004b, 119) proposes, emotions are productive and are able to bond people together as collectives, networks, or communities.

The aesthetics of gay porn and the sexual and everyday narratives in the alter community respond to the contexts surrounding gay sexuality in the Philippines. Apart from its function as a *de facto* porn industry where gay men express themselves sexually (Jones 2020; Mondin 2017), the aesthetics that are centred on the anonymity of participants highlight the fragility of masculinity in the Philippines. By anonymizing themselves, the participants are able to make sense of their sexuality and to experience affect and emotions arising from their sexuality and encounters with other bodies, virtual or physical. In other words, the aesthetics of the alter community of gay porn allow gay men to continue performing their roles as men while being able to make sense of their sexuality in this virtual space. Anonymity, I propose, becomes a stylistic choice aimed at protecting gay men in a society where institutions neglect granting protection to sexual minorities. At the same time, anonymity can also be taken to perpetuate the hegemony of macho men (Manalansan 2003) which has pervaded the ranks of gay men in the Philippines.

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“Can You Toss Me That Shirt Behind You?”

Beefcakes, Ambiguous Masculinities, and Pornographic Bodies in the Video Game *Coming Out on Top*

SAMUEL POIRIER-POULIN

Introduction

Class is over. Mark heads to the frat house where Brad lives to tutor him. Brad might be an excellent football player, but he is definitely not the best in English composition. Finding the entrance door unlocked, Mark gets in, goes upstairs, and enters Brad’s room. “Mark, that’s you?” asks Brad. “I just hopped out of the shower, give me a sec.” Brad appears a few seconds later, shirtless (see Figure 1). His well-defined pecs and impressive biceps are usually noticeable underneath his white T-shirt, but Mark is now speechless in front of Brad’s eight pack and hairy ginger torso. “Can you toss me that shirt behind you?” he asks, smiling. As Mark hopes Brad does not notice the swell in his jeans, the two young men sit at Brad’s desk and start working on his essay.

While Brad is a fictive character from the video game *Coming Out on Top* (abbreviated *COOT* hereafter; 2014), his young, attractive, bodybuilder physique is reminiscent of the beefcakes popularized in photographs, drawings, and films in the 1950s, especially in US culture. As Thierry Hoquet (2011) explains, the term “beefcake” refers to a substance that contributes to weight gain and is used to sculpt one’s body; it presents the body as a machine capable of transforming proteins into muscles. Nowadays, beefcakes can be seen on the cover of fitness and gay men’s lifestyle magazines, in Hollywood superhero films, and even in the music industry, with singers like Dan Reynolds of Imagine Dragons, who gives shirtless performances and sometimes sings while wearing the rainbow flag, presenting himself as an LGBT+ ally and as an object of desire at the same time.

Of special interest for this paper is the growing number of bodybuilders who post photos and videos on Instagram and YouTube, and advertise for their OnlyFans pages (Bernstein 2019; Ryan 2019, 119–36). Often, on these pages, erotic and pornographic content is available in exchange for money—from full frontal nudity to muscle worship and solo masturbation. Entire websites now specialize in muscle pornography: PumpingMuscle.com contains hours-long footage of naked bodybuilders filmed from suggestive angles, whereas TheBestFlex.com contains profiles of more than a thousand bodybuilders who can be contacted for cam shows, custom videos, and meet ups. As websites like these gain popularity, the boundary between bodybuilding, eroticism, and pornography becomes increasingly blurred. Progressively, the buff body has become part of what Susan Sontag (1982) has called the “pornographic imagination.”



COOT is a comedy dating simulator and visual novel. It tells the story of Mark Matthews, a college student who recently made his coming out. The game focuses on Mark's final year in university, his friendship with his two roommates, and his romantic and sexual life. The main storyline allows the player to romance six characters, from the cliché anatomy professor to the slacker football player to the anti-conformist punk singer. The game contains erotic and pornographic elements, notably double entendres, explicit sexual references, and images of the protagonist having sex with other characters. An update to the game added the Brofinder app, an app similar to Grindr or Scruff that can be used by Mark/the player to date twelve additional characters. In contrast with the main storyline, these dates mostly consist in one-night stands.

In this paper, I argue that the cast of *COOT* is composed of several beefcakes (see Figure 2) who perpetuate and transform the imagery of the beefcake that has been present in US gay culture since the 1950s. More specifically, I am interested in the beefcake as an ambiguous, homoerotic, and pornographic icon, and in the dialogue between this icon and *COOT*, one of the first video games to be specifically targeted at gay men. While *COOT* contains numerous comic elements (see Poirier-Poulin forthcoming) and summarizing it only as a pornographic game would be a mistake, in this paper I specifically focus on the sexual content of the game, situating my analysis within the scholarship on representations of the gay male body in media. My research thus falls within current attempts to bridge the gap between game studies, porn studies, and gender and sexuality studies, and wishes to extend the aesthetic and symbolic history of the beefcake to the world of video games.

Figure 1.
Brad just hopped out of the shower. Screenshot by the author.

The figure of the beefcake as a homoerotic and pornographic symbol has gotten some attention in film studies, media studies, and sociology (e.g., Waugh 1996; Lahti 1998; Alvarez 2007; Rushing 2008; Richardson 2010); however, research on that topic in game studies remains scarce. Marc Ouellette (2013) has proposed a framework for theorizing LGBT+ characters in video games by drawing on slash fiction, queer theory, and physique magazines and peplum films. Meanwhile, Nathan Thompson (2018) has investigated the creation of “sexified” male characters and explicit sex modifications in the fan community of *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* (2011), showing that pornographic modding can be a powerful way to claim heteronormative gaming spaces. Though not directly related to the beefcake, a number of scholars have explored various forms of queerness and masculinities in video games: Todd Harper (2017) has read the male Commander Shepard of the *Mass Effect* trilogy (2007, 2010, 2012) as a closeted gay man; Jordan Youngblood (2018) has examined how LGBT+ identity in *Mass Effect 2* and *3* is linked to militarism and national identity, and made complicit with neocolonialism; Braidon Schaufert (2018) has argued that *Dream Daddy: A Dad Dating Simulator* (2017) situates the queer erotic figure of the daddy within a suburban, upper-middle class homonormative fantasy; and Nicholas Taylor and Shira Chess have examined homoerotic aggression between white heterosexual male players, interpreting it as “hypermasculine fantasies of domination and violence” that reveal the vulnerability of heteronormative masculinity (2018, 274). Finally, indie game designer Robert Yang has used the same beefcake character



Figure 2. The beefy cast of *Coming Out on Top*. Upper row: Mark (in the middle) and the six characters who can be romanced. Lower row: the twelve characters with whom Mark can have a “bonus date.” Title image retrieved from obscurasoft.com.

in a number of his games, an invitation to the assumed gay male player to desire and worship him. Depending on the game, the player can spank the character in a consensual BDSM session (*Hurt Me Plenty* 2014), watch him erotically suck a popsicle (*Succulent* 2015), look at him, lying on his back, shirtless, a noticeable bulge in his jeans, holding a beer and smoking a cigarette (the title screen of *Radiator 2*, 2016), or help him wash his body in the public showers of a gym (*Rinse and Repeat HD* 2018).

As mentioned by Thompson, the inclusion of erotic and pornographic content in video games through virtual human bodies “troubles the notion that pleasure and eroticism need to come from human actors” (2018, 195). In *COOT*, the player can literally engage in sex through his avatar,¹ choose among a few sex positions, decide if he wants to wear condoms, and explore different sexual fantasies and kinks. Although sex in video games might a priori seem to be limited to onscreen representation, I would follow Linda Williams (2008) and argue that images and sound—and text in the case of video games—have the power to activate our whole sensorium through inter-sensorial exchanges; the attraction is directed to the flesh, and video games, just like pornographic films, have the power to put the player in a sex mood. *COOT* prompts the player to engage in its “libidinal economy,” pushing him to use his memory and imagination to creatively engage with its narrative, make decisions, and imagine what certain actions feel like (Krzywinska 2018).

In the following pages, I first introduce the figure of the beefcake and highlight its queer potential. Then, drawing on close reading (Bizzocchi and Tanenbaum 2011), I read the beefcake in *COOT* as a queer hypermasculine figure and as a pornographic body. I finally conclude by acknowledging the limitations of this imagery and proposing further research avenues.

Beefcakes, Bodybuilders, and Ambiguous Masculinities

The cult of the beefcake is mainly associated with the work of Bob Mizer (as well as Richard Fontaine and Bruce Bellas), who founded the Athletic Model Guild in 1945. In a few years, Mizer became known for his photos and films showing well-oiled muscles, bulging crotches, and young bodybuilders wearing only posing straps, loincloths, or swimsuits (Escoffier 2009, 17, 52). Although the pumped-up image had originally been popularized in the 1930s with the Santa Monica’s Muscle Beach, Mizer gave it a homoerotic twist, transforming what was the US ideal of manhood (Cagle 2000) into a sexually desirable body. The *Physique Pictorial* magazine he founded in 1951, as well as the posing, wrestling, and narrative films he made (see Waugh 1996, 258–66), largely helped him achieve this project. As Daniel Wenger notes, the emblems of straight masculinity that gay men had been discreetly looking at for a long time suddenly got infused with a new meaning: “the very men who had looked stoic and impassive in the straight magazines seemed, under Mizer’s direction, to be having fun” (2016, para. 4). Ultimately, under the pretext that men were exposing their body to represent sport, art, or nature was an “unapologetic celebration of flesh, community, and ambiguous masculinity” (Waugh 2000, 123).

It is interesting to examine bodybuilding in relation to queer pornography, and the complex interplay of alibi and pleasure that this tradition occasioned in queer spectators. As noted by Thomas Waugh (2004), looking at bodybuilding served as an alibi for eroticism and queer lust, but also as a denial of the self, a way to pretend that one was not really queer. The beefcake imagery pushed gay men to become enactors of desire, to read the beefcake as desirable, and to see what other people could not see. Talking more specifically about the posing film, Waugh highlights how the models often look at the camera—at the filmmaker and at the spectator—“as if asking for directions or mistrusting the motive” (1996, 258). Just like physique magazines, physique films were licit at the time, though gay men were arrested and convicted through sodomy and obscenity laws, complicating how these media were used, what kinds of desires were allowed, and blurring the boundary between the homosocial and the homoerotic (Waugh 2004).

Hoquet (2011) provides interesting insights on the ambiguity of the beefcake. According to him, the beefcake performs his masculinity, parades, and shows confidence without falling within the ideal of classic masculinity. The beefcake is somewhat of a player, Hoquet writes: he is aware of his virility—which he voluntarily displays by inflating his muscles and flexing—and often has a knowing, flirtatious smile—“an invitation to lust, but also the mark of an incorrigible second degree” (Hoquet 2011, 12, my translation). The beefcake proudly showed his (naked) body at times when homosexuality was a crime, longing for his body to be gazed upon and allowing the clandestine desire of anonymous observers (Hoquet 2011). For Hoquet, the beefcake thus appears as a consumable sexual object, and the possibility of purchasing physique magazines or mail-order films in which he featured—I would add—plays with the gay man’s sexual fantasy of ownership over the beefcake and his masculine, straight-looking body.

This idea of ambiguous masculinity can be traced back to the figure of the bodybuilder. In his foundational “Bodybuilder Americanus,” Sam Fussell (1994) argues that the bodybuilder challenges the heteronormative gender division and might not be as “manly” as we tend to think; he is more in line with the circus tradition of the bearded lady than the strong man, he says. According to Fussell, the bodybuilder can be interpreted as making a vocation of recreation—using his muscles to raise eyebrows rather than to build bridges—and thus challenging puritanical and utilitarian views of masculinity. The bodybuilder also takes the traditional female role of the body as object, shaving his body to ensure that it can be seen without obstruction and adopting a distinct walk, “elbows held wide from the body, thighs spread far apart”; each of his movement is self-conscious (Fussell 1994, 45). For Fussell, the bodybuilder is intimately related to camp aesthetic and the idea of artifice, exaggeration, and performance, as theorized by Sontag (1982). To some extent, this ambiguity has been transferred to the beefcake, who is also an adept of fitness culture.

In the context of gay culture, fitness and muscles come to have additional meanings and can be interpreted in light of radical body politics. As highlighted by Martti Lahti, “gay men have often appropriated images of heterosexual masculinity to put into question the dominant definitions of homosexuality that

locate it between genders, neither in the sphere of femininity nor in the sphere of masculinity” (1998, 187). The gay beefcake thus seeks to physically produce the hypermasculine, challenging the trope of the gay male body as effeminate (Hoquet 2011), while advertising himself as an object of desire. In contrast with his straight counterpart, the gay beefcake is not flirting subtly nor pretending to be innocent: his “gay” muscles are meant to be an erotic turn-on (Halperin 1995, 117). By doing so, the gay beefcake disrupts the visual norms of straight masculinity, which imposes discretion and asks that male beauty be on display only casually (Halperin 1995, 117). “Gay” muscles are therefore ironic: they subvert the patriarchal and heterosexual power traditionally associated with muscles (Pronger 2000) and in a certain way “homosexualize” the masculine body. Instead of being an instrument to ward off other men, these muscles are a homoerotic enticement (Pronger 2000). The gay beefcake thus becomes a potential threat for straight men, who are left without any unquestionably heterosexual identity and risk homoerotic identification and stigmatization (Healey 1994), leading to a form of homophobia (Anderson 2011). As I shall now demonstrate, *COOT* builds on this queer potential to appropriate and transform hypermasculinity.

Queering the Hypermasculine Body in *Coming Out on Top*

Several scholars have explored the representation of masculinity in video games in relation to violence, militarism, and sports (e.g., Kline, Dyer-Witford, and de Peuter 2003, 253–56; Blackburn 2018; Burrill 2018; Ouellette and Conway 2018; Conway 2020), highlighting the many ways these themes intersect to give rise to a hypermasculine ideal. Also known as the “macho personality,” hypermasculinity has been traditionally associated with careless sexual attitude towards women, the view that violence is manly, and the belief that danger is exciting (Mosher and Sirkin 1984). Pushing this definition further, Amanda Phillips (2017) has made a strong case for theorizing hypermasculinity in video games in relation to hardness; it manifests through firm and muscular bodies, hard penises, physical strength, emotional and physical responses that are restricted to anger and violence, an impenetrable self-assurance, and the rejection of weakness. Along the same lines, Anastasia Salter and Bridget Blodgett (2017) have shown how hypermasculinity in video games manifests through characters who are presented as superhuman—unique specimens of manhood saving the day—a man-versus-world mentality, derogatory language to refer to the Other (see also Lizardi 2009), and harder difficulty levels (Salter and Blodgett 2017, 23, 78, 82–83, 85). Duke Nukem (*Duke Nukem 3D* 1996) might be the most emblematic, over the top, example of hypermasculinity in games, but he is far from being the only one: other examples notably include Kratos (*God of War* 2005), Geralt of Rivia (*The Witcher* 2007), Chris Redfield (*Resident Evil 5* 2009), Franklin Clinton (*Grand Theft Auto V* 2013), Sam “Serious” Stone (*Serious Sam 4* 2020), and the list goes on.

COOT contrasts with the hypermasculine ideal on several levels; the most explicit one probably being the presence of characters who use their muscles to build homoerotic relationships with each other and with the assumed gay male player. While the game casts Mark as a hero to be admired because of his coming

out, coming out alone is not enough: Mark must come out *on top*, and in order to do so, he must enter the dating scene. After coming out to his friends, Mark immediately goes to the gay bar with Penny to celebrate. There, he meets the first potential love interest of the game, and his epic journey truly starts. This early encounter sets the tone for the rest of the game: (almost) every day in the life of Mark consists in meeting men with whom he will have the chance to have sex sooner or later.

The muscles of the game characters are not those that signify physical strength, but the muscles of the gay beefcake, i.e., those that are explicitly designed to solicit desire and that visibly inscribe on the surface of the gay male body their own erotic desire (Halperin 1995, 117). In a segment of the game, Ian asks Mark to come to a frat party with him in exchange for later being his wingman. Shirtless, he says with a hint of a smile: “Check out the gunboats. Am I not equipped to be the greatest wingman of all time?” The game characters are aware of their own beefcake physique and use it to their advantage. All of them even have a typical pose that accentuates and eroticizes the nicer parts of their body, especially when they are shirtless: Ian is very proud of his big arms and often crosses them, making them look even bigger; Alex tends to put his hands on his hips, proudly showing his pecs and his eight pack; and Brad, who has an overall athletic body, usually stands with his arms along his torso or behind him, allowing the player to observe his chest, abs, and arms without anything obstructing his view. These poses are a feature common to the visual novel genre (Bruno 2017), but in the case of *COOT* can also be put in continuity with the poses adopted by the beefcake.

The game, which was advertised as set “in a world where all men are gay (nearly all of them, anyway),”² is somewhat reminiscent of Tom of Finland’s utopian idea of creating, through his drawings, a “Tomland,” i.e., a place where all men are willing to have sex with other men (Lahti 1998). This is especially transgressive in the world of video games considering the abundance of games that associate muscles with brutal strength and killing. As Stephen Kline, Nick Dyer-Witheford, and Greig de Peuter argue, the historical ties between the video game medium and the US military-industrial complex as well as the fact that games are still mostly designed for young straight men have led the game industry to represent men according to an ideal of “militarized masculinity,” i.e., to put male protagonists in situations that “mobilize fantasies of instrumental domination and annihilation” and to create games “revolving around issues of war, conquest, and combat” (2003, 255). In *COOT*, rather than using the mouse to shoot at enemies and engage in ultraviolence, the player uses it to have sex and even fall in love. The player does not conquer newly discovered territories but conquer (or con-quer) other men, and hopefully, the heart of a potential love interest. It is especially interesting to see how the hypermasculine ideal is queered through two characters—Phil, the military man, and Brad, the jock—whose stories take place in environments that are known for being homophobic and heterosexist but also for their homosexual practices (Zeeland 1996; Pronger 1999; Messner 2001; Belkin 2012).

The ideal of militarized masculinity more specifically is queered through the character of Phil, a gay Afro-American marine who is currently going to



military school. While Phil comes back from bootcamp rather cold and distant, and gets harassed throughout the game by two homophobic marine fellows—the embodiment of toxic masculinity—he ends up enjoying his time with Mark after slightly distancing himself from military life. He apologizes for having been “a little harsh” and mentions that “bootcamp really does a number with your head.” A priori, Phil seems to portray the ideal of militarized masculinity: he is strict, disciplined, and appears as physically and psychologically strong; however, the fact that he is being considered for the Reconnaissance program, and therefore for military operations that focus more on exploration and information acquisition than on military combat, opens the door for an ambiguous, even queer version of militarized masculinity. The fact that he must repeatedly avoid a physical confrontation with the two toxic marines to keep a clean record and make it to Recon is also telling. Phil is not the classic “White Messiah” that we tend to see in shooter games (Gray 2014, 20–21), but a queer beefcake of colour who enjoys trivia quiz, helps his father who is running for state Senate, and does not mind kissing his boyfriend while wearing his military uniform (see Figure 3). Let’s not forget that being openly gay in the US military forces has only been allowed since 2012!

On the other hand, the game interestingly queers the ideal of the hypermasculine jock through the character of Brad, the quarterback of the Orlin University football team. Brad first appears as the stereotypical jock who has poor grades, lives in a frat house with his teammates, and is willing to pay Mark to write his essays for him. As the story unfolds, the player realizes that Brad lacks confidence and can be surprisingly good at school. It is noteworthy that Brad plays quarterback, a prestigious offensive position often associated

Figure 3.
Phil kisses Mark before leaving for Recon. Screenshot by the author.

with hypermasculinity but that is also rather homoerotic, as Brad highlights it himself. In the standard football formation, the quarterback is situated right behind the centre and places his hands under the centre's rear, ready to catch the snap. *COOT* makes the homoerotic aspect of playing quarterback (and centre) rather obvious, with Mark dreaming that he is practising snapping techniques with Brad while only wearing shoulder pads and briefs³—a “practice” session that slowly transforms into a sexual intercourse. It is also probably more than mere coincidence that the name of the football team in which Brad plays, the (Orlin) Otters, is a label used in the gay community to refer to hairy gay men with lean muscle mass. Brad's queer masculinity takes on greater significance considering that he aspires to join the National Football League (NFL), which is historically known for its heterosexist and homophobic culture (Morton 2013; Chadiha 2019), and which as of May 2021 has still not had any openly queer player in its teams (Ryan 2019; Hohler 2020).

In short, *COOT* queers the hypermasculine body through its beefy characters who behave in a non-hypermasculine way. The beefcakes of *COOT* thus do not fully correspond to hard masculinity when it comes to their psychology and their action; that being said, as I will now demonstrate, their bodies are still physically hard—muscular and erected—and must be situated within the logic of pornography.

The Beefcake as a Pornographic Body

While the beefcake originally fell within erotic and glamour imagery, the beefcake is becoming increasingly pornified, and trying to preserve his innocence under the traditional alibi of sports, art, and nature now seems to be a wasted effort. In what follows, I pursue my analysis of the beefcake in *COOT* by reading it as a pornographic body.

In “Straight Internet and the Natrifical,” Adam Geczy proposes a strong definition of the pornographic body. According to him,

The porn body, in tune with the repetitive pattern of pornography itself, is a body made, molded, and mediated, and thus worn, for immaterial representation. It is at once extremely physical and disembodied, virtual. Just as the moving image is a composite of different frames and angles, the porn body is a specific fashion object: a tissue of partial objects in which natural and fetish have become confounded, or fused. (2014, 174)

Interestingly, Geczy's description has some resonance with the body of the beefcake. The beefy body is moulded and sculpted through rigorous diet and training. Like the pornographic actor, the beefcake exhibits his ideal body through photos, films, and videos that are increasingly available online, transposing his thick, two hundred pound very material body into the immaterial, disembodied space. The body of the beefcake is also in tune with the repetitive pattern of pornography: it is the product of numerous series and repetitions of the same exercises, and of training sessions done several times a week. The beefy body is dissected and reduced to its components, i.e., to the different body parts on which the beefcake separately works at the gym (leg day, arm day, etc.), which he

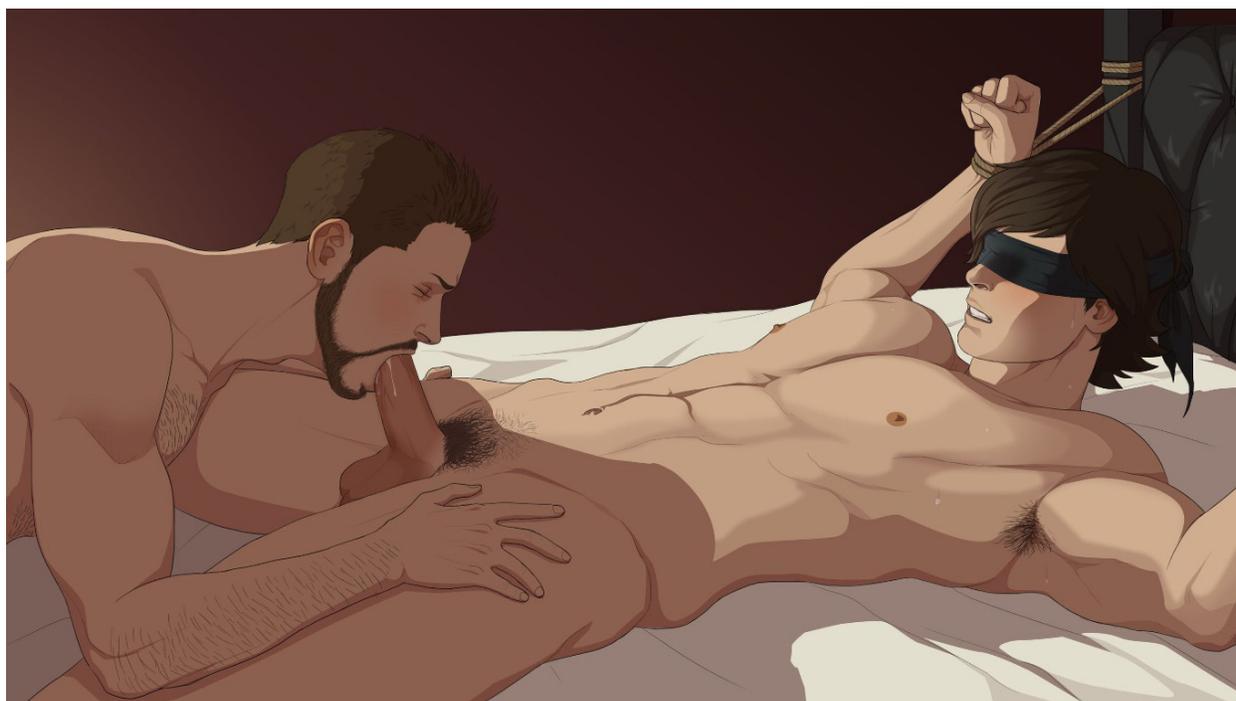
flexes separately when he poses, and which are shown separately in pornographic videos through close-ups. The ultimate goal of the beefcake is to gather all these ideal body parts and create a “specific fashion object” (Geczy 2014, 174).

As highlighted by Geczy (2014), the pornographic body has imposed itself on the spectator, allowing them to achieve what they otherwise could not without the assistance of pornography: climax. The pornographic body has also imposed



Figures 4–5.
Mark is having sex with Brad. Screenshots by the author.

itself on purely virtual bodies, notably those of *COOT*, making them part of its “total universe” (Sontag 1982, 228) and transforming them into beefy pornographic bodies—i.e., bodies that are “muscular, thin but not too thin, hairy but not too hairy, with ample dicks, and offered up for regular servings of sex, the apparent *raison d’être* of the gay male body” (Harper 2015, para. 9). The possibility to customize these bodies in *COOT* through beard and body hair options is reflective of their



Figures 6–7.
Mark is having sex with Ian. Screenshots by the author.

consumable nature and of a desire to satisfy the player's taste. The pornographic beefcakes of *COOT* are bodies that the player wants and is encouraged to get by the game: dating each of the eighteen characters gives the player the opportunity to unlock unique erotic and pornographic pictures that can be later consulted in the gallery. The characters' buff bodies are there to be "collected" by Mark, becoming possessions of the player; sex is not an end in itself but a "commodified game dynamic" (Hart 2018, 158) that allows the player to complete his collection—the only way to really "beat" the game—and to earn achievements. Through these game mechanics, *COOT* makes visible certain aspects of gay culture that are already game-like, whether it is opening Grindr and choosing among a selection of men which one to go on a date with (like the player does when he decides which character's route he wants to complete), or the ludic vocabulary some gay men use online to invite other men to have sex—"Looking to play?"—portraying sex as something "casual, fun, and obligation free" (Race 2015, 259).

The pornification of the beefcake in *COOT* is especially noticeable in the way sex is represented onscreen. Each sex scene is usually composed of two images: the first one shows the game characters having hardcore sex, sweating, moaning, and getting close to climax (see Figures 4 and 6), while the second one, almost identical to the previous one, shows the characters reaching climax, as attested by the money shot and the description of the narrator (see Figures 5 and 7). For example, while having sex with Brad, the player reads:

You grip his thighs and pump hard, lost in the sensation. / As you shift your angle, you see his body shudder and convulse. His grunts turn to moans. / The heat of your breath and bodies and sex fill the room. The strained groans of your animal voices envelop the air. / ...You comply and push harder, faster, pressure building, imagining your jizz in him. Fucking your spunk deep inside him. / ...You clench your ass tight, thrust your enraged cock one last time into the darkest depth of his asshole, and cum like a thunderstorm.

Although each sex scene is composed of still images, the first image is usually shown as a close-up or medium close-up of the beefy, naked bodies of the characters. The camera then slowly moves towards their buttocks and erected penises, showing a meat shot, and then progressively moves backward, allowing the player to see the scene in its whole and conveying pleasure by maximally exposing the bodies of the characters (following William 1989 and Melendez 2004). Throughout the scene, the player is teased by the slow movement of the camera and the detailed descriptions of the narrator but ultimately sees his curiosity and voyeuristic pleasure satisfied. In a few sex scenes,⁴ the entire image or the character sprite slightly moves up and down, or from the left to the right, faster and faster, reproducing the movement of penetrative sex and showing that hardcore sex is taking place; in other instances, the image shakes a little, reproducing the characters' climax. The combination of text and images in these scenes as well as the movement of the camera bring the game experience close to the experience of watching pornography. (It is not very surprising that the player only needs one hand to play the game!) As Williams (2008) writes, "when the moving image

shows two (or more) beings touching, tasting, smelling, and rubbing up against one another...in watching them I am solicited sexually too” (20). The beefcakes of *COOT* are not just eye candy for the player: they become sexually arousing bodies and seeing them engaging in sex leads to mimetic identification.

While in terms of gameplay Mark’s gaze is the gaze of identification—the player controls Mark, can customize his name, and picks his response to a particular situation from several options—the pornographic scenes complicate this gaze and transform it into desire. Identification and desire, famously conceptualized as two distinct axes by Laura Mulvey (1975), are here combined in a way that is strongly reminiscent of what Robert Rushing (2008) describes in his work on peplum films, also known for their beefy protagonists. In *COOT*, “desire and identification function less as separate axes than as pneumatic or hydraulic flows, capable of moving in multiple and even contradictory directions at the same time” (Rushing 2008, 172). The player is in presence of a gaze “saturated by same-sex desire” and is “tricked into believing that this is the gaze of identification” (Rushing 2008, 171). Gerald Voorhees’s (2014) proposition to position queer desire rather than identification as the fundamental structure governing the relationship between the player and the game protagonist applies especially well to *COOT*. Although the assumed gay male player might relate to some events Mark goes through (notably his coming out), the fact that the player sees Mark’s attractive body onscreen several times and sees other male characters desiring it transforms Mark into an object of desire. This feeling is reinforced by the fact that Mark is involved in the majority of the suggestive or explicit pictures of the gallery (he is shown in sixty-two of the seventy pictures to be exact, most of the time having sex); as the player unlocks more and more explicit content, Mark’s body slowly transforms into a pornographic spectacle.

Interestingly, despite its explicit gay content, *COOT* adopts at times the aesthetic of gay-for-pay pornography. While many of the game characters are introduced to the player as gay, a few of them are not: Ian has a girlfriend, Brad might succumb to the sexual advances of Daisy, Luke feels lonely and is “just looking” for a friend, and the macho cop Cesar is baiting gay men as part of a sting operation. Before getting to know all of the game characters, the player has time to wonder about their sexual orientation, to desire their consumable, straight-looking buff body, and to hope that they are willing to engage in sex with Mark whether they are gay or not. Just like with Bob Mizer’s beefcakes, looking at these characters leads to a complex interplay of alibi and pleasure, with both Mark and the player wondering if they are really allowed to look at these seemingly straight characters and get aroused by them, leading to the feeling that a taboo is being transgressed. Trying to figure out the sexual orientation of each character becomes a form of play (and even a tease) that is reminiscent of gay men trying to figure out the sexual orientation of strangers, or wondering if certain performers in gay pornography are really gay and if the confession-like videos in which they perform their straightness are genuine.

Like the gay-for-pay performers of Corbin Fisher and Str8chaser, the characters of *COOT* are generally young middle-class men who work out, do

sports, and sometimes talk about girls. Ian is the bro character *par excellence*: he is messy, shamelessly masturbates in the shower, calls the player “dude,” and talks about his big arms. In addition, the name of the app Mark uses to hook up—Brofinder—sounds more like the name of an app to find straight bros than a dating app for gay men, to the point of confusing one of the game characters. Indeed, when Mark arrives at Luke’s house willing to have sex, Luke explains that he was just looking for a bro to watch a film with—he did not know that “Streamflix and Chill” had a sexual connotation. Fortunately for Mark (and for the player), Luke ends up having “dude sex” with him and concludes the date by telling him that he is open to try out “different things” with him in the future.

Conclusion

This paper explored the representation of the beefcake in *COOT* by drawing on game studies, porn studies, and gender and sexuality studies, aiming to bridge the gap between these fields and to show that the beefcake has made his way to video games. While the beefcake was originally associated with ambiguity and homoeroticism, notably in the work of Bob Mizer, he has increasingly become pornified and is now shown having hardcore sex. The beefcake does not display his pleasure through flirtatious smiles anymore, but through moans and money shots. In the world of video games, the pornographic representation of the beefcake has the potential to queer the hypermasculine, hard body that has been associated with the video game medium since its inception and to challenge gender and sexual norms more broadly. In that sense, showing gay sex onscreen and allowing gay male players to take part in the libidinal economy of the game is especially powerful and transgressive: it is a way to celebrate gay sexuality and the gay male body.

Nevertheless, video games like *COOT* and the like—*My Ex-Boyfriend the Space Tyrant* (2012); *Full Service* (2020); *All Men Are Pigs* (forthcoming)—normalize certain fantasies while also excluding other identities from them. *COOT* challenges hegemonic game culture, but the “Tomland” it proposes to do so only allows certain types of bodies to take part in its fantasy and be legitimate objects of desire: these are the bodies of cisgender gay men who are thin, muscular, able-bodied, and with large penises. The game might not propose characters that fully correspond to the hard masculinity described by Phillips (2017)—and that is for the best—but it still proposes bodies that are physically hard and correspond to Western beauty standards. Additionally, the fact that *COOT* draws at times on the aesthetic of gay-for-pay pornography limits the queer potential of the beefcake and situates gay male identity within heterosexuality. By doing so, *COOT* situates homosexual desire within the heterosexual regime of desire and presents homonormativity as enviable. Such design choices do not challenge but rather uphold dominant heteronormative assumptions, “supporting the violence of heteronormative distinctions between legitimate and illegitimate lives” (Ahmed 2014, 150).

Therefore, *COOT* does not only appropriate and transform hegemonic masculinity and heterosexist discourses, but also circulates them. The beefcake, despite his queer potential, needs to be situated within this “very ambiguous

relationship to male power and privilege, neither fully within it nor fully outside it” (Dyer 2002, 145). He is the result of a combination of forces involving the game industry, its ties to the world of pornography, their relation to the ongoing celebration of hard masculinity, and the mainstream gay complicity in the fantasy that handsome, kind-hearted beefy men could not possibly have anything to do with upholding homonormative values and hegemonic masculinity. As Susanna Paasonen points out, sexual play tends to be seen as positive, light, and happy, and it can be easy to forget “the range of vulnerabilities and anxieties at the heart of sexual lives” (2018, 10).

Since research on the representation of the beefcake in video games is only starting, I would like to conclude this paper by suggesting two research avenues to further develop this reflection. First, the figure of the beefcake is especially noticeable in gay-themed visual novels and dating simulators (e.g., *Full Service, All Men Are Pigs*), two genres that often go hand-in-hand and that are still the main venue for erotic and pornographic content in game culture. These games appear as an ideal corpus to further investigate the pornification of the beefcake and could be analyzed from a comparative perspective, notably in relation to *COOT*. Second, fighting games are known for their long tradition of portraying muscular (shirtless) male characters. While game scholars have generally read the muscles of these characters as a symbol of power and strength, I believe that the muscles of characters like Rig and Jann Lee (*Dead or Alive 5* 2012), Miguel Caballero Rojo (*Tekken 7* 2017), and Cody Travers (*Street Fighter V: Arcade Edition* 2018) could also be read as an erotic turn-on for gay male players (no matter if this were the original intention of game designers or not) and could be put in continuity with the tradition of the beefcake.

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Notes

1. In this article, I am specifically interested in *Coming Out on Top* as a game targeted at gay men since this is how the game was advertised. For this reason, I am using the term “gay” (instead of “queer”) and the pronouns “he,” “him,” and “his” (instead of “they”) to refer to the player.
2. See the trailer of the game on Steam.
3. It is interesting to note that this transgressive aspect could have been pushed even further if Brad and Mark had been wearing jockstraps (instead of briefs), considering that jockstraps have been appropriated by the gay community as a form of lingerie.
4. This can be observed in the bonus dates of Donovan, Cesar, Terry, Theo, Luke, Pete and Oz, and Jesse and Hugh.

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REVIEW

**PLEASURE
AND POLICY**

Putting Porn Studies (Back) Into Porn Literacy

CLARISSA SMITH

In June 2020, as part of its online safety provision, the New Zealand government released a one-minute film in which a naked couple arrive at a family home to tell a mother that her son Matt has been watching online porn. The astonished mother is joined by her son as the porn performers, Sue and Derek, outline the differences between porn and “real life.” Explaining that pornography is a performance and that the male star would “never act like that in real life,” they also suggest that porn stars “just get straight to it” because consent is an off-camera matter. Sue and Derek remind mum that it is important to talk to Matt because “he’s just a kid” and “might not know how relationships actually work.” As they leave, mum turns back into the house advising herself, “Okay Sandra, stay calm. You know what to do here.” The film has garnered more than 3 million views on YouTube and was approvingly re/tweeted as “brilliant,” “honest,” “funny,” providing a “perfect” promotion of “porn literacy and online safety.” The broad message, that parents should try to converse with their kids about porn and sex more generally, is welcome.

The advert joins a range of broadcast initiatives intended to tell “the truth” about pornography for young people. Telling the truth about porn could be considered the synopsis of myriad numbers of non-fiction documentary exposes, including those focussed on particular stars such as E!’s *Linda Lovelace* (2000); on



Figure 1.

Sue and Derek outline the differences between porn and “real life.” New Zealand government, “Keep It Real Online—Pornography,” internet safety PSA, 2020. www.keepitrealconline.govt.nz.

a specific film, for example *Debbie Does Dallas Uncovered* (2005); the labour-related specials such as *Hot Girls Wanted* (2015), *After Porn Ends* (2012) or *Hardcore* (2001). My focus here is on the aspects of porn literacy that underpin documentaries aimed at the youth market, such as Channel 4's *Porn on the Brain*, the BBC's *Porn: What's the Harm?* (2014) and, specifically, my example in what follows here, *Porn Laid Bare* (BBC 2017).

Porn Laid Bare (PLB) sent six young people with different attitudes to pornography

“to visit Spain to explore its sprawling adult film industry. Meeting producers, performers, whistleblowers and the police, the group immerse themselves in one of Europe's biggest pornography production hubs where they...confront ugly truths and complex dilemmas. They...discover who makes porn; how they make it; why they make it; and who makes the money. Can the group reconcile what they see with their own values and ethics?” (Goldbart 2019)

Produced by the Connected Set and distributed by Banijay Rights, the three-part documentary was sold into various territories including Italy, Estonia, Poland, Australia, Finland, Canada and Norway (Parker 2019). In this essay, I analyse aspects of this documentary series as a mainstream educational tool, in order to explore some of the limitations of current discussions of “porn literacy.” Porn literacy has been offered as a key means of lessening pornography's supposed harms to young people but, as I will go on to argue, there is little that is very literate in the proposed interventions. Not least because conceptions of porn literacy generally have little relation to the considerable and developing bodies of research and understanding emerging from a dedicated porn studies approach. Perhaps that is something porn scholars ought to be worried about.

Learn to Do Porn Literacy Like a Pro: *Porn Laid Bare*

In what follows I suggest that the narrative made available to viewers of *Porn Laid Bare* is a public form of porn literacy. Obviously a short documentary series cannot be expected to provide a properly educative experience, but television has long played a role as a private resource for education, nowhere more so than on the UK's public broadcaster. The BBC has a particular history of providing education, information and entertainment to its viewers (Nicholas 2014), and its online channel BBC3 (which commissioned and broadcast *Porn Laid Bare*) has particular remit “to bring younger audiences to high quality public service broadcasting” (BBC 2013, 1) and “to knowledge-building factual content by tackling relevant topics in ways that feel different, original and interesting to them” (4). In her book length study, Woods notes how far the image of British youth presented in Youth TV is “framed by a liberal humanist agenda and shaped by emotional engagement” seeking to “present social, political and health-based concerns outside of traditional educational spaces and without showing its institutional hand” (Woods 2016, 146).

That delicate balance is achieved by placing young people and their views at the centre of “emotion-led storytelling” while supplementing the entertainment

by further educational materials on the BBC’s interactive online platforms. Drawing on the confessional and diary modes of “intimate, first-person storytelling” (Woods 2016; Dovey 2013) and with its punning title promising to lay bare both the truth of porn and the innocence of our investigators, it might be easy to dismiss *Porn Laid Bare* as just another instance of what Jane Arthurs labelled “docuporn” or “cheaply produced ‘investigations’ of sexuality” (2004, 94) which reproduce the exploitative elements being “investigated” while providing voyeuristic thrills. However, its intimate address to its target audience (16–34 year olds) viewed as in need of education means the series can be used to illustrate some of the inadequacies of current understandings of porn literacy, precisely because *PLB* is motivated by the same assumptions we see in policy interventions.

The Documentary

Porn Laid Bare follows BBC Three’s tried and tested formula for “peer presenters” including three women in their early 20s: Anna describes herself as feminist and never watches porn for ethical and political reasons. Neelam (described as a Former Heavy User) confesses to overconsumption of porn which meant she experienced physical symptoms of addiction. She is also critical of the representation of minority ethnic groups in porn: “As a woman of colour, I feel like I’ve been fetishised in the porn industry.” Nariece describes Pornhub as her “best friend” and is considering leveraging her amateur filming into a career as a porn performer. The young men comprise Ryan, identified as a Pornstar Superfan who has attended conventions and has met over 300 porn performers; Drew is described as a frequent porn user and enjoys the possibilities that porn offers for exploration of sexuality; Cameron is more ambivalent about his interests in porn—he has understood that porn “isn’t really proper sex and [that he] shouldn’t

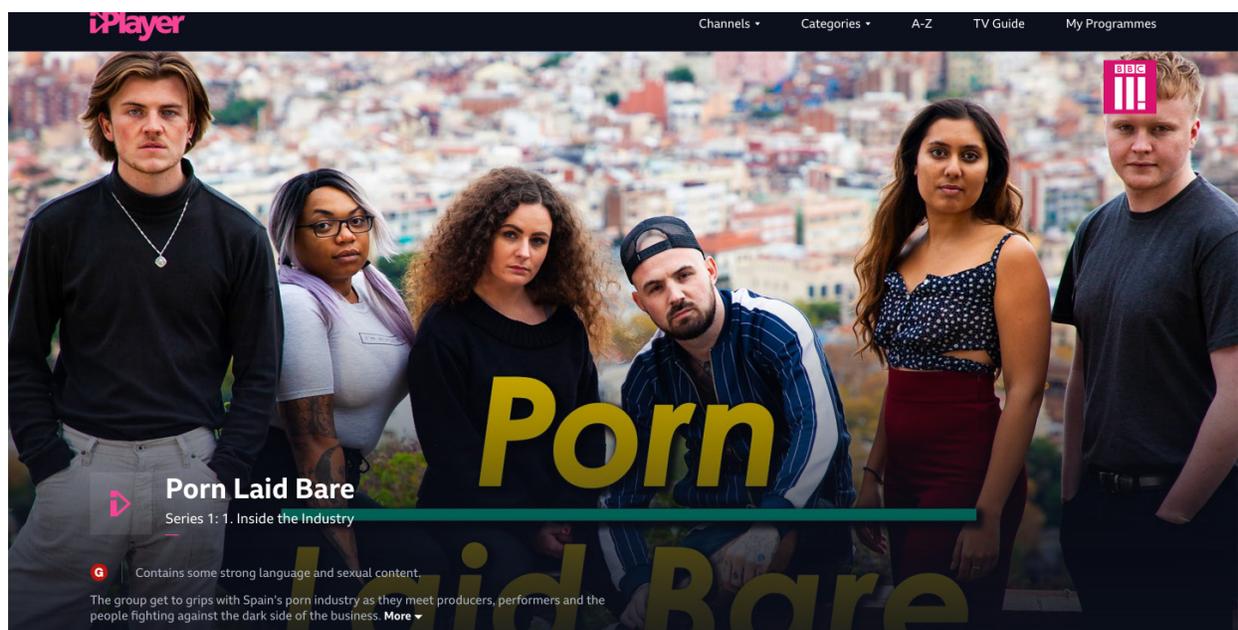


Figure 2.
Six go investigating in Spain, *Porn Laid Bare*.

use it to teach himself about sex”. Thus the six “ordinary” twenty-somethings, with their varied experiences, act as proxies for the BBC Three youth audience and as trusted peer advisors.

In the first episode, “Inside the Industry” the group visit a Cumlouder porn set; meet with a French porn producer and watch filming on a beach; they also visit a porn performer’s home; and, finally, debate the impact of pornography on real-life relationships with an academic. The second episode “Porn on the Brain” takes the group to meet a neuroscientist who tests their levels of arousal to pornography; some of them visit a surgeon to meet a young man having his penis enlarged to emulate the porn star “look”; while Drew and Cameron go to a gay porn set with director Macho Serge. Ryan talks with a psychologist about how porn has “conned him” and the others meet with a porn addict who has joined the No Fap movement. The final episode, “Is This the Future?”, sees the group sit in on a radio interview with feminist anti-porn campaigners. The campaigners introduce them to the Public Disgrace video series and so they return to some of the studios they’d visited previously to ask searching questions about the ethics of some productions. The group also meet Erika Lust to find out what is “ethical porn.” An academic tells them that pornography cannot be improved, but their experiences meeting with a couple, Eze and Jowy, who share videos of themselves on the internet, are described as “beautiful”. Finally, meeting producer Irina Vega, the group is invited to create their own film. Unwilling to participate in actually making a film, Anna proposes attending a march in Madrid to protest violence against women. The group of six amicably splits and just Drew, Ryan and Nariece take part in the porn production, while the others join the march. The episode ends in a series of to-camera explanations of each presenter’s individual sense of growth.

The presenters are, then, witnesses and investigators, off on an adventure in which they will also be investigated—finding out about each other but also about themselves. Positioned in this way as amateur investigators, dressed in their civvies and relating everything to their own experiences, the six are offered to the audience as “just like you,” they are the “guide from the side” rather than the “sage from the stage” (Gray and Bell 2013, 33). This is a strategy for enabling the sense of personal investment in the subject matter, which becomes ever more important as they learn about their own issues, understanding their own growth through examination of the apparent problem of porn. Yet there is little that is particularly new about the approach to understanding pornography underpinning the documentary’s narrative arc. While they engage with different producers whose work appears across analogue and digital platforms, there is little acknowledgement of how dynamic media landscapes have brought change to porn texts nor how that might impact porn consumers (cf. Jenkins 2004, 2). Moreover, the narrative is firmly invested in getting our intrepid reporters to recognizing only the problems of pornography—its bad lessons about sex, and its risks.

In documenting the “sprawling adult industry,” *PLB* introduces us to a number of stock figures, men as producers, women as “casualties”—even where we are



introduced to women who have other positions in porn production, there is little sense that their stories align with or alter the overall narrative of an industry beyond repair. Erika Lust is introduced with scare quotes around her ethical and feminist credentials, and she is asked if she can be trusted. The narrative effectively sidelines a significant number of its protagonists/interviewees in favour of the perception that porn is populated by male producers preying on individual nameless victims, which is amplified by a whistleblower’s accounts of rescue. The gay porn set is recognized as “friendly” and the shibari demonstration in Eze and Jowy’s home is “beautiful” because of its intimacy, but otherwise the motivations of the people they meet are hardly acknowledged. We see performers’ professional work through blurred images of their sexual congress, but viewers are not invited to understand them as either belonging to networks of professionals, nor as possessed of ambition or motivation for their work. Each film set visited is presented as an event at which unrealistic content is being created, motivated only by an interest in capturing novelty for profit.

As an exercise in understanding the porn industry, the documentary series fails on almost every count. Indeed, from the off, it fails to explain what is meant by “The Porn Industry,” compounded as the show progresses to the reduction of *all* pornography as a mode of production and body of texts with a singular political attitude. To illustrate this more concretely, episode one introduced viewers to Rob Diesel at Cumlouder studios—the group really like Rob, responding very positively to everything he has to say about wanting to foster intimacy with his partners in a scene, appreciating his warmth and friendliness, and later joining in enthusiastically on the fringes of the shoot. But in a later episode, they are

Figure 3.
Having fun on the Cumlouder porn set.



horrified to learn that Rob’s filmography includes scenes shot for the online website Public Disgrace. Two campaigners show Anna, Cameron and Neelam scenes filmed in Madrid’s famous Puerta del Sol and Plaza de España in which Rob humiliates his shooting partner as part of, or as a precursor to, sex-in-public. One of the campaigners gesticulates to the families using the square and remarks upon the romance of the setting, then asks the young people “do you think that is right [to film/have sex] in a public space?” Gesturing back to the mobile phone on which the video is playing, she then asks “is this sex?” The guys are in agreement it is not. When they later return to question Rob about his role in the videos, his justifications are silenced by Anna’s insistence that *she* would never ever want to be treated like that. If Rob had a riposte, it doesn’t make the final cut of the documentary. The point has been made...this is a business populated by tricksters.

Yet what do we actually learn about the content Rob is producing or starring in? There is evidently no need to ask Rob about the storied dynamics of the Public Disgrace scenes, because, as has been made clear throughout the documentary, porn has no storyline, no intent to tell a wider narrative. Focusing on the presenters’ visceral responses—the stock in trade of reality TV—their disappointment and disgust in discovering that nice Rob participates in not-nice filming is all that seems to matter here. The juxtaposition of the “bad sex” with families and the romantic setting is then just a matter of our presenters recognising the moral/ethical failings of Public Disgrace. *PLB* certainly isn’t interested in any kind of exploration of the ways in which Public Disgrace might be a meditation on shame or punishment, nor how its narratives might be complexly gendered. A more critically invested

Figure 4.
Discovering Rob isn’t as nice as he seemed.

investigation of Public Disgrace—a long running series produced by the team at Kink.com, trading in the erotics of humiliation and shame—might reveal the politics and histories of the sequestration of sex to the private sphere and their role in fomenting stigma that in turn have produced the models of “degradation,” that then translate into illicit pleasures that can be filmed. And, for all the show’s claims to conduct a deep dive into the industry, there is seemingly no interest in why a US-based production house is filming in Spain. It is through these lacunae that the documentary offers a narrative of continuity between different kinds of productions, to illustrate that all porn production tends towards the grand scheme of “The Porn Industry.”

“The Porn Industry” is of course a selective fiction with no history—its invocation is always accompanied by “key figures” (the Porn Star, the Pornographer) chosen opportunistically, activities selected without regard to establishing typicality or representativeness nor with any particular indication of their objective significance to specific cultures or practices of porn production or consumption. In these modes of uncovering, learning about pornography is dependent on forms of sloppy revelation and amateur exploration of what is a very complex phenomenon. This personalised approach, involving young people visiting workspaces, offers no possibility for an active confrontation of sexual politics and practice. Instead we see that apparently agentless force—“The Porn Industry”—at work, with no sense of the individual or collective struggles over sex that pornography, as text, practice, and the individuals who work within it, has contributed to.

Let’s examine briefly the location for laying porn bare. Spain has been chosen—according to the opening titles of the documentary—because it is a porn production hub. Apparently, in this ‘deep dive’, that is all viewers need to know. Yet there is, of course, a broader and more interesting story which could be told. In Franco’s Spain (1936–1975) porn was illegal. Censorship was relaxed after the dictator’s death, and nudity and sex became ubiquitous in the nation’s cinema. As Daniel Kowalsky reminds us, sexual scenes are so entangled in historical, political and social issues such that nudity and sex “reveal what was always simmering under the surface of *Franquista* repression” (2005, 194) contrasting “sex-in-the-sun breeziness” with “the darker side of sexual obsession, jealousy and dysfunction” (200), and playing “a significant role in the sexual catharsis of a society just released from forty years of dictatorship.” (203) The introduction of the X rating in 1983 saw the further development of pornographic production. And since then, Spain has been central to the development of an alternative pornographic sensibility, even constituting a tradition of production—post-porn,¹ which has attempted to rework pornography in order to de-naturalise sex, “de-centre the spectator” while recognising media and technology as inseparable from sex (Gregory and Lorange 2018, 137). Two key names in the Spanish post-porn movement, Diana Torres and Itziar Ziga, are members of a broader queer trans-feminist movement who emphasise the breaking of public/private boundaries through explicit performance (see Torres’s 2011 manifesto *Pornoterrorismo*). I am not suggesting that all production occurring in Spain has connection to the post-

porn movement but, like the history of fascist censorship and its relaxation, post-porn is a backdrop to the activities examined in *Porn Laid Bare*.

Moreover, there are important questions to ask about Spain's attractiveness to the Swedish Private Media Group, and to British porno-emigres who sought refuge from the UK's tighter laws on production and distribution (Voss 2015). These do have links to the ways in which both Barcelona and Madrid were centres of struggle over sexuality, sexual freedoms and expression. None of this is worthy of inclusion in *PLB*'s deep dive. For *PLB*, people working in porn are simply ciphers—tourist attractions to be gawped at. Who cares what they might want to say about sex and politics, porn production or its audiences? As *PLB*'s story builds to a climax, stories of prostitution and sex trafficking are introduced, a policeman offers anecdotes of “losing the fight” against the pornographers, and thus is the State cast in the role of benign arbiter of what constitutes good sex and good sexual practice.

Are You Sure You Want To Do This?

In a further set of scenes, three of the group travel at night to meet with Torbe—the self-proclaimed “King of Spanish porn”—and to view his porn studio. Torbe shows them around, explaining the intricacies of *bukkake*, demonstrating the glory-hole, then inviting them to view the filming of a gang bang. These scenes most clearly display the voyeuristic impulses of *PLB*, as viewers are treated to a montage of short clips of the naked lower halves of various men, men in balaklavas and masks, milling around in the studio space as they wait for the young woman who will be at the centre of their gang bang. These are also the scenes where



Figure 5.
“You say you’re okay...”

the programme's reductive stance on "understanding pornography" through the emotional responses of the presenters becomes most problematic. Anna speaks to camera to tell us that the men are getting impatient, while Ryan and Cameron pace about exclaiming how horrible the space is, that there is cum everywhere—their disgust is palpable, and I invite you to reflect on the usefulness of that emotion for cueing appropriate audience responses.

Eventually the female performer appears—the presenters ask her how old she is, how has she gotten into this, how long has she been making pornography. Anna asks her directly "Are you sure you want to do this?...Are you absolutely sure?" The young woman assures them she is fine and the gangbang proceeds: long-shots of the action are intercut with close ups on our presenters, recording their emotions as they view. Ryan and Cameron comment that the gang "Doesn't look fun" and that this "is not the environment for a 19-year-old." As time passes Anna makes an intervention, she asks to see the young woman's documentation and she voices her concern that the actress is scared.

Torbe interrupts shooting. The actress says, "Don't bother us with this nonsense" and asserts direct to the documentary camera "I like it!" Then she and Anna have a conversation:

Anna: It's just um...

Actress: It's okay. I like it.

Anna: You say you're okay but I'm just worried that maybe...as a young woman, I'm just worried that em...when we leave you're here and you're the only woman and there's all these men and I'm just worried about you.



Figure 6.
"I'm really worried."

Actress: No, it's okay.

Anna: Is it?

Actress: Yeah! No worry! Don't worry for me!

Anna begins to cry.

Actress: What's up? [Putting her arms around Anna] What's up? No. Don't cry. It's okay. Don't worry.

As she returns to the gangbang, the actress tells the waiting men that “She is worried about me.” The documentary camera cuts back to Anna’s tearful face and in this way, Anna becomes the drama. I am sure Anna’s empathy and her worries at the time of filming were genuine, but in the context of the documentary and its place in that narrative, her solicitude becomes performative, and her tears become the show. As the boys also begin to cry, viewers are offered what Jon Dovey has termed “embodied intimacy” (2000, 57) and to feel their empowering journeys towards the cognitive goal of seeing porn differently, and the behavioral goal of watching less.

As is all too standard in this kind of documentary, the porn performers’ words and perspectives are rendered secondary to the hurt felt by those who are observing on viewers’ behalf. Torbe’s filmset may well be exploitative but these scenes bring their own exploitation of the young Russian woman. As Claire Potter observes, the realities of porn labour are generally rendered invisible: “work on porn sets is usually self-regulated, nonunionized, and without benefits or enforceable industry standards for wages and intellectual property” (Potter 2016, 113). Such a combination of invisibility and opaqueness facilitates exploitative practices while the stigma connected to porn work “makes it difficult for people who are exploited to speak up” (113). There is no doubt that *PLB* allows some performers and producers to speak on their own behalf, but the ways their scenes are presented feeds the stigmatization of both porn labour and the labourers of porn. As Anna, Cameron and Ryan leave Madrid, talking of their “horrific” experience, viewers are left in no doubt that the gangbang scenes are to be read as an investigative exposé of “The Porn Industry”—the dark heart has been revealed. Shot from the presenters’ point of view, our view of the young actress is an objectifying one and, even as she speaks and refuses their rescue, she remains an object of pity and concern.

This exploration needs to end here although there is certainly more I could have drawn attention to: how the “educational journey” narrative (re)produces homeostatic paradigms of male vs female sexuality, and particularly good vs bad girls, while at the same time claiming to be progressive and inclusive; or how “experts” and statistics are used to give a veneer of evidence. But I think I have probably said enough about *Porn Laid Bare*, its disposition and outlook, to give context to the final section of this essay in which I turn to the idea of porn literacy and its uncomfortable negotiations of changing mores and resistance to that change.

Porn Literacy—What Does Porn Studies Have To Do With It?

Albury (2014, 173) identifies two quite distinct discourses of pornography and learning. First, there is “pedagogy about pornography” (critical media literacy skills) and second, “porn as pedagogy” (what pornography teaches about sex and sexuality). The first is problematic because while it encourages young people to critically reflect on porn messages, it does nothing to address why pornography might be exciting or thrilling to consumers, nor does it challenge the heteronormative or gendered elements of sexual cultures (youth or adult) (Albury 2014; Hancock and Barker 2018). And the second highlights that “while many commentators and scholars have acknowledged the educational qualities of pornography, there is no universal consensus as to *what* porn teaches its consumers and *how* it works as an educator” (Albury 2014, 172).

I want to first address that second role—porn as teacher. That pornography offers information to young people is widely accepted (Horvath et al. 2013; Wright et al. 2018), even as debate about the desirability of such information is heated. How far pornography influences the development of young people’s interests in, beliefs about and values towards sex, gender and sexuality is not so well understood (Brown and L’Engle 2009; Byron 2008; Smith 2013; Ybarra, Strasburger and Mitchell 2014). This shouldn’t come as a shock given that, despite the headlines, we have little to no real data about young peoples’ consumption of sexually explicit materials.² While there have been numerous large scale population surveys of young people regarding their use of online environments (for example the UK’s Information Commissioner’s Office/Ofcom report in 2020 and EU Kids Online 2020 are useful explorations of young people’s experiences online), their surveys of young people’s experiences of pornography and what they might acquire from those experiences are not definitive. We also have little robust data on the accessibility and impacts of high-quality sex education. In this context it is difficult to know precisely what young people are learning about sex and from whom.

Research conducted with Irish 18–24 year-olds by Dawson et al. (2019b) found no direct relationship between using pornography as a source of sexual information and satisfaction with school-based sex education or learning about sex. Instead, they found participants dissatisfied with the sex education they were offered; other research in educational settings has also found that sex education as currently taught often fails to enable young peoples’ interrogations and appreciation of intimacies, consent, communication and pleasure regarding not only pornography but also their own experiences of intimate relationships (Fields 2008; Gilbert 2014; Moran 2000). There are numerous practical objections to offering frank sex education for young people and a variety of legal and ethical as well as practical reasons for avoiding discussion about young people’s engagements with pornography (Goldstein 2020; Hancock and Barker 2018; Allen 2011).

Yet the landscape for young people is changing fast—technological developments have changed the ways individuals communicate and connect, as well as new opportunities for intimate practices using technologies. Sex is

increasingly mediated (Plummer 2008, 10) and engaging with porn, whether professionally/amateur or self-produced, takes place as part of a broader set of shifting online practices. No longer identifiable as an entirely separate practice, engaging with porn can encompass a wide range of activities, not just viewing but also producing, sharing, broadcasting and starring in intimate content (Attwood et al 2018; McKee 2016; Tiidenberg & Van der Nagel 2020; Tziallas 2016). Although the pleasures of porn are often considered obvious, audience research indicates that engaging with pornography can be about more than just wanting to get off, young people look to sexually explicit content to communicate about sex and relationships; searching for information and advice; creating, accessing and circulating sexual content online, through social media and through apps; and through each of these exploring their own interests, emotional, physical and sexual (Löfgren-Mårtenson and Månsson 2010; Mulholland 2015; Smith et al. 2015; Attwood et al. 2018).

While young people regard pornography as socially accepted and part of everyday life, (Löfgren-Mårtenson and Månsson 2010; Mulholland 2015) politicians seem to prefer the kinds of inquiry where sexualised imagery and particularly pornography are described as having an inordinate amount of power over young people,³ and in which the youth exposed to such images become products of the environment rather than understood to be actively choosing or rejecting pornography. Evidence to support these concerns is limited, largely based on quantitative studies using cross sectional data which may show a correlation between certain practices and other characteristics or outcomes (see Peter and Valkenberg 2016), but are not able to establish a causal link (or if there were a causal link, its direction) (Orben and Przybylski 2019; Marston 2018). As well as calling for further legal regulation and control of sexualised media, educational interventions are being suggested, particularly forms of porn literacy.

What Is Porn Literacy?

The quite detailed and comparatively measured report from New Zealand's Office of Film and Literature Classification 2018 suggests more research and forms of literacy or awareness education for young people, noting that "[such] programmes teach young people to critically analyse porn as part of a broader programme tackling consent, relationships and sexual violence prevention." (2018, 58) While calls for critical pedagogy around pornography are presented as entirely practical and necessary there is little real sense of what such porn literacy might *actually* entail. The most recent UK Government guidance for teachers offers the following advice for schools with regards to pornography:

Schools should...cover the following content by the end of secondary: pupils should know that specifically sexually explicit material e.g. pornography presents a distorted picture of sexual behaviours, can damage the way people see themselves in relation to others and negatively affect how they behave towards sexual partners. (2019, 28)

That one brief paragraph in a fifty-page document offers the UK's Department for Education's understanding of porn literacy, as if the lessons to be learned *hardly*

need to be spelled out because they are so obvious. As is implied in the guidance above, porn literacy is most often imagined as a form of inoculation—success defined in terms of pupils’ abilities to apply knowledge about what is “real” and what is “fake”; the critical pedagogy predicated on the kinds of research that emphasises “first exposure,” “heavy” consumption levels, “attitudes,” “expectations,” rising rates of depression, failed relationships and difficulties maintaining proper bodily function (Crabbe and Flood 2021; Rothman et al. 2020; Rothman et al. 2018). While some commentators see porn literacy as a “subset of media literacy,” there is rarely any suggestion that porn literacy will include consideration of the ways pornography is a form of media, with its own aesthetics, performance-styles or storytelling.

While some sex education programmes include sessions on pornography, it is unlikely that any school will wish to study sexually explicit materials in depth. Online, more and resources are being made available—some are not bad, some are extremely poor. In the weakest of those programmes, literacy is offered through a combat approach—the need to fight the new drug or to rewire the brain. Alongside the intentions to get kids off pornography, there are some programmes which seek more cognitive outcomes, producing “better consumers of porn”—a more activist consumer position, where they might recognise “ethical,” “fairtrade” or “non-sexist” pornography, able to recognise more appropriate content, and to critique elements of “The Industry” (see the reporting in Jones 2018).

Interestingly, we have been here before (at least in the UK). For some time, media literacy has been declared an important counter to “bad” media messages (whether in mainstream media, videogames or, more recently, fake news), but as David Buckingham has pointed out, such literacy is “more of a rhetorical gesture than a concrete commitment.” (2019, 20) Indeed as the UK government presses forward with its Online Harms agenda, media literacy has been eroded such that it now mainly confined to teaching online safety than exploring and understanding media. And porn literacy shows every sign of taking the same route. Which brings me back to the title of this paper to ask how it has been possible to advocate for porn literacy without recourse to the growing body of work that approaches pornography as a complex media form?

I can’t actually answer that question here! But as I hope I have shown in the exploration of *Porn Laid Bare*, young people learning about pornography is envisaged as a particular kind of learning. And it is not one in which young people are expected to engage in debate, discussion or significant analysis. Instead they are expected to learn a form of public health message which is offered as self-evident and simple, which sees pornography as a text to be transparently interpreted such that the aims and objectives of porn literacy can be achieved in getting students to answer whether what they see in porn is real or not, to confirm they perceive its exaggerations (not all men have big dicks and tits come in all sizes, big and small) and that they’ve understood porn is not a great way to make money. In seeking rejection of porn, or at least awareness that it isn’t realistic, young people are supposedly evidencing critical thinking. Perhaps most striking about some calls for porn literacy are the way they *close down* explorations and

explanations, needing nothing more to be said.

In phrases common to porn literacy presentations—for example, “remember, watching porn isn’t inherently shameful” or “porn changes attitudes towards women”—we see compressed claims whose steps are not specified. People rarely feel the need to add “because...”—the point they are making is to them self-evident. Yet these do in fact need spelling out, not just (but certainly particularly) for young people, because the messaging is confusing. If watching porn isn’t inherently shameful why are kids told that the first issue about pornography is its illegality, or that it has negative impacts? There is a broader and wider set of issues at stake here: adding in a range of comparisons such as “porn sex isn’t real sex” or attempting to distinguish between “true desire and fantasy,” pointing out that ordinary men have smaller penises or that vulvas come in different sizes speaks to sets of concerns that remain unspoken. One is a sort of universal principle: “that all representations are untrue...”. A variant on this hints at porn’s uniquely deceptive characteristics: “young people can’t see beyond the excitements of porn...”. Third, that actions might follow from their naïve engagement with pornography: “they’ll believe this is the way to behave...”; “that they will try out...”, or that “they will fail to establish good, lasting relationships...”. That last points to a longer, overall failure of proper emotional and sexual development because indeed, porn literacy depends quite heavily on the sexual hierarchy of the monogamous relationship (Rubin 1983).

And these are significant and political issues. “Is that real sex?” is a political question—the boundary marking and definition(s) of real sex vs porn sex are purposed towards shaping what young people *ought* to think about sex, not how young people actually *are* in relation to sex; the teaching here is a struggle to control young people and their perceptions of the world. What is the “real sex” that young people are encouraged to assess porn sex against? If sex isn’t meant to be like it is in porn, is that a comment on the raw unpleasantness of sex outside of “properly intimate” relationships, or a condemnation of pornography for including it? Is it a comment on the unlikeliness of pleasure in sex? Or of enthusiasm? What story is being told about “real sex”? It can vary, and there doesn’t seem to be any immediate discursive clues to distinguish them—because of the closure effect of reference to reality—sex is just not like porn.

Literacy programmes are intended to build resistance to influence, to empower young people, to instil responsibility, but are not intended to recognise young peoples’ interests in knowing about sex, or that young people might themselves have experiences and knowledges of pornography that contradict anticipated learning outcomes. Young people are not invited to discuss what must surely be shared practices of pleasure seeking, or to articulate how they might find representations of sex and sexuality as in any sense creative or meaningful beyond messages (McKee 2016). In the UK guidance quoted above there is no sense that there may be any positive impacts or engagements with pornography, instead skills can be measured in how far there is recognition of distortion, damage, and negative behaviours. Exploring what young people are seeking, what they find arousing or pleasurable might reveal how sexual subjectivities

develop and whether/how pornography might act as a resource for framing and articulating subjectivities. Goldstein has suggested that “critical media literacy” is unlikely to get to grips with the complexities and social contingencies of young people’s engagements with pornography (Goldstein 2020), nor is it likely to deliver the “protection of innocence” so desired by anti-porn campaigners. It is not enough to know *what* young people might be viewing, we need to understand the complexities of their developing understandings of sexual subjectivities, particularly but not exclusively in relation to gender, and recognising how the taken-for-granted heteronormativity of public discussions of sex education plays significant role in both the stories about pornography and the stories it tells (Goldstein 2020).

What Could Porn Studies Contribute?

How pornography is named and described is crucial—we have ample proof that it is difficult to move beyond the harms paradigm, worries about unhealthy sexual attitudes or of porn addiction which dominate the headlines. Yet studies of the social and cultural significance of pornography are hardly new. Theories of media representation, production and consumption have all been deployed to analyse and contextualize pornographies in relation to other media genres (Albury 2009; Attwood 2017; Barcan 2002; Jones 2020; McKee 2016), forms and aesthetics (essays in Kerr & Hines 2012; Mercer 2017a, 2017b; Powell 2019; Tiidenberg and Paasonen 2019), exploring production histories (Carter 2018; Newton and Stanfill 2020; Strub 2019), interests among different sexual communities/orientations (Asman 2020; Gilbert 2020; Neville 2018; Robards 2018; Waling et al 2020), and in relation to cultural regulation (Freibert 2019; Stardust 2014) and value (Barker 2014; Ding 2020; Vörös 2015). Porn studies have found that porn is indeed often formulaic, sometimes ritualistic; its characters, events, locations, actions, interactions are often repetitious (Maina and Zecca 2016; Mercer 2017; Williams 1989; Zecca 2017) but recognising that also means recognising the insider knowledge possessed by those who consume porn. It also points to various tastes in pornography, how and why do individuals like different forms of porn: what are they looking for, what conventions speak to their interests? What sparks pleasure, what sparks excitement in viewing, what sparks disgust, or boredom.

The digital age also means being cognisant of the changing ways in which pornography is encountered. While groups like Exodus Cry identify Pornhub as the major source of pornographic content, it is also clear that pornography exists in other spaces and in various forms (Brennan 2018; Hester et al. 2015; Keen 2016; Saunders 2019; Tziallas 2016). How are consumers targeted in different spaces? How often are they watching content that is generated by users? In which case, what are the meanings and pleasures being generated in digital user-generated productions (TikTok, GIFs, etc.)? With the increasing importance of sites such as OnlyFans, and the forms of intimacy they offer, it is useful to consider how conceptions of authenticity/realness etc. circulate in mainstream media cultures as well as pornography. Examinations of the “infrastructures of intimacy” (Paasonen 2018) afforded by digital/mobile technologies are at the centre of

debates about “de-platforming” of sex in academia (Tiidenberg and Van der Nagel 2020), the media (Dickson 2021; Holmes 2021), as well as those communities of sex workers, artists and activists directly affected (Blogger on Pole 2020). “Deplatforming” is not just about sex (for instance, Twitter’s recent deplatforming of Donald Trump) but has been deployed against sex (as practice, as pleasure, and as work) by conservative campaigners. Young people certainly need to acquire and develop critical understanding about how pornography might work, but this is no different to their need for critical understanding of all activities online.

Of course it is difficult to bring pornography into the classroom (Allen 2006), particularly as young people are not legally permitted to view porn (Albury 2014) but there are other means by which the significances of adult material can be explored. For instance, young people could be invited to think about the contexts of sexual representation, recognising that pornography is not a separate sphere of representation but belongs to a continuum of image-making in which bodies and movement, sexual feeling and dramas of desire are performed (Arthurs 2004; Attwood 2017). They could be encouraged to explore how pornography is defined, represented and debated in public spaces, and by whom? (Cole 2014; Jones 2016; Needham 2018; Paasonen et al. 2019) What kinds of regulation are promoted and who might benefit from that, who might not? (Nair 2010; Petley 2014; 2016; Pilpets and Paasonen 2020; Stardust 2014; Tiidenberg and Van Der Nagel 2020) How might existing audience research illuminate the significance of sexual representations in everyday life (Asman 2020; Attwood et al. 2018; Macleod 2020; Scarcelli 2015; Smith et al. 2015) and what conversations might such work spark for young people regarding their own interests? Getting students to think about the controversies ignited around some forms of representation over others, and how those play into particular political and cultural worries in order to challenge assumptions about content, contexts, working practices, etc. Media studies has long asked difficult questions about working practices in the creative industries but does so without homogenising entire areas of production as all tended towards a singular outcome, similar engagements with the production contexts of pornography might be usefully attempted (Berg 2016, 2021).

Young peoples’ interests in pornography (indeed everyone’s interests in porn), their attitudes and habits of use are developed outside of educational settings. The kinds of education that focus on abstinence from porn or on rejecting its enjoyment are unlikely to impact on anyone already engaged in viewing porn. Understanding pornography—as texts and as practices—is a dynamic process (whether you are a researcher or a teen encountering sexually explicit imagery for the first time), reducing it to “facts” to be learned is not at all helpful, except to fuelling the stigma already so well entrenched in culture. Indeed, research by Dawson et al. suggests that young people want porn literacy interventions to “center on reducing shame” (2019c, 10)—not increase it!

Porn literacy requires understanding how pornography relates to mainstream culture, gender and sexual politics, recognising industry practices, histories, aesthetics, performance styles are neither unitary nor transparent. Creating educational resources will require reflexive and ethical approaches which

crucially engage with a broad range of experiences from within porn production. Engaging with audiences or consumers of porn requires recognising that we are not simply determining the effects of their consumption—literacy is not about simply seeking evidence or signs that audiences of porn have been only adversely affected by what they have seen. Calls for education about pornography based on those concerns should be avoided—porn literacy will not deliver self-regulation, it won't lessen the appeal of porn as fun, disgusting, escape or as a form of sex education. It won't deliver better attitudes towards women, or see a decrease in anal sex, it won't lessen the incidence of rape or violence against women. Porn literacy needs to be conceived of as more than a behaviour modification therapy. The task will be difficult and complicated, young people need to understand their own interests in sexual representations, how those interests and representations knock up against other orientations and motivations, and how representations of sex circulate within the wider spheres of entertainments. We need to give young people the tools to think more complexly about the experiences, practices, codings (and moral codes) of mediated sex, on-and offline, and how they, themselves, participate in those spaces.

Notes

1. The post-porn movement originated in the USA during the mid-1980s and has been particularly active in Europe throughout the 1990s and 2010s. See Tim Stutgen, ed. (2010). *Post/Porn/Politics*. Berlin: B books.
2. One project estimated that as much as 83–100% of male and 45% to 80% of female adolescents' have viewed pornography—although frequency of viewing could vary from only once ever, to daily (Horvath et al. 2013); while another found that 71% of male and 40% of female adolescents had seen some form of pornography (Valkenburg and Peters 2006). The problem is that we haven't actually learned very much in either of those—how many view daily? How many have only ever encountered pornography once? Did they make conscious decisions not to engage again? What are the forms of porn these teens have seen?
3. The preferred mode of research for policymakers seems to be the Rapid Evidence Assessment. At least twenty such reviews of the extant literature on young people and media have been undertaken in the past fifteen years, considering topics including pornography and sexual content, sexualisation, and commercialisation (see APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls 2007; Bailey 2011 [and the critique in Barker and Duschinsky 2012]; Papadopoulos 2010; Horvath et al. 2013; Buckingham et al. 2010; Livingstone and Mason 2015). These are areas in which values often drive the research agenda and it matters very much for whom and why the review has been commissioned.

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Crossovers and Consent

Underlying Assumptions in Porn Health Protocol

VALERIE WEBBER

At the 2019 Adult Video News (AVN) convention, the Free Speech Coalition—a porn industry trade association—organized a panel on HIV stigma and prevention. The goal was to review advances in HIV science and how these might impact on-set HIV prevention. Key topics covered were PrEP (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis, a drug regimen to prevent HIV acquisition) and the principle of U=U (Undetectable = Untransmittable; that is, HIV+ people with a suppressed viral load are not infectious). Tension was palpable during the event, and there was a great deal of controversy in its wake. Attendees were divided on if and how these advances should impact the way on-set prevention is handled. Discussion of hypothetical changes to the current straight-industry protocols set Twitter aflame with gossip, fear, and outrage.

Health research about porn typically focuses on the potential porn has to influence viewers' sexual health behaviours (e.g. Harkness et al. 2015; Lim et al. 2016). Rarely do the health practices used in porn production itself become the object of inquiry. The porn industry, as Heather Berg and Constance Penley describe it, is not some “monolithic, static, or internally consistent body” but rather made up of “dynamic networks of workers, management, and institutions that take part in the production process of adult film” (Berg and Penley 2016, 160). These industry networks have always expressed an interest in ensuring worker health and safety. But as the AVN panel demonstrated, they do not always agree upon the best way to do so. All film production entails an on-screen/off-screen compromise between the envisioned final product and performer needs and capacities. Porn production offers fertile ground for investigating this tension between the ambitions of art/commerce and the protection of worker health. The “use” of porn, in this instance, is that it brings into relief broader assumptions around what a worker is, who is responsible for them, and what those responsibilities should entail.

In this paper, I suggest that the notion of consent acts as the basis for sexual health protocol in mainstream straight porn production. I further suggest that this is problematic, and demonstrate alternative policy visions offered by gay and queer production procedures. After a brief description of my methods, I sketch the porn industries with which my research deals. I then evoke the controversial figure of the “crossover” performer (cismen working in both gay and straight porn) to illustrate the role played by choice and bodily autonomy in conversations about porn health protocol. An emphasis on informed consent, I argue,

presupposes three questionable interrelated assertions: that workers' bodies are discrete, individualized, immunological entities; that some form of asymmetry between these workers is required to determine occupational health and safety rights and responsibilities; and that in the absence of some other asymmetry, the ableist protection of a "clean" (i.e. pathogen-negative) body is imposed, with discriminatory implications. I then look to differences in how gay and queer porn productions operate to suggest other approaches.

Methods

This paper draws on my PhD research, which applies critical interpretive medical anthropology to the politics of occupational health protocols in pornography. I have been involved in the porn industry since 2002 and official data collection for this project was conducted between 2016 and 2020. This included participant observation on four film sets in the United States, at eleven major industry events (trade shows, award shows, and film festivals) in Canada, the United States of America, and Germany, and online (e.g. Twitter, key industry media outlets and newsletters, etc.). I conducted forty unstructured interviews, primarily with current performers and performer/producers, but also with directors, marketing and tech professionals, and lawyers working with adult industry clients. I transcribed interviews verbatim, returned them to participants so they could review and edit if desired, and thematically coded all by hand. This research received ethical approval from Memorial University (file #: 20180439-ME).

It is common to impose a pseudonym upon participants to protect their confidentiality, particularly when they are framed as "vulnerable" by some outside institution, as is often the case with research dealing in sex (Irvine 2012; Webber and Brunger 2018). However, this denial of authorship can be an expression of undue paternalism (Gustafson and Brunger 2014). My consent process explicitly asked participants how they wanted to be cited in related publications. Many chose to be identified, as they wished to be credited for their thoughts and ideas. Direct quotes are therefore cited with the name, stage name, or pseudonym of the participants' choosing. Some quotations have been lightly edited for readability.

An Industry Sketch

Historically the porn industry has been concentrated in California, largely due to legal and infrastructural factors. A 1988 California Supreme Court decision, *California v. Freeman*, legalized pornography production in the state (Shachner 2014, 350), and Hollywood offers all the necessary film production resources (Sullivan and McKee 2015, 36). The industry has decentralized in recent years due to factors such as rising production costs, falling profits, and a general increase in mobile and "gig" economic structures, combined with the development of technological platforms that support independent production and dissemination. Additionally, Measure B, which mandates condom use in LA County, has led to out-migration of production (Berg and Penley 2016; Sullivan and McKee 2015). Nevertheless, California continues to play a central role in the global industry both ideologically, as the apex of the porn imaginary, and materially, as the site

of important institutions like major production companies, trade associations, health and community services, and media and award show outlets. Throughout the 2000s and to some degree today, the California landscape can generally be divided into two primary sectors: the “straight” industry concentrated in Southern California (mainly Los Angeles and the San Fernando Valley) and specializing in heterosexual content, which includes some “girl-girl” and transwomen content; and the gay, queer, and kink industries located more in Northern California and the San Francisco Bay area (Tibbals 2012, 233–36).

Therefore, the industry is often spoken of in binary terms, having a “gay side” and a “straight side”. The two sides have adopted different safer sex protocols. The “straight side” relies largely on STI and HIV testing according to “PASS” standards (Performer Availability Screening Services), a database service operated by the Free Speech Coalition¹ since 2012 (following the closure of a similar system, Adult Industry Medical, that operated from 1998 to 2011; Shachner 2014, 352–59). The PASS protocol mandates that in order to perform, talent must have tested negative for HIV RNA, Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C, syphilis, trichomoniasis, gonorrhea, and chlamydia, within the preceding fourteen days. At the time of writing, performers could avail themselves of services at approximately 500 draw centres linked to one of three private labs participating in the PASS network (at a cost of about \$140 to \$280 USD, usually paid by the performer). Producers can then access the third-party PASS database, and while they cannot see a performer’s full test results, they will see a green or red check, indicating that a performer either does or does not have a current negative test on file. Some sets may also use condoms, and some performers may elect to take PrEP, but these are not standard practice. If a performer ever tests HIV+, they are barred from using the PASS system in the future.

For the “gay side”, on the other hand, things are generally less standardized, as it is more common to use some combination of testing, condoms, and/or PrEP. Some gay productions use condoms with no testing while others use testing and no condoms. PrEP is used widely by HIV negative performers, and some productions may not use testing or condoms. HIV+ performers are not uncommon, given that contemporary anti-retrovirals make it relatively easy to achieve an undetectable viral load, impeding transmission of the virus (Eisinger, Dieffenbach, & Fauci 2019). The PASS system is used by some studios, typically those whose parent company also owns major straight studios and has standardized sexual health protocols across all brands. But since PASS excludes anyone who has ever tested positive for HIV, many gay studios do not opt in (Clark-Flory 2019).

Much debate over health in porn—and the crux of the controversy surrounding the AVN panel—has been over the relative risk of working with those often disparagingly referred to as “crossover” performers: cismen who perform with both ciswomen in straight porn and other cismen in gay porn (whether or not working with transwomen makes someone crossover seems to be in flux at the moment, as porn centring transwomen shifts from a marginal “fetish” category to a mainstream straight market).

Some performers believe that working with these men represents a greater risk of contracting HIV on set, assuming that cismen who work with other cismen engage in sexual activity and/or drug use that makes them more likely to come into contact with HIV. This issue intensified following the tragic death of performer August Ames in 2017, who died by suicide after being met with criticism for tweeting that she would not work with a man who had performed in gay porn (Horn 2017). Occupational health has proven a perennial and divisive topic ever since.

The decision not to work with crossover talent is framed as a matter of health management and risk reduction. The argument is that men who have sex with men are more likely to have HIV, so avoidance is not indicative of homophobia or discrimination but rather a statistical risk calculation. For example, when Ames was rebuffed for her initial tweet, she responded:

NOT homophobic. Most girls don't shoot with guys who have shot gay porn, for safety. That's just how it is with me. I'm not putting my body at risk, i don't know what they do in their private lives. [@AugustAmesxxx, December 3 2017]

Challengers of this position point out that anyone working on a straight set has to go through the PASS system regardless. Performer Adela put it succinctly in our conversation:

If we put faith in the testing system, then that's it. It doesn't matter if someone does crossover porn, it doesn't matter if someone escorts. It doesn't matter. We accept that the testing protocol we've established is going to protect us based on the science behind it.

Performers also point out that we rarely know much about the private sex lives of the people we work with. As Charlotte Sartre, who was on the AVN panel in question, told me:

You can't limit like, "oh I'm not gonna fuck *this* type of or *this* class of performer who's done this because I'm taking a calculated risk". We have no idea what anybody's doing off camera. Anytime you have your scene partner's test in your hand, you're taking it at face value. But the fact is, you just don't know what actually has gone on.

Adela and Charlotte acknowledge that it is impossible for scene partners to know one another's risk profiles with total transparency. For them, PASS testing operates as a rigorous barometer. Other performers, however, express doubt: the PASS system tests for HIV using the viral RNA test rather than the antigen/antibody test (Ag/Ab). Some fear that HIV+ performers with an undetectable viral load could "slip through" unbeknownst to their scene partners, appearing to be HIV negative on paper but in fact carrying the virus. As with the rationale behind the criminalization of HIV non-disclosure, these performers argue that informed consent requires certain knowledge of their scene-partners' HIV status, because otherwise relevant risk-assessment information is missing. Failure to obtain informed consent, the argument goes, is tantamount to sexual assault. This subset of performers demanded that the Ag/Ab test be added to PASS protocol, so that anyone who had ever tested positive for HIV would be detected regardless of their

viral load. This would expose invisible infections, perform the work of disclosure, and ensure fully informed consent is possible.

Requiring an Ag/Ab test, or simply refusing to work with crossover talent, are both presented as expressions of one's right to exercise bodily autonomy. Or rather, that bodily autonomy is an occupational right that can be *secured* through the disclosure of certain kinds of information. Tweets in this vein focus on how performers have “the right to decide what I allow with my body” [@APAGunion, April 24, 2018], sometimes including hashtags like #mybodymychoice [@alanaevansxxx, January 23, 2018]. Similar sentiments were expressed in interviews I've conducted, including one with performer Jasmine Lefleur who said, “I didn't agree with the statement that August Ames made, but I respected her opinion and what she said because it is our bodies and it's her choice.”

The precedence of personal choice stems partly from a liberal sex worker rights movement deeply invested in the neoliberal rhetoric of choice. Mainstream sex worker movements have often attempted to justify sex work by positioning it as “legitimate” work that, when *chosen*, is personally satisfying and fulfilling (Berg 2014).² Additionally, however, is the fact that the only framework available for thinking about how to choose individuals to perform sex acts with has been borrowed from a recreational sexual consent model. Necessarily so: there is no model of consent specifically designed around sexual labour wherein all involved parties are labourers (and not clients); there is no specific framework to address sexual labour gone wrong (what we might call “breaches of contract” in other domains). Sexual consent becomes the default criteria. Is this problematic?

Karla O'Regan undertakes a genealogy of consent, illustrating how the concept is presumed ahistorical and self-evident. Debate about consent tends to focus on if and how it can be communicated, rather than on what it actually *is*. The “content of consent,” O'Regan writes, “is left to presumptions about its heralded foundations in personal autonomy and free action” (O'Regan 2020, 7). Understood as an expression of individual autonomy, the idea of consent is invested in preserving and idolizing the myth of a universal, “individualized agency” that ignores and obscures social inequalities (7). I suggest that because of its presumed foundation in autonomy, recreational sexual consent is not an appropriate basis for ethical occupational health practice. As the following sections argue, the very notions of informed consent and bodily autonomy fail to appreciate the reality of material bodies. A consent model also invokes ableist solutions to the ways that occupational health typically distributes rights and responsibilities. By failing to adapt to the unique dilemma posed by workplace sex, this solution risks ostracizing the very performers that health policies are intended to protect. I now address these three issues in turn.

Discrete Bodies

“A challenge for HIV prevention” writes Mark Davis, is “its reliance on individualised action that does not address the ‘we’ of sexual practice and therefore joint action” (Davis 2008, 190). Sex, and therefore sexual health, is a collective project. Like all viruses, bacteria, and parasites, STIs connect bodies,

even those that don't touch directly. They have a way of revealing the inherent *we-ness* of even the most ardently individualized lives. Lotus Lain cut to the heart of this reality while talking with me about how some performers avoid working with crossover talent as part of their sexual health plan:

[I don't understand] that whole sense of security that people give themselves when they put barriers in front of working with "crossover" talent. Because my argument to that is always: what is it when you're doing a threesome, or a gangbang? Or those double anal penetration or double pussy penetration scenes? Is that not literally a crossover scene happening right there in the very same vagina holes? Or anus holes?...[Even] if you're not working with crossover, if you're not doing those kinds of scenes, even if you're just doing one-on-one, boy/girl sex, who's to say that girl didn't just do a scene with someone that does crossover work? Or did a scene with a girl who does scenes with crossover? Like, we're all connected.

Here Lotus points out how any decision that treats one's own body and the bodies of scene partners as discrete entities ignores the *inextricability* of one performer from another. Margaret Little (1999) has pointed out the fallacy of discourse based on "the premise that people are physically demarcated" (295). While she was writing about abortion rhetoric, I would argue that sex work similarly:

asks us to face the morality and politics of intertwinement and enmeshment with a conceptual framework that is...poorly suited to the task. A tradition that imagines persons as physically separate [doesn't] do well when analyzing situations in which persons aren't as it imagines them. (297)

When it comes to thinking about sex and consent, the notion of autonomy has sometimes been swapped out for the idea of "bodily integrity" because, as Matthew Wait (2007) writes, "autonomy" falsely treats bodies as "nothing more than the vehicles through which mentally formulated choices by people of full capacity are realised" (Wait 2007, 108). But while the shift to "bodily integrity" might avoid certain assumptions around agency, it retains other assumptions around wholeness: "such a shift ignores, or discounts, the fact that human beings lack the very bodily integrity which is justification for that shift" (109–110). The notion of bodily autonomy has important symbolic value that is crucial to honour when grappling with best practices around disclosure and consent. But the idea of discrete bodies has little *material* value. Bodies are porous. There are no decisions, no disclosures, that can socially detach the body and render it impermeable.

There exist many critiques of individualism—both the mythical ideal itself, and the ethnocentric binarism with which it is contrasted to the notion of humans as relational beings or "dividuals" (Smith 2012)—and of the idea that autonomy is absolute and universal, versus being a set of inherently constrained choices. I am far from the first to suggest that "bodily autonomy" is not an ideal foundation for ethical decision-making and political practice. In this instance, however, it is not just sexual consent that is at stake, but also work. Does the context of *work* change things? Does the permeability of bodies matter differently when sex is work, and if so, how should this be reflected in occupational health and safety policy? For the work context invites additional questions around responsibility: who is

responsible for who, and what rights do people have to secure an income? Most critiques of consent focus on a “reformulation (and expansion) of the procedural requirements of consent, thus leaving its foundations in autonomy intact” (O’Regan 2020, 10). What might be true were we to renounce this foundation in autonomy? Are there instances where one’s right to have work should override someone else’s right to reject scene partners in the name of autonomy?

The question is uncomfortable, because when we consider it in terms of recreational sex, people should obviously be entitled to select their sex partners according to whatever criteria they like, no matter how racist, homophobic, ableist, or otherwise problematic it might be. In recreation, this means some people might be refused sex, but in porn production, this means that some people are refused work. Is the inability to secure employment a different kind of issue than the inability to secure recreational sex, and is that cause for concern? Yes, it is, when we take up the position of those who are edged out of the performer pool.

Some people should be edged out: those who act disrespectfully towards scene partners and repeatedly violate their boundaries. The industry has regularly grappled with how to call out performers who exhibit a track record of abusive conduct. Lacking more formal grievance procedures, performers’ individual “no” lists (which name specific performers people refuse to work with) are one of the best ways that talent can exert power to remove people from the pool. The experience of a bodily boundary violation at work can feel indistinguishable from the experience of a boundary violation in one’s private sex life, and consent (however inadequate) is the framework we have to think through that experience.

The type of rejection that concerns me, and to which “bodily autonomy” is perhaps improperly applied, is the universal rejection of a *type* of performer because of their real or imagined pathogen status, especially when there are alternative ways to manage safer sex that would enable those people to work without posing exceptional risk to their scene partners. Application of the logic of sexual consent, not just to sexual acts that constitute a breach of contract (i.e. the performance of sex acts different from what performers agreed upon, or which did not stop when safe words or other indicators were used) but to STI and HIV testing and disclosure mandates, broadens the impact of individual consent in important ways. If crossover performers are refused work based on stigma or generalizations about HIV, despite there being no actual risk of transmission, do they have a right to claim labour discrimination? Not according to a consent-based occupational health logic. Why not? Partly because of how occupational health and safety policies are typically structured, to which I now turn.

Asymmetry

Occupational health and safety has traditionally depended on asymmetry between workers/clients or employers/workers to determine who is responsible for whom and the direction of liability. Workplace safety either a) regulates conduct between providers and clients, where the provider is burdened with the task of ensuring a safe environment or procedure for the client (e.g. restaurant food safety, aesthetician services, or health care practices), or b) regulates contact

between workers and certain substances or conditions, where the employer is burdened with ensuring workers are safe (e.g. procedures to protect against contamination by toxic chemicals, the risks of using dangerous equipment, or exposure to environmental harms in the workplace). In both instances, a hierarchy is assumed or imposed. One entity is responsible for conducting certain practices or procedures that protect another; the protective relationship is not reciprocal.

Porn production, however, is different. While direct service sex work like dancing or escorting can be plugged into the asymmetry framework, porn performance entails protecting performers from one another.³ This means regulating a *symmetrical* relationship. If both workers are simultaneously the person to be protected and the potential source of danger, what does this do to our traditional understanding of occupational health? Who is burdened with ensuring worker safety? How, in this instance, might occupational health protocols discriminate against the very workers they are supposed to protect? Here we have entered a tricky ethical conundrum where we must balance multiple kinds of rights between equivalent workers. When sexual performance is our source of livelihood, economic justice and fair hiring practices must reside, no matter how uncomfortably, alongside matters of consent and bodily autonomy.

Claims of possible job discrimination are usually met with the defense that informed consent on the part of pathogen-negative performers takes precedence over any rights on the part of positive performers. As Eric, who directs for gay companies, told me:

Personally, I think the entire industry should be tested only. The real conflict comes from how the gay industry allows so many HIV+ performers to work, which I have a problem with. But I have to suppress that opinion when working in that environment. It's an unpopular opinion. They see it as job discrimination. I see it as seeking a healthy work environment.

Later, he conceded a more nuanced approach: "The HIV+ guys can work together, and if somebody wants to work with an HIV+ performer they can sign the release. No problem. It's not about discrimination. It's about providing a safe and informed workplace."

Eric's two philosophies—that no workplace is safe if HIV+ performers are present, or that HIV+ performers can work safely contingent on legalistic standards of informed consent—demonstrate how consent is stretched to fit different scenarios, while maintaining its foundation in a particular sense of autonomy. It is difficult to imagine otherwise. An intriguing alternative was raised by Charlotte Sartre, as we discussed the possibility of undetectable (and therefore non-infectious) HIV+ performers "passing" a PASS test and being cleared to work in straight porn:

The way I see it, if somebody takes the test, the next day they go to work with me. I don't know this person. Their test says negative. If they're undetectable, I end up not getting HIV and I never really find out that they had HIV, how is that hurting me? If anything, I would be more burdened with the information and the fear.

Charlotte offers a perspective where an HIV negative person's right to certain information does not override a non-infectious HIV+ person's right to work. This defies the pathogenic asymmetry that typically structures porn health policy, whereby protection (symbolic or otherwise) of STI negativity takes unquestioned precedence over any competing worker rights. I explore this issue more in the next section.

The Morality of Negativity

In order to establish the kind of asymmetry that simplifies the distribution of occupational health rights and responsibilities, STI negativity and positivity are positioned in hierarchical opposition to one another. Pathogen-negative persons are the object of protection; or rather, negative persons are the only one's able to be protected, inasmuch as a (real or presumed) positive person is beyond protection—they have already fallen victim to the target of protection. This presumption takes for granted that the only acceptable goal of occupational health is to identify and reject those with a positive status so as to maintain a worker's negative status, and where the preservation of pathogen-negativity is prioritized over any other needs that pathogen-positive workers might have.

It is crucial here to recognize that many performers and activists would like to see PASS, or some parallel program, include HIV+ performers so that they could avail of an equally structured system of STI and viral load testing. This idea was floated hypothetically at the AVN panel discussed at the outset of this paper and is what provoked the massive negative response. That some HIV negative performers would consent to work with HIV+ performers is seen by many as reckless and delusional, because consent, while ostensibly ensuring personal freedom, actually entails “a series of unspoken presumptions about what is ‘normal’ human behaviour,” such that “the availability of consent hinges on the ‘reasonableness’ of the defendant's⁴ conduct” (O'Regan 2020, 5–6).

The emphasis on maintaining pathogen-negativity serves many ends. For one, it offers a defense against governmental and non-profit entities that try to regulate (or some would argue, stifle) porn production via health policy. As performer Courtney D told me:

Performers with HIV are treated with a mixture of a bogeyman, *ew gross* kind of thing, as well as a bit of “this gives us a bad name, having performers with HIV”... There's so much pressure from political organizations that are trying to commute the spread of HIV within the adult industry that it seems like in order to be taken seriously within that debate, the industry has to position itself also against performers with HIV.

Because of pornography's precarious social and legal standing, the industry is pressured into taking an abolitionist stance to HIV in order to ward off groups like the AIDS Healthcare Foundation and various California public health departments. These organizations have repeatedly lobbied to impose health policies that are not informed by current porn professionals, but rather modelled off of healthcare blood borne pathogen protocol and completely incompatible with porn production. The industry has argued that external regulation is

unnecessary given the success of their voluntary, self-regulatory measures, with the PASS system lauded for its rigor and effectiveness. Free Speech Coalition press releases regarding health issues in the industry often remind readers, in some variation or another, that “[t]he adult film industry has not seen an on-set transmission of HIV on a PASS-regulated set in over a decade” (FSC 2018) or “we have not had a transmission of the [human immunodeficiency] virus on a PASS-compliant set since 2004” (FSC 2019).

In this way, the industry has positioned itself as not only *not* irresponsible, but as setting an enviable standard for sexual health that is far superior to what external agencies suggest or what the average civilian does. The frequency, transparency, and effectiveness of PASS testing protocol is exceptional, and deserves the accolades it receives. Most of the performers I spoke with, whether they had access to PASS or not (draw centres are scarce throughout Canada, non-existent in Europe, and, where they exist, prohibitively expensive for many lower-earning or part-time performers) considered PASS an ideal system and a worthy model. The key critiques, when present, were that a) the cost usually falls upon performers, b) that site-specific swabbing is unavailable or costs extra, enabling the undetected spread of certain STIs, and c) that window periods (the period of infectivity between contraction and detectability) always present a risk beyond mitigation. Otherwise, most people felt that PASS strikes the correct balance between enabling the work to be done effectively within an acceptable level of risk. Indeed, many of the performers I spoke with said they prefer to only have sex with other porn performers, believing these individuals are more risk-aware and conscious of their sexual health:

We’re tested every fourteen days. That is literally twenty-three more times than the average American. *If* that person makes it to their yearly physical. I have met tons of people that haven’t been to the doctor in years. That scares me because they have no idea what their status is.... I don’t hook up with people outside of the porn industry because I’m terrified. And I’m not the only one. There’s many performers that know: if you go out into the wild, you will come back with something. [Ash Hollywood]

Or as Chanel Preston said “the reality is most performers I know care about their health more than other people, and they’re more aware of it, and a lot of them don’t even have intercourse with people outside of the industry just out of fear that they’re the ones that are gonna give them an STD.”

Online, performers also promote the notion of the porn industry as a sexual health role model. They often mention PASS protocol in media interviews to counter mainstream assumptions about pornography production. For example, veteran performer Nina Hartley told the Huffington Post: “I have had over 165 negative HIV and STI tests...I have been tested every three to four weeks for the last twelve years. How many people out there actually know their HIV status? Testing works for us, and condoms work for outsiders” (Williams 2012). Many performers also tweet when they have just been tested. Certainly, this is a form of promotion, indicating their availability to work with the goal of obtaining bookings, but many also take the opportunity to advocate for testing, using

hashtags (some more problematic than others) like #knowyourstatus, #healthfirst, #stdfree, and #teamclean.

Finally, some performers explained that PASS protocol now informs how they conduct their personal sex lives. For example, Delirious Hunter told me:

I feel [working in porn] is actually much safer than just meeting someone at a club or anything like that. It's even changed my negotiations with friends.... Now whenever I look at a partner, it's like "ok, here's the deal, you have to get tested and if you want to continue playing, you must continue to keep up on the testing. Because I am not gonna let you fuck up my life".... I don't have a lot of trust in other people. And I also don't trust when, even some friends just saying, "oh, well let me just go to my doctor and I'll give you a paper copy." I'm like "nope, Talent Testing has a civilian version, it's called I Know My Status.com".

I Know My Status refers to a testing service powered by Talent Testing Services, which was at the time of writing the largest and most popular lab network participating in the PASS system. They launched www.iknowmystatus.com for civilians, with the telling catch phrase, "Test Like a Porn Star". Their advertising uses "testing like a porn star" as short-hand for rapid, reliable, high-tech testing. This capitalizes on the idea that porn performers achieve the height of sexual responsibility.

In many ways, this label is well deserved: the PASS protocol has done a commendable job of preventing HIV and other STI transmissions on-set. Frequent testing and disclosure are sensible occupational health protocols, and it makes sense that performers want to work in conditions that minimize their risk of STIs and HIV. For many, it is an obvious material truth that being pathogen-negative, if possible, is preferable to being pathogen-positive: symptoms can be uncomfortable and painful, including the structural symptoms of living in an ableist, pathogen-moralizing society. When the porn industry responds to accusations of sexual "irresponsibility" *within the terms of debate* set by critics, however, it perpetuates those same structural symptoms and makes no allowance for workers with current or incurable STIs or HIV. As an industry advocate, I participate in this defense myself; mainstream antagonists don't leave us much choice. But the wider implication of this defense is that it can limit the conversation of sexual ethics to "being responsible," and equate "responsibility" with the maintenance of a pathogen-free body/work setting (versus advocating for other kinds of harm reduction that could enable STI and HIV infected people to work).

The imperative to be negative can be read as a form of ableism, inasmuch as it normalizes and prioritizes a (real or imagined) pathogen-free body and buttresses discrimination against certain sexual subjects. Is there a way to enable workers to take occupational health precautions as they see fit without reinforcing STI stigma, and without limiting the possibilities for "healthy" (read: "rational") sex and safer sex options? Referring to the practices of gay and queer porn productions, as I do in the next section, offers some alternatives.

Explicit Access

While perceived promiscuity and HIV risk is precisely a common point of stigmatization for both sex workers and gay communities, the debate over crossover talent is framed by some as a clash between sex worker and gay politics. In a new iteration of the disconnect between gay and sex worker movements, “gay rights” were seen by many as a threat to the health of (straight, female) porn performers. As Becki L. Ross (2018) writes, gay men and sex working women share many of the same oppressive forces and political goals, since both “homosexuality and prostitution were administered by medico-moral authorities as sources of maladjustment, degeneration, and threats to the health of the white-settler nation” (257). Additionally, both

navigated oppressive forces within institutional apparatuses of the law, organized religion, families, politics, mass media, medicine, and education. In the mid-80s a new moral panic—AIDS—targeted “hookers” and “faggots” as sexually spoiled and fatally promiscuous. The pain and shame of imposed and internalized stigma necessitated subcultural formations as bulwarks against hate and violence. (258–59)

Despite this, the seeming natural ally-ship between gay men and sex working women never really took off, largely because when homosexuality was decriminalized and depathologized (but sex work was not), the mainstream gay movement embarked on a rights-based project of homonormative acceptance and assimilation. Straight industry debate over crossover performers replicates these dynamics, although now rearranged, framing straight porn performers as respectable community members, and those with or suspected of having HIV as gay infiltrators.

Many gay and queer porn studios have a different relationship to HIV and sexual health than straight studios. HIV is not something which infiltrates the community, but rather coheres it. “I have a responsibility to a community and a tradition,” writes Paul Morris of his gay studio, Treasure Island Media (Morris and Passonen 2014, 216). His explanation divorces respectability from pathogen-negativity, rejecting the imperative of safety as it is typically understood:

TIM is two things, basically. We’re a developing and living archive of real male sexual experience. And we’re a laboratory that performs experiments that the men involved in our community propose.... Most gay porn hides behind a façade of “safeness.” But in my case, the men in my work are considered prized for being damaged, for having taken what conservative gays deem “the ultimate risk” and lost. (217)

Tellingly, Treasure Island Media is one of the few studios to have signed the Porn Producers for Safety Against Discrimination pledge (<https://ppsdpledge.com/>). The first statement in the pledge, authored by porn performer and activist Jason Domino, asserts that

Having reviewed and discussed available trial results and medical information, we accept that individuals living with HIV who maintain an undetectable viral load cannot pass on the virus to their sexual partners. As such, we encourage people living with HIV with an undetectable viral

load to approach us for work as performers without fear of discrimination. Aside from Treasure Island Media, the other sites or studios that openly and explicitly allow STI/HIV+ people to work are largely gay or queer-identified. This is perhaps unsurprising, given the historical connection between queer communities and movements for justice around sexual health and HIV status. Whatever the epidemiology of STIs and HIV today, queer communities have a history of advocating for the rights of HIV+ folks. Queer, trans, kinky, sex working, and HIV+ communities are historically and persistently policed by public health and law enforcement agencies, be it through the criminalization of HIV non-disclosure and sex work, or through the shaming, blaming, and disproportionate responsabilization of targeted prevention campaigns. A strong desire not to replicate such policing animates these communities. What remains is a legacy of fighting discrimination faced by people living with STIs and HIV, and of honing expertise in safer sex methods beyond testing, such as barriers and lubricants, strategic positioning, serosorting, and non-fluid-exchanging play (Webber 2018; see also Schieber 2018). This broadening of what constitutes safer sex (and by extension, occupational health) opens porn work to those who are excluded by a rigid testing system. Robert McRuer writes that both queer and disability rights movements are “cultures...founded on access” (McRuer 2003, 99). Access is a fundamental political goal for these movements because “another world can exist in which an incredible variety of bodies and minds are valued” (McRuer and Wilkerson 2003, 14), and everyone is enriched by this heterogeneity. By adopting a broader notion of occupational health and a broader usage of the concept of consent, studios that explicitly hire HIV and STI positive performers critique pathogen-ableism by enshrining their right to be sexually expressive, while directly challenging the economic marginalization of performers barred from the industry because of their serostatus. I illustrate these methods and motivations more below.

Alternatives to Asymmetry

During a panel on Ethical Porn Production held at the 2018 Toronto International Porn Festival, performer and director Icy Winters lamented that by not allowing performers with STIs to work, the mainstream straight porn industry shames people for having STIs. Given the variety of options for preventing transmission, she argued, there is no reason to bar pathogen-positive folks from sexual performance. Doing so insinuates that people with STIs/HIV have forfeited the right to be sexual beings.

In our interview, queer producer Kate Sinclair agreed. She states that “as a society, we insist, ‘you’ve got HIV, you’re no longer a sexual person. You don’t get to enjoy things’. That’s pretty much it. It excludes those people from the porn world.” At the time of our interview Kate Sinclair had not yet worked with any openly HIV+ performers, but her policy allows for it. The FAQ on her site, Ciné Sinclair, includes the header: “I’d like to perform, but I have an STI.” The posted response says that all performers need to produce a recent STI test, and that “a safer sex conversation must be had before the shoot can go ahead.” However, “Having an STI does not mean that you are not able to

work as a performer for Ciné Sinclair. It does mean that your partner deserves to be informed, and that they will be, by you. If the partner consents to using barriers, the shoot will go ahead as planned” (<https://www.cinesinclair.com/faq/>).

I asked Kate to expand on the motivations behind this decision. She recounted an incident where performers had disclosed, only after shooting, that they carried the herpes simplex virus. The situation made her ask herself, “why did these people not feel like they could disclose?” She continued:

Realizing that people won’t come forward with things if they feel like the money they’re gonna make, their job, is in jeopardy, I was like: ok, well, rather than crack down on it, I’m just gonna be like, “declare everything and we’ll find a way to make sure you get your money. We’ll shoot something. We won’t endanger your livelihood because of this.”

She describes this approach as a way to “put my money where my mouth is, to put myself at risk in that way, because people are putting themselves in a vulnerable position for me [when they] perform”. The decision is thus a “very deliberate act” that aims to balance performers’ bodily autonomy with their financial security. To do this, Kate employs a variety of harm reduction techniques on set. Of her process, she says:

I don’t require to see the tests.... But we are required to have the conversation and have it as honestly as possible.... Especially for queer people: maybe there is any number of things keeping them from seeing a doctor for these things. But I do want people to be as open and honest as they can be, and if they come forward and say, “I haven’t been tested in 6 months,” that’s honest too. Then their scene partner can be like, “you know what, I’m actually not comfortable,” and they’re empowered to do that.

As this last point attests, the inclusion of pathogen-positive performers does not override the value placed on informed consent but complicates and stretches the principle in important ways. For one, Kate addresses the structural parameters and inequalities that can impede the ideal of informed consent (such as the disincentive queer people might have to seek healthcare, see Paine 2018). She also explicitly acknowledges the unique role of labour, whereby material need and potential financial gain inform the consent equation.

Informed consent is also stretched in subsequent points of the Porn Producers for Safety Against Discrimination pledge:

Performers who are not living with HIV will have the opportunity to agree to work with other performers who are undetectable... We will also make reasonable effort to educate all performers about HIV and other STIs, including that people living with HIV maintaining an Undetectable Viral Load can’t pass HIV on. Along with advice on testing, condom use and accessing PrEP/PEP.

As noted above, informed consent procedures usually default towards protecting the decision not to work with performers who are HIV+, assuming this is what most “rational” HIV negative performers will choose. In this pledge, however, the right to *accept* work with HIV+ people is emphasized, as many people in the porn industry are comfortable doing so when policy allows them to. Also addressed

here is the matter of education in defining when consent is truly informed, by underscoring how many people are ignorant of the latest HIV science and prevention methods.

What modifications to straight policy might we draw from these queer ways? Porn health protocols could reconsider how they prioritize pathogen negativity, by integrating matters of financial and social justice alongside matters of individual consent. Advocates on the AVN panel with which this paper opened suggested the possibility of building an additional testing system, to be used by HIV+ performers with an undetectable viral load and those open to working with them. Another option would be a flexible/modular system where performers could be pooled and matched according to their STI/HIV status, personal boundaries around exposure, and preferred harm reduction methods. Whatever shape it might take, the point is that alternative designs are possible when we disrupt assumptions about what is considered a rational health choice, and what constitutes informed consent to make such a choice. The next phase of this project aims to work with industry stakeholders to concretely reimagine occupational health protocols and procedures.

Conclusion

Workplace health and safety in the straight porn industry is shaped by decision-making frameworks that were never designed with pornography in mind. Interrogating how standard notions of consent and occupational health are applied to porn reveals the problematic assumptions of these models. It is crucial to trouble these and strive towards fair working conditions for *all* porn workers. Gay and queer studios offer some alternatives, as these communities have contended with sexual health in different and deeper ways. Whatever changes to policy and protocol occur, they must emerge from within communities of porn professionals and porn-adjacent service providers. External bodies—such as government and non-profits—should not have a role in enforcing “solutions”. As it stands, however, performers must too often be suited to a protocol, rather than the protocol suited to performers. A testing and disclosure process that utilizes a wider variety of harm reduction techniques may be one way to create more flexible protocol.

Beyond supporting the immediate needs of performers, it is useful to examine porn health policy because porn is uniquely positioned to illuminate what is taken for granted about bodies, sex, health, work, risk, and responsibility; and what is considered a rational way to navigate those things. While we can and should put porn to use in these ways, it would also be a mistake to overemphasize porn’s uniqueness. In the same way that the umbrella term “sex work” can erase the variability between different jobs that happen to deal in sex, so has it erased the many points of commonality that sex work jobs have with different kinds of “straight work.” Viewing assumptions about the body-at-work as they arise in the context of porn can enable us to see how else these assumptions fail us, who else doesn’t easily fit within them, and what else slips through the cracks left by them.

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Notes

1. Since the writing of this paper, PASS has undergone several changes that are not reflected in its description here. PASS now operates as an independent organization, has introduced COVID-19 protocols in addition to STI/HIV testing, and the network of affiliated testing facilities has fluctuated. The author has also joined the PASS Board of Directors.
2. This liberal defense contributes to classist discrimination against certain sex workers (a system known colloquially as “the whorearchy”) by securing rights and respect only for the most upwardly mobile, racially-, geographically-, and class-privileged individuals.
3. Reviewing the regulation of legalized prostitution demonstrates this. For example, Nevada requires that “legal courtesans” (as they are referred to on their licenses) adhere to a STI testing regimen that can include restrictions of their movement (not being allowed to leave the brothel during shifts) and having to get a fresh test once they go off-sight for a given number of hours, whereas clients do not need to provide any kind of proof of testing, although clients with penises must wear condoms for all penetrative acts, akin to a “no shirt, no shoes, no service” mandate of responsabilizing customers to contribute to overall occupational health and safety status (Nevada Administrative Code 441A; Nevada Revised Statute 201.358).
4. As the language indicates, O’Regan is referring to the allocation of legal consent in judicial contexts, however I think the argument holds for other standardized norms, such as occupational policies and community standards.

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Pornographic Altruism, or, How to Have Porn in a Pandemic

JOHN PAUL STADLER

I. Thinking Beyond Pleasure

“What good can porn do?” is a complicated question. One might suppose *pleasure* is the natural by-product and virtue of pornography, but pleasure is neither a uniform nor singular experience, and treating it as such obscures its beneficiary, structure, and function. Thinking beyond pleasure, this analysis seeks to address the “good” of pornography through its labour. Historically, Marxist thought minimized the question of sexuality, which it designated to the realm of leisure and domesticity, and therefore separate from the exploitation of labour and place of work.¹ But feminist theorists have dismantled this neat division between work and “play,” noting that sexuality was in fact work (and largely women’s work) that was integral to the act of social reproduction, and that this labour was alienated, as well. The result of such alienation and compulsion to perform in a narrowly prescribed manner made the cultural emphasis on a supposed pleasure a fraught one, at best (see Frederici 2012). While I do not claim that sexuality and pornography are the same thing, in the case of pornography we can begin to ask how the current production, marketing, and distribution of sexual labour seeks to redress exploitation and enact altruism, even as it always remains firmly moored in the logic of capitalism.² When viewed against the current backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic and its attendant economic crisis, this inquiry gains heightened salience.

The question of pornography’s goodness is neither easy nor obvious to answer, and it should go without saying that this approach is but one among many. In addition to being difficult to answer, it is rarer still to ask. Indeed, the dominant cultural refrain from an Anglo-American perspective has been centered for decades on this question’s negation: “What *harm* does pornography do?” But *harm* is not a static concept, either, and has, in fact, undergone a transformation of sorts: initially, the question of harm centered on misogyny and violence,³ but increasingly, harm has manifested as a public health crisis.⁴ Harm’s transformation from behaviouralism to concrete physicality tracks with the biopolitical imperative of self-care and the Neoliberal refashioning of subjectivity (see Patton 1996, 118–38; Waugh 2000, 233). This focus on the body can lend specificity to the search for pornographic “goodness” by orienting this inquiry to the sphere of public health. In other words, we can whittle away at the question of a pornographic goodness to arrive at a narrower question: “How can porn promote health and what does that health look like?”

The Covid-19 emergency has exacerbated structural inequalities across the world, so it comes as no surprise that the pornography industry would find itself both challenged by *and* impelled to make tangible interventions. This is not, after all, the first time that pornography has been confronted with a pandemic. At the start of the AIDS pandemic, pornography taught its consumers safe(r) sex. Film scholar Thomas Waugh (2000) and sociologist Cindy Patton (1996) have shown that, while not uniformly, segments of the gay porn industry were among the first cultural responders to the virus, against the backdrop of an immobilized United States.

The dilemma for pornography at the onset of the AIDS crisis was how to negotiate titillation with education. This question was already circulating more broadly through Richard Berkowitz and Michael Callen's famous pamphlet "How to Have Sex in an Epidemic," which, while surprisingly not interested in porn, did endeavor to alter gay men's sexual behavior by "limiting what sex acts you choose to perform to ones which interrupt disease transmission."⁵ Despite their often homonormative stance, which Douglas Crimp takes to task in "How to Have Promiscuity in an Epidemic,"⁶ Berkowitz and Callen can be credited with initiating a franker discussion of sexuality and its relation to disease. As a result, gay video porn from this era began adopting heightened condom visibility and tutorials, among other safe sex practices,⁷ in effect elevating pedagogy to a prominent function of pornography. The political organization Men's Gay Health Crisis commissioned and disseminated pornographic comix [sic] that taught safer sex practices, to the dismay of Senator Jesse Helms (see Greenblatt 2019). My own research (2019) has shown the increase in popularity of phone sex during the 1980s, which, as the first pornographic network, provided an alternative medium for fantasy making and sexual release. In short, the AIDS pandemic necessitated that pornographic purveyors reassess their content's *raison d'être*—the carefree delivery of pleasure—alongside the careful(l) delivery of information. In other words, this moment demanded that pornographers yolk the "realism" of disease prevention with the "fantasy" of unencumbered sexual expression that may seem anathema to one another, but the two can and do find complementarity. This is not to say pornography became less pleasurable—although cultural critic Daniel Harris argues AIDS transformed its function from aphrodisiac to voyeuristic replacement (1997, 131)—but that pornography, as it so often does, responded to the cultural crisis of its time by incorporating it into its very logic.⁸ In short, porn was not just about pleasure, nor has it ever only been so.

In what follows, I track how contemporary pornographers have responded to the health crisis of Covid-19 through the emergence of mutual aid, the expansion of rigorous health guidelines, and the rise of a genre of charity porn, and ask to what degree we can say one of pornography's uses is the promotion of health. Maintaining a skeptical perspective, I seek to articulate care's many forms, the possibility of virtue signaling, and what may ultimately be nothing more than cynical marketing.⁹

II. Production: Mutual Aid and Covid-19 Health Guidelines

The response of the pornography industry today has been swifter to act to protect performers and viewers alike, which, I speculate, derives from Covid-19 not being stigmatized as a “gay disease,” as AIDS was.¹⁰ When Covid-19 began spreading across North America in the early spring of 2020, sex workers more broadly, and the pornography industry specifically, began to form networks of care and support. Additionally, the trade organization Free Speech Coalition quickly set up fundraising efforts and distributed revised health guidelines. Since the 1990s, the FSC has overseen the national testing sites for pornographic performers and recently formed an economic relief fund to assist those who have been unable to work since March 15, 2020. This organization originated from the erstwhile Adult Film Association of America in 1969 in response to Lyndon B. Johnson’s Presidential Commission on Obscenity and Pornography. Their original mission centered on guaranteeing porn performers, filmmakers, and distributors legal remedy against charges of obscenity and indecency. More recently, as fears around pornography have shifted to public health, The Free Speech Coalition has been vocal about legislation in California that has sought to regulate the porn industry like Measure B and Proposition 60, which hoped to mandate condom usage and even allow residents the opportunity to sue performers for failing to do so.¹¹

While The Free Speech Coalition has fundraised for the pornography industry specifically, very few performers have been able to sustain their livelihoods through pornography alone, and often performers require supplemental income. Many, in fact, must work in what Heather Berg (2016) has termed “satellite industries,” or alternative revenue streams that include strip clubs, escort services, and webcamming. Without these satellite industries, the vast majority of performers could not survive on porn work alone, and vice versa. Covid-19 has spurred sex workers to develop mutual aid efforts across the United States to deliver much needed resources to peers through its decentralized fundraising (Herrera 2020). Jack Herrera has reported on mutual aid programs in Los Angeles, Las Vegas, New York, and elsewhere that have banded together to redistribute money to sex workers suddenly finding themselves out of work. Innovation has been another less widespread but still potent tool. For instance, in Portland, a strip club adopted a “drive-thru” model after previously deploying their dancers to deliver food through the punnily titled Boober Eats (Russo 2020). These efforts give a glimpse into the creativity and collectivism that have made sex work possible, even before the pandemic began to jeopardize this labour. Operating at the margins of the economy, sex workers in the United States fall outside of government safety networks, which structurally withhold services and benefits to them. And it is not just governments that deny services to them. Jiz Lee and Rebecca Sullivan (2016) remind us that for many sex workers, financial institutions have penalized if not outright forbidden their services to labourers in the sex industry.

The methodology behind disbursement of mutual aid in the case of sex workers, though, presents challenges when it comes to uniform, egalitarian distribution. Mutual aid is not charity. In fact, mutual aid’s philosophy seeks to dissolve the underlying power imbalances of charity, which its proponents argue reproduce

inequality in the form of a donor class that determines to whom money is given, how much, and for what purpose. In theory, this positions mutual aid within a liberation politics, but in practice it often still requires difficult pragmatism, and it has been no small task to determine precisely which performers to support and how much aid to grant. Jack Herrera explains:

Deciding who gets aid takes many forms. Organizers have said they take into account whether workers have the option of taking on web-based work, like cam work or porn. Sex workers explain that this sort of transition is often difficult on not just a practical level—they may have no WiFi or private space to work out of—but also on a mental health level, as the separation between work and life shrinks. They also note if people are supporting children or other dependents. (Herrera 2020)

Taken at face value, cam work would seem to be the last bastion of sex work relatively unscathed by Covid-19, and, if available to sex workers, a precluding factor for some mutual aid groups. But as Herrera nuances, multiple circumstances must factor into consideration. Additionally, Heather Berg (2016) has pointed out that camming largely operates in an ecosystem of sexual labour, which commonly requires more traditional porn work to market cam work, and vice versa. The question of camming's profitability outside of this symbiotic relation remains unclear. While pre-taped pornographic scenes and videos have not disappeared entirely, their reduction has presented another roadblock for cross-promotion.¹² In short, the camming side of pornography may appear "pandemic-proof," but with the rise in unemployment, many who have never even considered themselves sex workers are contemplating joining this gig economy. A good example of this phenomenon and its backlash can be seen in the recent doxxing of a New York paramedic who joined OnlyFans to supplement her income (Frias 2020). This potential increase in performers threatens to further saturate and dilute the market, making the profitability of such labour all the more uncertain.

The rise of mutual aid within the pornography industry highlights the continued "outlaw" status of sex work today, but collective assistance is not novel to this moment as much as it is accelerated. Collectivism has long been a feature of the industry. Pornographers have always been problem solvers because pornography has rarely been seen as anything other than a cultural problem. Recent legislation like FOSTA-SESTA displaced sex workers from using craigslist and ousted pornographic bloggers from Tumblr, which had become a safe haven for queer and trans youth (see Cho 2015; Valens 2020). Additionally, various condom ban initiatives in California sought to limit where and how sexually explicit material could be made and distributed, and in one case, to offer viewers the legal right to sue performers who did not abide by them (Chappel 2016). While the latter, Proposition 60, did not pass, FOSTA-SESTA did. These examples give a glimpse into the recent legislative efforts to regulate online sexual media as though it only produces harm, claiming to protect the public from sexual trafficking and sexual health threats. As independent contractors, porn performers have been denied the ability to file for unemployment at any time, not just during the recent pandemic and production moratorium. Nontraditional kinship networks have, by

necessity, always been a source of relief to these workers, who face discrimination and structural violence with alarming consistency.¹³

While equitable pay is paramount to the safety of porn performers, so too are effective health protocols. In terms of the latter, the pornography industry has been leading the charge on safe sex since the 1990s. Indeed, several health experts begrudgingly admit that the pornography industry offers a proactive model to emulate for reopening other industries. Michele C. Hollow reported in the *New York Times* that porn teaches us the “four Ts”: Target, Test, Treat and Trace. These protocols hail from the aforementioned Free Speech Coalition, which sought to keep porn performers safe from HIV transmission through the development of the PASS system. On June 12, 2020, these guidelines were updated to include Covid-19 precautions, which recommend studios frequently test performers, enact temperature checks, require masks on set when not filming, limit crew and when possible, and use performers who live together for shoots, among other recommendations.¹⁴ Scholars and health clinicians laud these guidelines but note that stigma may limit their broader implementation. This hesitation to adopt similar measures, or to do so without acknowledgement of the pornography industry’s leadership, reveals just how entrenched moralism is to notions of public health. For instance, one recent publication went so far as to question whether the global lockdowns and stay-at-home orders might accelerate an often-feared porn addiction crisis, while ignoring at the same time the many safety protocols that the industry has implemented proactively (Kearns 2020).

So long as the proactive health guidelines and practices of pornography as an industry remain relegated to the status of insider knowledge (something that is done off camera and “behind the scene”), their utility and influence will remain obscured, but visibility of such practices within the diegesis of pornography may be one way to promote safety measures. That said, just as pornographers in the 1980s were conflicted over how to render visible “safe(r) sex” within their videos’ narratives, so too studios will need to decide how manifest Covid-19 safety procedures should be. One could easily imagine mask usage being incorporated into pornographic scenes, but would their absence denote risk? Just as “bareback pornography” emerged out of widespread condom usage, one could imagine a future in which scenes of maskless sex could lead to the fetishization of risk for Covid-19 transmission.¹⁵ Interestingly, on many tube sites, “coronavirus” and “Covid-19” are trending in searches, but what that looks like in terms of depiction is less uniform (Sachdeva 2020). Sometimes a mask is worn, or isolation serves as an inciting incident, but for the most part, dispensing health recommendations does not appear to be a priority. Perhaps the audio-visual arena of pornography is ill-suited to deliver Covid-19 safety measures as a story line. Intriguingly, some written erotica has taken up the challenge to narrate precisely this moment.¹⁶ This observation suggests a disparity between pornography the production (industry) and pornography the representation (narrative). But there is another arena where health finds promotion beyond the diegesis of porn, and that is through distribution and marketing.

III. Distribution and Marketing: Charity Porn

“Charity porn” is a relatively recent moniker for an admittedly older practice: raising funds for a “good cause” by selling sexually explicit content. “Charity porn” is pornography you can feel good about because it comes prepackaged as an ethical act. The commodity—the adult content—has what we might call the “value added” feature of altruism in addition to that which typically comes from pornography: the pleasure of self indulgence. Any stigma that normally attaches to the act of viewing pornography may be balanced—or even outweighed—by the good deed that such spectatorship facilitates. This phenomenon derives from a longer lineage of media than the present moment might suggest, and precursors include glossy pin-up calendars of scantily clad models, with profits going to an endless supply of humanitarian disasters. A more recent example can be found in Kaylen Ward, who put charity porn on the map with her viral Twitter campaign to send nudes to all who donated to the Australian Fire Relief Fund. Soon after, other copycat charity porn fundraisers followed. Ward repeated her own campaign but through a different website and cause, using an OnlyFans account to raise money for earthquake relief to Puerto Rico (Kibbe 2020). Ward’s transformation from a non-professional model to for-hire pornographer mirrors the same genre trajectory of amateur porn stars, who rely on an initial anonymous status, unassuming aesthetic, and word-of-mouth virality to market their desirability.

The rise of charity porn, though, need not be thought of as only an amateur endeavor. In fact, it finds a similar, albeit corporate, expression in the case of Pornhub, the premier tube site of global conglomerate Mindgeek. In April 2012, Pornhub launched the “Pornhub Cares” initiative on their website, which sought to raise money for various humanitarian endeavors (largely through viewership), ranging from increased research for testicular and breast cancers (nominally adjacent concerns of pornography, as they are fetishized and/or eroticized body parts), to recent efforts to save bees and clean the ocean of littered plastics. Like clockwork, the positive press Pornhub received for these fundraisers was almost immediately met with scrutiny and in some cases outcry. Critics went so far as to call upon the benefactors of these efforts to refuse or return donations, claiming the money was tainted by its association with pornography and invoking longstanding allegations of sexual abuse and trafficking to further discredit the donations.¹⁷

While not featured under the banner of “Pornhub Cares,” Pornhub’s “Stay at Home” initiative launched shortly at the start of the Covid-19 outbreak with the mission to incentive quarantine by granting viewers access to their premium subscription service free for one month. Pornhub rolled this initiative out first in Italy and later in other regions of the world especially hard-hit by the virus (Turak 2020). In addition, Pornhub donated 50,000 PPE to Italy and later to New York. Furthermore, they donated to the Free Speech Coalition’s fund for out-of-work performers. The question remains whether such donations made any tangible effects on the pandemic, or whether they acted merely as virtue signaling—here, the rehabilitation of the now classic refrain that pornography is a social ill by expressly positioning it as a social good—to serve their bottom line, but it might

be the case that both were well-served. Unlike the charity porn outlined before, these Pornhub examples do not rely on purchase or viewership to spur relief efforts, but rather the charity precedes spectatorship and is seemingly separate from it. Despite their differences, what links each of these examples of charity porn is an invocation of altruism and the promise of its material effectuation. The goodwill Pornhub earns becomes a dominant marketing tool for the website, but the material consequence of that tool has its limits. Repeat viewership of Pornhub does not increase how much PPE is distributed nor does premium access to Pornhub have the surveillant power to keep its viewers at home, but one could claim that this form of commodity altruism does further codify the public health protocols surrounding Covid-19's containment.

Pornhub and the innumerable other tube sites have dominated pornographic distribution in large part because they are free. Certainly, some could pay for their premium services, but for most, an endless collection of pornographic content could just as easily be accessed for the price of wifi and a connected device. The free-ness of porn online—perhaps the paragon of the gift economy¹⁸—was not always a given, especially not at the start of the public Internet. In fact, the pop-up advertisement was an idiosyncratic marketing innovation developed in the 1990s to monetize websites without fear of associating products directly with porn.¹⁹ Since 2008, the lawful purchase of porn has diminished precipitously.²⁰ Revenue is driven largely through advertisements and pirated content, which has had striking effects on individual performers, who are hired at will and with increasingly diminished pay scales. These performers navigate what we might colloquially call “the pornosphere” by harnessing multiple income streams that then maximize viewership. This has given rise to what Sophie Pezutto (2019) rightly calls the “porntropreneur,” or, the increasingly savvy porn entrepreneur who markets and monetizes their performance across a host of social media and amateur adult platforms since studio porn alone no longer pays the bills.

What holds “value” to the consumer must be viewed in relation to and as a result of tube sites disseminating endless free porn clips. The development of amateurism was a direct confrontation with the perceived inauthenticity and hegemony of mainstream pornography. Amateur pornography emerged in the 1990s and followed a path similar to celebrity sex videos.²¹ These videos garnered notoriety and success for their subjects because they appeared authentic. Amateur pornography today, though, can be seen almost exclusively through the lens of the gig economy: cam shows and patron sites sell subscriptions to the porn performers themselves, who produce their own content. The amateur in this sense operates as an alternative to the monopolistic studio system, allowing the performer themselves to set their price and market their work as they see fit. They keep the bulk of their intake, too, except for the platform on which such content is hosted.²² Media scholar Daniel Laurin notes that, in addition to promoting the notion of authenticity to viewers, sites that run on a model of “subscription intimacy” forward the neoliberal idea that economic responsibility falls to the individual, not the state: “OnlyFans appeared to be another tool that called on individuals to take it upon themselves to solve the larger structure problems

facing the porn industry, including fewer scenes and lower scene rates” (Laurin 2019, 73).

Gay porn star Bruce Beckham has appeared in several studio porn videos, and, like so many, he also has an OnlyFans account. In April of 2020 he advertised on Twitter that 100% of his OnlyFans subscription fees would be donated to Covid-19 relief (GayVN 2020). Through a blog entry posted to Str8UpGayPorn on April 9, 2020, Beckham was quoted verifying his donation of \$2,740 to The Center for Disease Philanthropy. This money went toward stocking food banks and purchasing PPE, he wrote, noting he “thought it was important to represent the porn community as philanthropic and invested in giving back, as the sex industry is often stigmatized” (Beckham 2020). Beckham’s statement makes explicit what I have so far merely speculated, that the negative affects surrounding pornography are a strong motivating factor for pornographers who utilize their platforms for charity. In effect, Beckham sublimates any anxiety of the commodity of pornography by re-imbuing it with new value.

Slavoj Žižek writes of a similar phenomenon in the purchase of a cup of coffee from Starbucks that advertises a portion of the cost goes to charity:

You had to do something to counteract your pure destructive consumerism.... What Starbucks enables is to be a consumerist without any bad conscience because the price for the countermeasure—of fighting consumerism—is already included into the price of the commodity.... You pay a little bit more, and you are not just a consumerist, but you do also your duty towards [the] environment, the poor starving people in Africa, and so on and so on. It’s, I think, the ultimate form of consumerism. (Žižek 2014)

While Žižek may overestimate the bad conscience most people experience when purchasing coffee, the argument he makes seems custom-made for pornographic consumption. Pornography has always been a “bad object,” so in this case, the built-in countermeasure allows the viewer to rehabilitate the ill health porn is often accused of fomenting. Pornographer Tristan Taormino theorizes feminist porn in a similar vein, writing that it is an attempt to “counteract the messages we get from society that can be reflected in mainstream porn: sex is shameful, naughty, dirty, scary, dangerous, or it’s the domain of men, where only their desires and fantasies get fulfilled” (2013, 261). This filiation with feminist porn and charity porn goes deeper; beyond its counter narratives, feminist porn has always placed a fair and ethical work environment at the center of its praxis. Charity porn, then, may more accurately be described as participating in the same ameliorative structure of the now nearly four-decade long endeavor of feminist porn.

IV. How to Have Porn in a Pandemic

If the proprietary data are to be believed, statistical analysis of pornographic usage can offer a glimpse into what surely at one point in history would have been a ridiculous question: what is the relationship between porn spectatorship and impending death? On January 13, 2018, Hawaiian residents were greeted at 8:07AM by a text message alerting them that a ballistic missile was thought

to be inbound and to take immediate shelter. Similar to the panic that ensued from Orson Welles's fictionalized radio broadcast "War of the Worlds," many Hawaiians feared for the worst. At 8:45AM, though, these same residents were sent a second text message rescinding the first warning, which, it turns out, had been made in error. Government mea culpas aside, this fleeting terror offered a curious social experiment for analysts of pornography. "Pornhub Insights" is the data analysis branch of Pornhub, and it frequently tracks trends among users' habits, presenting periodical blogs that report on what regions of the country were searching for "MILF porn," among other enlightening search queries. The Hawaiian alert scandal did not escape their attention. Four days after the Hawaiian ballistic attack scare, Pornhub Insights released the following post, with accompanying graphic:

By 8:23am, traffic was a massive -77% below that of a typical Saturday. As residents were notified around 8:45 that the initial warning was sent in error, traffic began to return to normal and Hawaiians collectively breathed a sigh of relief. Those seeking further relief, headed back to Pornhub where pageviews surged +48% above typical levels at 9:01am. (Pornhub 2018)

Given these data, we can presume that many Hawaiians perceived themselves to be facing imminent death. Perhaps unsurprisingly, when people find themselves approaching the big death, they do not seek out *la petite mort*. Upon learning that they had cheated death, though, Hawaii residents flooded Pornhub, sending a massive spike in porn searches. I note the speed of perceived demise because the emergency in Hawaii lasted for thirty-eight minutes. What, though, is the relationship of pornographic viewership to a sense of death that lingers?

At the time of this essay's writing, the necropolitics of Covid-19 can be thought of through what Lauren Berlant calls "slow death."²³ In part, we have become habituated to the existential threat that lurks everywhere, and complacent to the rising death toll from the coronavirus.²⁴ Living in a state of near constant emergency—as normalized as this experience has become—has elongated and stretched out the anxiety associated with it, effectively domesticating it. In living with the threat of a constant lurking virus, demise either loses its terror, or finds its expression elsewhere. While the sudden onset and revocation of the Hawaiian ballistic attack scare resulted in the dramatic reduction and then escalation of porn viewership, the slow death associated with Covid-19 has produced a more incremental effect on porn consumption after the initial spike from the first lock-downs. Whether pornography serves as escapism or antidote, what has also become abundantly clear during this period from the data on pornographic usage is that its viewership has been on the rise since the pandemic first began to surge. With many people working remotely, and still more furloughed and out of work, the pandemic is looking more and more like a *porndemic* (Higgins 2020).

Porn and the workplace have always shared a complicated relationship, but not an incompatible one. GIFs (Flatt 2017) and #NSFW (Paasonen et al. 2019) hashtags provide users with discreet options for partaking in adult content at work, mitigating risk and reprimand. For the increasing segment of the population that

now works remotely from home, clandestine consumption of pornography finds its limits not from the threat of being caught by the boss so much as by what time the zoom call is scheduled or when one's fellow inhabitants are home.²⁵ Indeed, the pandemic has further strained the distinction between work and leisure, because the space of work has been mapped onto the space that traditionally defined leisure. Perhaps it should not be surprising, then, that productivity at most companies has taken a net reduction of between 3 to 6%, although this assessment fails to fully account for the manner in which these corporations also benefit from utilizing the private resources—water, electricity, buildings, technology, etc.—of their employees (see Garton and Mankins 2020).

If pornography is going to exist in the future, and there seems to be no reason to imagine that it would not,²⁶ Covid-19 will serve as an important inflection point, just as 2008 did for the adult industry. In 2008, on the heels of the (then) Great Recession and the advent of Web 2.0—that awkward term for when we “discovered” the internet could be interactive and user-generated—tube sites emerged as the dominant distributor of online pornography. This model of pornographic dissemination rested almost entirely on piracy and user uploads, but it also resulted in the monopolistic rise of conglomerate MindGeek, which eventually vertically integrated itself by purchasing several of the very porn studios it previously pilfered content from.

So what will pornography look like in 2021 and beyond? The desire for pornography is now more amplified than ever, and while the voluntary production hold has been lifted by the Free Speech Coalition, whether performers will feel comfortable returning to traditional studio porn or not remains an open question. Even if they do, fewer and fewer performers can make a living by studio porn alone. Camming, though, continues undaunted, and appears to be the future of porn. The epitome of gig economy work, its amateur performers make their own hours and charge their own rates that are listed upfront. With the rise of even more exclusive subscription fee sites like OnlyFans and JustForFans, performers can parlay fame on cam sites like chaturbate or cam4 to a platform where they can offer more personalized, intimate, and subsequently lucrative content.²⁷ These sites were early to integrate charity into their business models, too, with OnlyFans adding a fundraising target feature in March of 2020. As a result, these sites illustrate their goodness at the levels of production, distribution, and marketing in a kind of radical rebuke to the notion of pornographic harm.

The porn performer has always been an independent contractor, but Covid-19 has hastened sex workers to be even more creative and caring. Care, of course, is a foundational element of this labour, but typically that care was only directed toward the viewer. Today, networks of care extend to fellow cammers and beyond. If giving back by donating portions of shows or subscription fees to fight Covid-19 (and, increasingly, to support the Black Lives Matter movement) brings visibility to the care work that porn has always been, then one can hope that this increased visibility will compel viewers to treat porn performers with increased care, too, which in this case, would mean paying them equitably for their labour. But even while one can hope for a more egalitarian pornographic economy to

emerge, major credit cards have recently announced a boycott of Pornhub content creators (Associated Press 2020). Following Nick Kristof's op-ed column in the *New York Times* alleging abuse and sex trafficking on Pornhub, the major tube site has taken the drastic measure of deleting all unverified accounts, resulting in the erasure of a broad swath of amateur performers' content in the process (see Grant 2020; Valinsky 2020). These recent measures reveal Big Porn's refusal to invest in better content moderation and further exacerbate the already precarious position of the porn performer, especially the amateur one. I speculate that porn in this moment will continue to shift away from the gift economy and return to a model of payment, just as one would have encountered at the video store before the internet, and the porn theatre before video, and the traveling blue movie before the porn theater. As a consequence, the sociality of pornographic spectatorship may also find renewal in the livestream comments that often accompany cam shows, which are a form of theater, first and foremost.

Pornography in the face of Covid-19 makes the labour of sexual performance central, whereas tube sites have largely elided this labour, if not outright stolen it.²⁸ As the adult film industry reopens cautiously, how various performers exhibit care and for whom will be important to track. Mutual aid and charity are two different approaches to the same problem—that is, inequality: or, the structural failure of the state and the constitutive violence of capitalism—and some efforts ultimately may prove to be more altruistic than others. Regardless of how cynically we may view these efforts, the need for care is palpable in the age of coronavirus, and pornography will only continue to thrive if its performers and viewers live to see another day.

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Notes

1. Friedrich Engels comes the closest to giving sexuality its due within early Marxist thought. See Engels 2010.
2. A special issue of *Porn Studies*, edited by Brandon Arroyo, is forthcoming on the very topic of pornography and Marxism and will further nuance this often-overlooked confluence.
3. Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon are the standard bearers of this line of reasoning. Their joint efforts centered on the “media effects” of pornography, which they alleged directly produced misogyny and violence in the men who consumed it. Their efforts culminated in the mid 1980s with the adoption of antipornography ordinances in various cities across the United States—most prominently in Indianapolis. They became figureheads of Women Against Pornography (WAP), colluders with the conservative Moral Majority movement, and feminist dissidents in the notorious “Sex Wars.” See Duggan 2006.

4. The strongest advocate of the “public health crisis” argument is sociologist Gail Dines. Her website <https://www.culturereframed.org/the-porn-crisis/> gives an overview of this framework.
5. Berkowitz and Callen examine, among other things, the risks associated with sucking, getting sucked, fucking, getting fucked, no risk sex, kissing, rimming, water sports, dildoes, sadism & masochism, fist fucking, washing up, backrooms, bookstores, balconies, meatracks & tearooms, the baths, closed circles of fuck buddies, jerk off clubs, poppers, buying sex, selling sex, and personals.
6. One of the first assertions in Berkowitz and Callen’s pamphlet is that a couple could merely get tested for CMV (the initial nomenclature before HIV) and pursue a monogamous relationship, and therefore ignore the remainder of their pamphlet’s advice (1983, 13). Douglas Crimp (1987) challenges the latent sex-negativity of Berkowitz and Callen, arguing that promiscuity had all along helped gay men to imagine and enact new modes of sexual expression and sociality that ultimately helped to keep them safe during the AIDS epidemic.
7. Cindy Patton (1991) writes about filmmaker Al Parker, who was an early adopter of safe sex on his porn sets. Parker offered an expansive vision for safe sex that included, in addition to condom usage, surgical gloves for finger fucking and plastic wrap for anilingus. Additionally, Patton notes that jerking off, licking, tit play, and verbal play were a part of the growing repertoire of acts that helped shift perceptions on what might constitute “sex” to begin with.
8. Laura Kipnis (1999) writes: “A Culture’s pornography becomes, in effect, a very precise map of that culture’s borders,” including “its anxieties, investments, contradictions.”
9. I want to note that the bulk of this essay was written in the spring of 2020, with revisions taking place in late fall of 2020. Wherever possible, I have revised pertinent information as need be, but I must acknowledge upfront the difficulty in keeping up-to-date with the many developments in the Covid-19 pandemic and the porn industry.
10. João Florêncio (2020) has written about how Covid-19 differs from the AIDS epidemic in constitutive ways. At the same time, it is important to note that Black and LatinX communities have been disproportionately affected by Covid-19 in the United States. It could ultimately be the case that Covid-19 will foster stigma alongside minoritarian populations.
11. See Lynn Comella’s compelling editorial: Lynn Comella, “The Adult Industry Can Survive without Government Help. Here’s Why,” *The Washington Post* (12 March 2020): <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2020/05/12/adult-industry-can-survive-without-government-help-heres-why/>
12. The Free Speech Coalition imposed a voluntary production hold on March 15, 2020, which it then lifted on June 12, 2020, to curb the spread of Covid-19 in mainstream porn scenes. Upon lifting the hold, the FSC offered new Safety Guidelines, including revisions to the PASS system. No doubt, in the interim, some rogue pornographers and amateurs continued to film pornography, but on the whole, the output from mainstream outlets dropped precipitously and relied on a backlog of unreleased content.

13. A prime example of this can be found in transgender sex workers Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P Johnson founding Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR), which opened a shelter for LGBT youth with rent paid by their sex work. See <https://www.nswp.org/timeline/event/street-transvestite-action-revolutionaries-found-star-house>
14. The full Covid-19 Guidelines from the Free Speech Coalition can be found here: <https://www.freespeechcoalition.com/blog/2020/06/12/announcing-the-covid-19-guidelines/>.
15. Contrary to this speculation, Tim Dean (2009) argues for the radical ethics of bareback sex, a concept that seems difficult to imagine transposed to the current pandemic.
16. *The Evergreen Review* has launched a coronavirus-themed porn series called “COVID-69: Personal Protective Erotica,” which they refer to as a “heroic effort to alleviate your boredom.” The first two stories can be found here: Alexis N. Wright, “Behind the Bars, No World,” *The Evergreen Review*: <https://www.evergreenreview.com/read/behind-the-bars-no-world/>; Camille Claudel, “Aries,” *Evergreen Review*: <https://www.evergreenreview.com/read/camille-claudel-aries/>
17. A prime example of the never-ending crusade against porn can be found in Nicholas Kristof’s op-ed, “The Children of Pornhub” (Kristof 2020).
18. This concept was first examined at length in 1988 by David Cheal (2015), who notes the striking manner in which this practice, coded largely as a private activity performed by women, came to draw mainstream appeal and practice.
19. See Episode 3: “We Know What You Did,” *Reply All* (3 December 2014): <https://gimletmedia.com/shows/reply-all/awhmex>
20. An interesting, albeit incomplete, take on the effects of Pornhub’s free content can be found in Jon Ronson’s podcast *The Butterfly Effect: Who Really Pays the Price For Free Porn?*, July 27, 2017. <http://www.jonronson.com/butterfly.html>.
21. For an early example of this, see Hillyer 2004.
22. In the case of OnlyFans, 20% goes to the website.
23. Berlant defines “slow death” as “the physical wearing out of a population and the deterioration of people in that population that is very nearly a defining condition of their experience and historical existence.” See Berlant 2007, 754.
24. As of December, 2020, the World Health Organization tracked 1,700,000 deaths worldwide and nearly 77,000,000 cases globally. See the WHO Coronavirus Disease (Covid-19) Dashboard, <https://covid19.who.int/>.
25. Between writing and revising this article for publication, this contention has been challenged by journalist Jeffrey Toobin, who was fired for exposing himself on a zoom call, which he claims to have been unaware he was still on. While this example is intriguing in its ineptitude, my contention remains that the average viewer will find that working from home largely facilitates rather than limits pornographic viewership. For more on the Toobin debacle, see Katherine Rosman and Jacob Bernstein, “The Undoing of Jeffrey Toobin,” *The New York Times* (15 December 2020): <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/15/style/jeffrey-toobin-zoom.html>

26. While I am being a bit flippant here, it is important to note that this is a serious question to ask, and one worthy of pursuing. Philosopher Alan Soble (1986) approaches the question in a slightly different vein, devoting three chapters to the speculation on pornography's place in a post-capitalist society, if any.
27. Angela Jones has written the first comprehensive book on the topic of online camming. For more, see Jones 2020.
28. Some pornography makes the act of remuneration central to its logic, even if it, too, is exploitative. One example is gay-for-pay pornography, which I have written about elsewhere. For more, see Stadler 2013.

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Pornography's Feminist Uses

A Conversation

LYNN COMELLA AND DESIRAE EMBREE

Pornography and its uses have been topics of heated debate among feminist activists and scholars since the 1970s. Is porn inherently exploitative or can it be a source of empowerment? Is it possible for feminist entrepreneurs and cultural producers to use the sexual marketplace for radical purposes, or are their projects limited, and perhaps even doomed, by the logic of a capitalist industry defined largely by and for men?

In this wide-ranging conversation, sexuality scholars Lynn Comella and Desirae Embree discuss the complex and often contradictory uses to which American feminists have put pornography in the last 50 years. Drawing upon their respective research on the history of feminist sex-toy stores and the dyke pornography industry, they push back against the explanatory limits of the empowerment versus exploitation narrative, while simultaneously calling on researchers to explore the messy and often untamed cultural and commercial spaces occupied by sex-positive feminist and queer cultural producers and pornographers.

Desirae Embree (DE): One of the things I feel comes out of your work is a very balanced perspective on the various uses to which feminism has put pornography. Often the narrative around feminism and pornography tends to settle into a pro- and anti-framework in which, on the pro-side, pornography is seen as a means of sexual empowerment. On the anti-side, it's seen as a means of oppressing women and keeping them sexually subjugated on both an individual and collective level. What I appreciate so much about your work is that you take a more complex view of it on both a small and large scale, particularly because you're dealing with economies, businesses, and various enterprises that extend beyond the purely political. But *Vibrator Nation* really shows that there are all kinds of uses that might follow from these two broad camps, which are really the feminist sex wars' legacy.

Lynn Comella (LC): It's always interesting to hear people talk about your work and describe what they get out of it, so thank you. I think we sometimes end up in places with our research not necessarily because we thought we'd end up there, but by following the data. That's what ethnographers do. We start with what are hopefully good research questions, and then we continue to refine and sharpen our questions as we learn from the field and as we learn from our interviewees. To be honest, I didn't start out with any intention of studying pornography. That

was a direct outgrowth of studying the world of feminist sex-toy stores. It just so happened that some, although not all, of these stores had erotic video collections that included more educationally oriented porn like *How to Female Ejaculate* (1992) and the *Bend Over Boyfriend* series (1998, 2000). These films piqued my curiosity, and I began thinking about how they fit with the larger educational missions of the feminist and queer businesses I was studying.

I kind of fell into porn studies, really, because when you're studying retail businesses, you are also looking at the kinds of products they sell and how decisions are made about what items to carry. Porn was part of the product mix for many feminist sex shops, and it was also part of the stories I was hearing from many of my interviewees: people like Susie Bright, who started the erotic video collection at Good Vibrations in 1989, and Shar Rednour and Jackie Strano, who founded SIR Video in the late 1990s. The porn piece of my larger project was just kind of there, staring me in my face, and I needed to think about how feminist retailers approached, and in some cases resisted, engaging with pornography and its uses, because it was ultimately part of the story of these businesses.

To go back to your question, though, I think it's really worth discussing the ease with which women's relationship not just to porn but to sex work and to the sexual marketplace more broadly gets collapsed into either a form of empowerment or a form of exploitation. That's the go-to default, and I think it's so lazy. I really became aware of the extent to which it's the default as I began to do more media engagement and began speaking with journalists who were contacting me to get my take on some aspect of the adult industry, whether that was pornography or strip club culture or something related to the sexual economy in Las Vegas, which is where I live. It got to the point where I could almost predict their first question: "In your opinion, is [fill in the blank] empowering or disempowering for women." I finally just stopped even trying to answer that question, and I would instead say, "Let me tell you what I think is interesting about the story that it sounds like you're writing." I just began sidestepping the question altogether as opposed to spending 10 minutes explaining to them why I didn't think it was a very good or interesting question to begin with.

I don't think we've begun to dislodge, really at all, the degree to which discourses of empowerment versus exploitation continue to be the dominant framework for examining women's relationship to sex. I think this speaks to the enduring legacy of not just the feminist sex wars, but the power of the anti-pornography position to shape and define cultural narratives around pornography. I think you're correct that this narrative still operates today, but it flattens out so much of the complexity of our lived experiences and realities. As an ethnographer, I don't theorize things abstractly. Rather, I try to understand how people narrate and make sense of their worlds. I'm listening closely to how people talk about the cultural universes they inhabit, and I'm trying to understand the complexities and contradictions that define their worlds. I think when you approach research this way, you have to abandon any easy, simplistic explanations for understanding cultural phenomena, practices, and beliefs, because those easy explanations just don't work. Complicating the rigid binary of empowerment versus exploitation

was a byproduct of my research and a byproduct of a methodological approach that allowed me to see just how complicated and contradictory the space between those rigid poles is. As a researcher, I've always been intrigued by those complicated and arguably messy spaces.

DE: I love your point that if you are asking good research questions and you have a good, responsible research methodology that has integrity, that it won't actually allow you to produce a narrative that fits neatly into those poles. I had the exact same experience. I remember when I started my project on the dyke pornography industry—which represented the first time in history that lesbians were creating their own commercial sex media—I still didn't know exactly what I was writing about because I hadn't seen any of the videos I was studying. Until recently, it was very, very difficult to see them. You had to go to an archive across the country. But in my dissertation proposal, I was approaching this industry from the empowerment perspective. I thought that women like Suzanne Meyers (who performed in mainstream adult film under the name Chris Cassidy), Debi Sundahl, and Nan Kinney were liberated feminist heroes who had empowered their audiences by going against the feminist orthodoxy at the time. And I remember my committee telling me that my job wasn't to be an uncritical champion of these women or these texts. My job was to find out all of the nuance and the complexity suggesting that the empowerment narrative—even as it was explicitly adopted by many of the women involved in the industry—might not have been an accurate description of what was happening.

And I *did* have to take a more nuanced perspective once I got into the archive and started looking at all of the actual, physical materials related to these videos, their production, and the lives of the women who made them. All of the complexity and messiness of navigating different experiences that result from being a woman or a queer person in the world... they were just sort of there, in the archival record.

The women at Fatale Video, one of the first dyke porn production companies, really *did* see making those videos as a way of empowering women by freeing them from sexual shame, giving them ideas about what pleasure could look like in their lives, and giving them permission to go explore that pleasure *as feminists*. But also, when you look through the business records, it was not a wholly empowering experience for *them*. They experienced a lot of disempowerment not necessarily because of pornography or sexual representation but because of the context around the act of creating sex media and products. There was so much to navigate and that really took a lot out of them both in terms of material resources and in terms of emotional energy. It taxed a lot of their relationships. It was not an uncomplicated project, either politically or personally, for them. And I really started refining my thinking about how complicated this question is, particularly for women and queer people, with Carole Vance's edited collection *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*. It was published in 1984, and so it's situated squarely within the sex wars. As someone writing in a 21st century context, it just kind of blew my mind, that in the midst of what was probably the most polarized feminist debate in history, there was *Pleasure and Danger* arguing

that women's lived sexual experience is one that's marked by both empowerment *and* disempowerment. You cannot disentangle pleasure from danger, and what's more, their co-existence is not necessarily a bad thing. It just is the condition of our sexuality, of how we live in the world. So, I'm interested in your point when you say that as you get these media requests that people seem to really want you to validate that polarization between exploitation and empowerment, because it actually seems like we haven't taken up the nuance that was provided for us by so many of the people writing during the sex wars.

LC: That framework operates so powerfully in the world of journalism because it operates so powerfully in the world. I'm really glad you brought up that priceless, indispensable collection *Pleasure and Danger*, which came out of the 1982 Barnard Conference. It's such a touchstone for me. One of the things that was so groundbreaking and remains so important about that collection, I think, is the extent to which, right out of the gate in the introduction, Vance points to the lived complexity of women's sexual desires and experiences. Here it is, so many years later, and feminist researchers, writers, and activists are still having to make that case. We're still having to talk about, write about, and theorize the lived, embodied space of complexity. This is the case when it comes to sex workers, when it comes to the world of pornography, when it comes to the world of consent. It's interesting for me to reflect on the years that have passed since I started my dissertation in the early 2000s and think about how much the field of porn studies and research on sexual economies have grown. And yet, if you pare back all of the growth of the field, the larger culture still lags behind.

I say that in part because the empowerment versus exploitation narrative has enjoyed decades and decades of dominance despite the work that's being done to examine and theorize these rich spaces of complexity. So many of the people that I admire and look up to in the field, and who I'm proud to call colleagues and friends, occupy this space as researchers, thinkers, and interlocutors with the popular press. They are doing really important work to push the larger culture to think differently about spaces of complexity that are often overshadowed by those who reduce the complicated terrain of sex to either/or binaries: good/bad, acceptable/unacceptable, empowering/exploitative. Sex and sexuality continue to be domains of social and cultural life in which binaries operate quite powerfully, and many people are very comfortable being reductive about sex in ways that they wouldn't necessarily be with other domains of social and cultural life. That's interesting to me.

DE: I wonder what it is that is so seductive about binaries when it comes to sex, generally, and pornography, specifically? What is it that invites us to disregard decades of really complicated work, both in academic scholarship and in popular press, and to fall back on to the either/or?

LC: That's a really interesting question, and I immediately go back to *Pleasure and Danger*. One of my favourite essays in that collection is Gayle Rubin's "Thinking

Sex.” Your question is a complicated one that would involve me being more of a psychologist of the national psyche to answer, but I think at the end of the day many people find comfort in Rubin’s idea of the charmed circle. I think even for people who live their lives outside the charmed circle, whose sexual practices don’t resemble those that define the charmed circle, they also find refuge in the idea of it, which is why I think we see so many politicians leading double lives in terms of how they present themselves to the public and how they live behind closed doors. The charmed circle is *still* an incredibly seductive ideological framework for thinking about how cultural ideas and discourses around sex operate.

DE: I like the idea you bring up that there is comfort within the charmed circle for those whose identities and sexual practices might not fall within it, because I think about this all the time given that my research focuses on 1980s lesbian sex radicals—people who were part of marginalized sex cultures, who undertook marginalized sex practices. One of the things that always strikes me is how quickly those cultures settled into their own norms. They had their own cultural norms, and they had their own cultural rituals that in time became doctrinaire. And at the same time, their identity was built on being on the outside, being in opposition to things like the doctrinaire and the normative. I’m constantly going back and forth, trying to make sense of what was—and what is still in many ways—a truly radical sex culture.

I’m interested to know whether you think this is still the case, but making pornography in the 1980s *was* one of those radical sex practices. When women like Candida Royalle, Sundahl, Kinney, and Meyers started making sex films, it was a radical sex practice, but it was a radical economic practice too. They weren’t just consuming or performing in sex films, they were taking advantage of consumer technology in order to be producers—to be pornographers! But I wonder, do you see it as being similar today? Do you think it is still the case that when someone like Shine Louise Houston, a queer woman of colour, or Courtney Trouble, a fat- and trans-identified person, create sexual imagery and then sell it online to a consumer base—does it still have that radical element to it the way that it did in the 1980s?

LC: Clearly the historical moment is different, and the context is different. There are different conversations happening around pornography today than there were in the 1980s. But I think anytime that women, queer people, and other marginalized people harness the means of production via images and words to create alternative messaging around sex, it’s radical. I still believe that even though it’s 2021 and not 1984—which, as we know, is not only the year that *Pleasure and Danger* came out, but it’s also the year that *On Our Backs* [OOB] published its first issue, the year Candida Royalle founded Femme Productions, and the year Fatale Video got its start. Yet despite cultural shifts and changes, including having more space in the wider culture for sex-positive ideas and discourses, we can’t discount the extent to which society remains overwhelmingly sex negative. Anytime sex-positive cultural producers can carve out space for their work it

is, I think, a radical act, because they are working against cultural forces that would otherwise prefer these things didn't exist. The cultural forces that *OOB*'s founders were pushing against in 1984 are different than what someone like Shine Louise Houston might be pushing against today, but all of us who do this work, as researchers or as cultural producers, are still pushing against a culture of sex negativity and sexism, misogyny, and homophobia, as well as anti-queer, anti-trans sentiments. These things are still very real.

DE: We could kind of arbitrarily break that into two questions. One is about the radical potential of creating alternative, sex-positive images inside of a sex-negative culture—so the question of representation there and what representation can do politically and ideologically. And the other is a question that I don't think we ask enough, which is about the radical potential of marginalized people appropriating media technologies and inserting themselves into media economies. I think that we often forget how radical it is that a woman even picked up a camera. It is easy to forget how recent, historically speaking, it was that women—or any other marginalized group—gained unfettered access to moving image technologies that would *allow* them to create alternative images. And you're right that adult filmmakers are working within a different historical context now, but what's interesting is the extent to which they are still required to be resistant subjects. If you aren't part of a socially dominant group, then creating these images and seizing the means of production in order to do so is always going to require resisting the dominant social organization of both capital and ideology.

LC: There's so much that can be said about the power of images. Thinking about that watershed year, 1984, it's important to remember just how little space there was in the culture for women to speak about and name their desires. There were definitely feminist and queer cultural producers who saw the radical potential of creating erotic and pornographic images that featured women's desires and bodies, but it was also a way to push back against anti-pornography forces. I think it's fair to say that much of the inspiration for *OOB* was the anti-pornography movement. I'm not sure *OOB* would have emerged at that point in time or looked the way it did without anti-pornography feminism informing the images as a counterpoint and in-your-face response. One of the things I realized early on in my research on feminist sex-toy stores is the extent to which cultural producers are always, explicitly or implicitly, in conversation with the thing that they set themselves against.

OOB was at times quite explicit about the counternarrative it was putting forth, but it didn't always have to be explicit to still be in conversation with anti-pornography feminism. The magazine was a very concrete, pragmatic, material intervention. You could pick it up. You could open it up. You could turn the pages. You could look at the images with the knowledge that someone was creating them with the purpose of making a statement about lesbian sexuality and desire by bringing new kinds of sexual images into the world.

It also seems to me that a lot of writers who were at the time reviewing *OOB* and the other lesbian erotic magazines that came out in the early 1980s were struggling to find a language to talk about what these magazines even *were*. There was such a dearth of explicit imagery and sexual language for naming and claiming queer female desire that some of these reviewers didn't have the words to talk about what *OOB* even was. It was groundbreaking in its efforts to create a repertoire of radical lesbian sexual imagery, but it was also, simultaneously, helping to create a new linguistic field for naming and representing lesbian desires.

DE: This is something I'm thinking about a lot right now, as I'm writing a chapter that specifically deals with *OOB* and *Fatale Video*, which were sister companies. The chapter thinks about that image repertoire, as well as how they combined a variety of aesthetic influences in order to construct discursively a zone that was not just specifically lesbian but specifically *dyke*. In the 1970s, cultural feminist discourses of sexuality that naturalized women's sexuality created the template *against which* dyke pornographers were really pushing. In the 1970s feminist artists like Barbara Hammer or Tee Corrinne were representing women's sexuality through visual metaphors that likened it to fruit, flowers, or the landscape, and, to be clear, in its own moment that was also really radical in that it was trying to find, like you said, a language for claiming women's desire.

But a decade later *OOB* and its contemporaries appear, and it seems like their reaction was to say "No, you know what? Our sexuality is artificial, it's constructed, it's commercial, it's enabled by all of these technologies, it's enabled by sex businesses, it's enabled by sexual entertainment. It's manicured, it's shaved, it's pierced, it's tattooed, it's ritualized." There really was a rejection of the cultural feminist ideal of woman-as-nature and women's sexuality as an expression of nature.

I hadn't thought about it in quite the terms that you put it, which is that cultural producers are always in conversation with the thing that they're pushing back against. And *OOB* is, of course, the perfect example of that because its very name was a jab at the feminist anti-pornography newspaper *off our backs*. But it's really interesting how many of the women in that first generation of feminist pornography started their political lives *as anti-pornography feminists*. I think that goes back to your point about the lived complexity of our sexuality. Even the political lens through which we read our desires can change over time, and that's a whole new level of complexity. Debi Sundahl actually said in an interview that when she and Nan Kinney were involved with the anti-porn movement in Minneapolis, they firebombed an adult store. That image of these two dyke pornographers firebombing an adult store—how do we understand that moment and that aesthetic image if we are looking at it through the image repertoire that they created? In many ways their entire career was a version of that act—throwing a Molotov cocktail at the establishment, whether that was the mainstream adult entertainment industry or the lesbian feminist orthodoxy.

LC: Exactly. Regarding the second question you proposed above, capitalism and consumerism are also areas of social and cultural life in which complexity often gets flattened out. It's not just the idea that porn is harmful, it's also that the world of pornography is understood by many as being populated by predatory male capitalists. In other words, pornography is not just a set of representations or ideas about pleasure and danger, it also is a set of commercial practices. It's hard to parse through all the complicated layers around women and capitalism, feminism and capitalism, and sex and capitalism. That was one of the biggest tensions I tried to disentangle in *Vibrator Nation*: the ways in which many sex store owners and employees were constantly trying to find their footing within a capitalist system that they were fundamentally uncomfortable with. Many of my interviewees proudly claimed the sex piece of their work, but not the money part. Sex, as we know, can be a really difficult cultural space for women and girls to inhabit without shame, and here were these women stepping into that space without any shame or stigma or apologies, who were pushing cultural boundaries by selling sex toys and talking openly about sex. But they didn't have the same kind of chutzpah when it came to capitalism. Many people I interviewed were trying to keep consumer capitalism at bay at the very same time they were squarely located within it. That's perhaps the thing many of my interviewees struggled with the most. And it wasn't that they were struggling only with their sense of self and the label "businessowner" or "capitalist"; they were also struggling with being part of a system that's often set in opposition to progressive politics. The dominant narrative is that you can be either a feminist or you can be a capitalist, but you can't be both—or be both successfully. The stereotype is that women aren't supposed to care about money. They're supposed to be nurturers and caregivers. They're supposed to volunteer for good causes, and if they do venture into the world of business, especially if their goal is to do good in the world, they're not supposed to profit from that work. That was a refrain I heard again and again in my research: "We have a social mission. Our mission is about more than commerce. Yet, we have to be commercially viable in order to advance our mission." So, it's an endless loop. That was an ongoing challenge for the majority of businesses that I wrote about in *Vibrator Nation*, and I know it was also an ongoing challenge for scrappy do-it-yourself enterprises like *OOB* and other lesbian and queer production companies that followed in their footsteps, like SIR Video.

Honestly, I am in awe of any marginalized individual who says "I have a vision, and I am going to pursue this idea as a business venture. And I am going to do it even though there is no existing space in the culture for me to sit." Take *OOB* for example: there wasn't an existing marketplace for lesbian porn in 1984. Instead, the magazine's founders were like, "We are going to break open these boxes in terms of the content and images we are creating, and we're going to figure out how to do this in a commercial space where this really hasn't been done before and where there's no infrastructure to support it. We're going to create these images knowing that we're going to get blowback—knowing that we're going to have to push back, every day, against people writing us hate mail and bookstores refusing to carry our magazines—but we are also going to figure out a distribution model

because none exists.” So it’s like, figuring out how to do all these things at once because there is no model. You’re creating radical sexual imagery at the same time that you’re trying to establish a path forward in a marketplace that’s not designed for you, because the idea of porn for women, of lesbian porn, was laughable to many mainstream adult industry folks. That’s something Candida Royalle talked about when I interviewed her years ago. Her biggest challenge wasn’t making porn for women but figuring out how to get her videos into stores because nobody understood what she was doing. They didn’t understand the concept of porn for women or porn for couples. They didn’t understand her box covers, and they didn’t understand why her price point was higher than other videos they were selling. Creating the images was, in some ways, the easy part. Figuring out the marketplace, which includes distribution, advertising, marketing—all of that stuff—that was the hard part.

DE: One of the things I constantly return to as I’m thinking through this question about the marketplace is one night in 1984, when the *OOB* folks throw a strip show at a San Francisco lesbian bar called the Baybrick Inn. Debi Sundahl was a dancer at the O’Farrell Theater and the Lusty Lady, and so she brought lesbian dancers from those venues in as entertainment. Gayle Rubin actually deejayed! And they used the money from the strip show to produce the first issue of *OOB*, to get it printed. I think a lot about that party being the reason the magazine was able to get off the ground and how the magazine was largely sustained by the passion and ingenuity that made that first issue happen. These were not people who had any formal training in print publication. Debi had some experience working on the newsletter for Samois, the San Francisco leatherdyke collective, so she had a little bit of experience. But to your point about these being DIY operations, these women were really learning how to use these technologies *as* they were creating their products, and they became savvy businesswoman *as* they pieced together their business.

One of the things that allowed *OOB* to exist and to stay financially solvent, or close to it, for so long was that they were such early adopters of technologies like the Mac. They got a Mac in 1984, when the first consumer model was released, and they did everything from the second issue onward using desktop publishing. There were all of these technological developments that had to happen in order for them to be able to blaze this trail, but there also had to be political shifts in terms of the organization of capital and politics, which feminism made happen. I think we can easily forget that women weren’t even allowed to have credit cards in their own name until 1974 when the Equal Credit Opportunity Act was passed. So, it’s only ten years before that landmark year—1984—that women are even able to take out a line of credit in their own name. That’s incredible to think about. If you look at that moment, and where the adult film industry is, there’s a disparity between this business, which was booming and flourishing, and where women were allowed to be huge stars, but women can’t even get a line of credit in their own names, so how are they supposed to be making these products themselves?

Dyke pornographers did not have the same kind of ambivalent relationship to capitalism that it sounds like feminist sex-toy businesses did. Part of that is that many of them were already coming out of sex work. I'm thinking about Tigress Productions' founder Suzanne Meyers, who had performed in hundreds of Golden Age films under the name Chris Cassidy, or Lavender Blue's Gene Damage, who was also an adult film performer. These women didn't have an ambivalent relationship to feminist politics, sex, or money, because they had already been living at that intersection. It's interesting to think about how women might come to these projects through different avenues.

LC: People's relationship to the capitalist piece of the feminist puzzle is very much influenced by their position to privilege. It's certainly something that folks who worked at Good Vibrations over the years pushed back against when they heard co-workers with greater resources talk about money not mattering while they were struggling to pay their rent in pricey San Francisco. When I talk about the struggles some of my research subjects had with being located so squarely within capitalism at the same time that they wanted to tear capitalism down, I think there's this sense, still, that to do good activism or to be a good political actor you need to keep commerce and capitalism at bay because otherwise it taints your project. Part of the struggle is, I think, a desire that many people have to be seen as being pure in their politics and activism.

DE: In a previous conversation, you said something that has stuck with me, which is that that capitalism is, among other things—including, I would say, a system of exploitation—a system of meaning. It made me think of something that Joseph Slade has said, which is that “in a capitalist system...culture is synonymous with commerce. Whether one speaks of public or intimate information, ideas circulate to the degree that they can be packaged and sold.” I think that really gets at something unique about pro-sex feminist businesses, which is that they were really the only way that, at the time, radically new ideas about women's sexuality could be not just circulated but understood. Shopping in a sex-toy store, ordering a video from a mail-order catalog, subscribing to a magazine—these were social interactions that people already understood and were comfortable with.

LC: It's a provocative idea to think about: culture being synonymous with commerce. I think culture certainly can't be easily separated from commerce and, conversely, commerce can't be easily separated from culture. That's why I often describe my research as being situated within a larger framework of cultural studies of sexual commerce, because I'm really interested in systems of meaning and representation. One of the things I was trying to do in *Vibrator Nation*, to the extent that I was or was not successful, and I think different readers might have different opinions about that, but I was trying to make the case that consumer capitalism is malleable and that the sexual marketplace, like other forms of culture, is a system of meaning that can be reworked to do and communicate different things. I mean, that's the entire premise of cultural studies, right? Culture

is a system of meanings that can be articulated and rearticulated in different ways. So, if we agree with post-structuralist theories of discourse and meaning, then it makes sense that we would try to think about the ways in which different social actors, in different moments in time, have attempted to tap into and rework the meanings of consumer culture and consumer capitalism to do different things—whether that’s advancing sex education or ideas about sex positivity or whatever. So, the idea that culture is synonymous with commerce, as Slade contends, particularly in a place like the United States, which is such a hyper- and crass capitalist society, is interesting to think about. But also, what might it look like to imagine a kinder, gentler, and more ethical system of consumer capitalism in which the world of sex and sexual commerce might exist?

DE: What’s kind of disheartening about that question is the extent to which effecting the kind of change you’re describing is always dependent on one’s ability to flourish within the marketplace as it currently exists. I’m thinking about companies like *Fatale* or *Tigress*, which were helmed by women who were trying to use, as you’re saying, consumer capitalism as a vehicle for cultural change. But they were always doing so from a position that was already constrained economically. You’ve also mentioned this before, that so many of these feminist sex businesses were failed capitalist projects.

LC: Right. It’s the problem of the perpetually under-capitalized feminist capitalist, right? What does it mean to try to be a capitalist when you are perpetually under-capitalized?

DE: That’s an excellent way to put it. One of the things I say about dyke pornography is that this is a story about women’s economic containment and the effect that has on their attempts at sexual empowerment. These were not wealthy women, and they were never able to secure large investors for their projects. They operated outside of the mainstream industry, creating their own distribution networks, using their own production materials, relying on their immediate community’s labour, sacrificing their own salaries, and often putting their own money into companies that were rarely profitable if they were profitable at all. They were continuously operating in debt, mortgaging and second mortgaging their homes. When I interviewed her, I asked Nan Kinney why in the late 1990s she transitioned *Fatale* out of production and into distribution. She said, “I was getting older. I needed to retire. I needed some money so I could support myself. I couldn’t make porn forever.” And I heard that from several other women too.

They *did* effect a significant amount of cultural change. I live in rural Texas, and I drive past a feminist sex store every day, which would not exist without the feminist entrepreneurs that you study in your book. They did shift the culture so much. They revolutionized what was possible for women’s sex lives, and they revolutionized what was possible for women-owned sex businesses. And yet they just weren’t able to keep their companies—or even themselves, in some instances—afloat. That was enormously taxing.

LC: It reminds me of a set of images of Debi Sundahl in the Human Sexuality Collection at Cornell. It was a contact sheet from a photoshoot she had right before she left San Francisco for Santa Fe. She's naked, and her hair is wild. They are very dramatic images, almost like a piece of experimental performance art. The title of the set, dated 1994, is "Meltdown of a Stripper," and attached to it is a handwritten note on a notecard that reads: "DS sold magazine, divorce, end of life in Marin County. A 'death of an era.'"

The photos really seem to capture a complete emotional collapse, and it made me wonder—and I've always wondered about this—about the emotional toll it took on these women to constantly do battle against various sex-negative cultural forces, including anti-pornography feminists, and, at the same time, put all of this energy into making sure there was enough money in their bank account to pay their employees and vendors. Those images of Debi really symbolized to me the end point of a failed capitalist project. It also makes me wonder how different Debi's life, or the life of *OOB*, might have been if the world of venture capitalism had existed then like it does today. What if some sex-positive philanthropist had come along and said: "The world needs more lesbian porn and we need you to make it. How much money do you need? Here's a blank check."

DE: I find your suggestion that what they really needed was an angel investor very interesting. *OOB* had a huge coup in the early 1990s when they got Absolut Vodka as an advertiser. From the early 1990s until the magazine ended for good, Absolut had a full-page colour ad on the back of the magazine. That was the first, and, really, only, major corporate advertiser that any dyke porn project had, and when I asked Nan and Debi about it, they said that it was the only reason they were able to do the magazine as long as they did. That ad alone paid for printing the entire issue. It really does show you just how powerful having that kind of financial backing could have been. That these companies kept creating products for so long *without* that financial backing just really shows that they were tenacious as hell.

LC: I agree, and I think that tenacity really needs to be acknowledged and celebrated. The uphill battles these women experienced, and the emotional scars those battles often left, were real. Celebrating their contributions doesn't mean that we uncritically put feminist trailblazers or their projects on pedestals, but rather it means that as researchers we commit ourselves to telling their stories in all of their messiness. This includes fully fleshing out the ways in which women occupy deeply complex and often contradictory relationships to feminism, sex, and capitalism. It also means being willing to write about not only their successes but their failures too. That's the kind of feminist research on pornography and the sexual marketplace that excites me the most: the messy, untamed, and multi-vocal stories that can't be easily reduced to neat and tidy either/or narratives and explanations. Those are the stories I most want to read.

A Conversation with Polish Film Director Wojciech Puś on His Project *Endless*

INTERVIEW BY ALPESH KANTILAL PATEL

Poland-based visual artist Wojciech Puś has been working on the project *Endless* since 2016. Comprised of a non-narrative feature film as well as planned and spontaneous performances, *Endless* explores identities-in-process and transition as a foil for the fixed way in which categories of identity typically circulate, particularly in Western European and American contexts. The entire project is inspired by the life of his friend Magdalena Wawrzynczak, who transitioned from male to female in 2013 and who lives in Łódź, Poland. I met Puś in Łódź, where he works as a professor at the National film school, in 2015 and a year later spent some time on the set of *Endless* as work on film began. This was also around the time that Poland began to become increasingly conservative in relation to gender and sexuality. In 2014 politicians created the parliamentary group “Stop Gender Ideology.” The first decision of the current President of Poland, Andrzej Duda, after he took up the post in 2015, was to veto the Gender Accordance Act, which would allow transgender people to change their legal gender without the approval of their parents (Szulc 2019). In the run-up to the most recent Parliamentary election in 2020, Law and Justice party leader Jarosław Kaczyński publicly conflated homosexuality with pedophilia (Davies 2019). Despite an increasingly hostile political climate, Puś has been able to continue work on his film. Below, we discuss *Endless*, focusing on how pornography functions as both a subject and aesthetic in the film. In February 2021, an episode of the series “Queer Landscapes”, based on *Endless*’s themes, premiered at the Rencontres Internationales Paris/Berlin festival in Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Alpesh Kantilal Patel (AP): The rights of LGBTQ-identified people in Poland have been increasingly compromised since The Law and Justice party took power in 2015. Could you fill us in on these recent events? Also, how has it been filming your project in this climate?

Wojciech Puś (WP): I am working with a small group of people. We have known each other for years and we trust each other. In terms of financing, the project is independent which of course means a lot of difficulties, but what’s more important, it also means total artistic freedom. I would say that political climate in Poland did not affect my production at all. This climate existed before 2015, but was very precisely hidden, so to the world my country appeared civilized and progressive, which is total fucking bullshit. Now because of the growing popular-

ity of alt-right movements, the real ugly face is more visible. I like it this way, you can see the enemy more clearly. Also, there is no nuanced discourse about LGBTQIA+ rights in Poland. Everything drowns in the discussion about partnership of white, middle-class, gay men. So, this is the real place in which we are now and probably will be for the next decade or two.

AP: Could you briefly describe *Endless*, how long you have been working on it, and how it came into being?

WP: It started in 2015, when I contacted my friend Magdalena Wawrzyńczak about working together on a short film project to be commissioned by Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw. This was postponed, but we started to work together anyway on a screenplay based on Magdalena's life around the time of her sex confirmation surgery. It turned out that the screenplay for *Endless*, inspired by certain themes from the life of Magdalena, was a trembling mirror of sorts for me, through which our creative process resonated. It also acted as a venue for telling stories that were rooted in both of our own personal experiences. This is how *Endless* came about—no longer a typical feature film screened at a movie theatre, museum or gallery, but a multimedia cinematic hybrid referencing the idea of Zofia and Oskar Hansen's Open Form. Their postulate referred specifically to architecture and the visual arts, calling for the creation of works that aren't closed, but which offer the possibility of new contexts and interpretations. Such a project would be a living mass, always ready to be placed in a new set of circumstances, a new time and relationship with a changing reality. Because of this, it never loses its relevance, and the audience experiences the full complexity of the solutions that are proposed. The Open Form also argues for egalitarianism with regards to the collective nature of the artists' relationship with the audience taking part: this fully reflects the fundamental idea of *Endless*.

AP: You wrote the script as well as directed this film. Were scenes that could be read as pornographic part of your script-writing process?



All photographs and stills from *Endless* (film and live performances), courtesy of Wojciech Puś.



WP: From the very beginning, I already knew that the film will contain sexual matters in terms of how you start to think about your body in the process of transition. Some of the scenes I wrote in the script were described in a very explicit way. I really wanted the descriptions to be like that so people involved with the film would know what kind of a journey making this film would be. That is, there would be no surprises for them after jumping in. I initially gave the script to not only the actors to read, but also people in a technical department like, for example, my camera assistant and my gaffer. I've been told by many individuals (artists, producers, curators, gallerists), who have read the script, that it's absolutely impossible to get people who will be both good actors and also be so brave and honest in showing their bodies, and, you know, depicting sexual activities in front of the camera. The other thing was that I tried to approach actors and actresses in Poland, and they told me that it's impossible to find performers (especially male ones) in Poland who will be comfortable and, let's say, be adventurous in front of the camera. So, it took me 2 years to find the circle of people who would be happy to do that and, what's more important, understand and love my ideas; and were happy to bring their ideas, too! I had to find people who not only are fearless, but also would understand why we are using such and such imageries, and did not need to ask: Why do we have sex here? Why the sex needs to be so explicit?

AP: Given the difficulties you mentioned with finding actors, how did you "cast" the film? Or did you end up doing something different than traditional casting?

WP: I don't believe in the process of traditional casting—to find the right people for the right characters. It's a fake situation of proving something that maybe isn't there. For me, merging the actors' experiences into that of the characters is important, typical casting can't account

for this more complicated process of character development that I am interested in. Somehow, I would say that actors from the field of porn are often more believable, than “trained,” professional actors, and I’m not talking only about scenes which include sexual matters. With actors and artists experienced in porn, somehow the process is smoother and more truthful. They tend to discuss scenes on a level that is disconnected from the category of shame. I feel I have to work twice as much with professionals so I can dig into their “truth.”

AP: How did you find your actors in the end?

WP: The first person I approached was Szymon Czacki, an actor from the National Old Theatre in Krakow and who I had worked with before. For the standards of a “professional” actor, it’s really courageous of him that he agreed to be in this project. I think the second person I approached was Josef Ostendorf. He’s a great actor in many theatre pieces by Christoph Marthaler and Frank Castorf—both important European theatre directors. He is 65 years old and quite a big guy, but he’s not shy about using his body as a performer, actor, and artist. Josef is very daring on stage. To reveal the complicated layers of a character, he is not afraid to make the viewer uncomfortable. He has a great, philosophical approach to it. Josef then told me about his friend from Chile, Jorge Benavides, who lives also in Berlin. Jorge and I spent some time together talking. I loved his energy and wisdom and naturalness. I definitely wanted him to be in the film and I already knew which character he should portray because of his presence, his body, but also his background, in addition to being a porn actor, director and performer, he’s a sexual activist and healer. So yeah, we started some conversations, and then after I think the third one, he told me about his latest photoshoot with this beautiful, wonderful, electric young guy, Pierre Emö, and showed me his photos. I figured out that actually one year before I downloaded short porn films with Pierre, so I wrote him a message about the project and we decided to shoot one monologue, just to see if we can get along together. In the meantime, Pierre started to work more for theatre. In 2018, he performed in *Dekameron* with the Berliner Ensemble and in mainstream/arthouse productions such as Yann Gonzales’ *Knife + Heart*, nominated for Cannes International Film Festival’s *Palm d’Or*. In the beginning of the same year, we—Pierre, Jorge, Lina Bembe, Anton Tsyhulskyi, Magdalena, Szymon, and Josef, started our journey with a set of performances in Germany, France and Poland, at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw.

AP: How do these performances connect with the film?

WP: In the process of rehearsing the scenes from the script I developed the idea of live acts that could feel like cinematic experiences. Some of the scenes we’ve rehearsed felt right for the camera and others felt better to be experienced “live.” I thought about these events as neither theatre, nor a film, but an experience that allows the audience to be a part of the environment and the story told by actors and performers, who are using texts by Michel Leiris, Gilbert & George, Paul B.

Preciado, Anton Tsyhulskyi, Lana Del Rey, and also by me. I presented these 45 to 90-minute cinematic performances at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw: one was titled *Endless: Day as Days*, curated by Natalia Sielewicz and the other, *The Wind Connects Us*, which was a part of the *Parliament of Bodies (PoB) / The Night of Black Milk* show curated by Paul B. Preciado and Viktor Neumann. The performances were also documented on film and video and will be included in the film, as a part of a story.

AP: What is your approach to storytelling and how do you shape the characters in your film?

WP: In my film there is a story within the story within the story. That is, it is one story, really, but every time I show it from a different perspective, so it's a little bit like a multi-layered labyrinth. *Endless* brought together everything from performance and the diaristic book to the soundtrack I composed for the characters and performers. So, in a way the whole world of *Endless* manifested in different "media" co-existing together. Also, when I met Jorge Benavides and Lina Bembe, the fact that they are sex educators, porn actors and performers, immediately shaped the way how I developed the characters they play in *Endless*. This is the case with all of the people in the film that came to my project with a background and experience in art, porn, activism and education regarding sex and sex working. I was not only doing scenes for the film but also, I was doing a documentary about them: there is a blurring between what is documentary and fiction in *Endless*. If there is a main story, it is that based on the real events from the life of my friend Magdalena, who underwent a male-to-female transition in 2013. Her story is filled with meaningful characters who are loosely mirrored by the actors and performers. The result is a filtered dream about transition in every sense of the word. There is a link here to the classic film *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961, dir. Alain Resnais), the characters of which seem to be in a state of in-betweenness. You cannot tell so much what their profession or "place in the society" is. They, their feelings and emotions, seem to be stuck in limbo. In the end, I mix the characters with the background of the actors' lives together to refuse the viewer a singular narrative.

AP: Does porn factor as an aesthetic or style in your films? Also, what else influenced your style?

WP: Shooting sex scenes was a really big test for me as I had never done so in the past. During the 3 years, almost 4 years, I have been working on this film, I would say that my cinematography in *Endless* is connected not only to paintings but also porn. In terms of the aesthetics of porn, I don't move the camera, so a viewer just has the possibility to put oneself in a position of a voyeur. This is something that is pretty common in porn films, especially homemade ones, where you have a fixed frame. You observe something but actually you cannot move, and we have a lot of this kind of imagery. So, it looks like a like a painting with things hap-

pening inside of it. You know, like a big panorama with people coming and going away, talking, dancing, fucking, and drinking. You have all these possibilities of thinking that something might have happened outside of the frame. I am thinking of the very specific usage of hidden camera in amateur porn films when you have it fixed, when you have it may be hidden somewhere. So, I put the viewer in a position of a voyeur. Apart from that, the composition of the bodies and the usage of light and colors in *Endless* have their roots in the paintings of Hieronymus Bosch, Francis Bacon, and Johann Heinrich Füssli. So, I combine the ripe and rich aesthetics of painting with something that in many ways culturally is sadly marked as low - meaning the rawness of scenes involving sex.

AP: You work a lot through abstraction which may be surprising given we are talking about pornography. Can you describe this abstraction and why it is relevant for your project? That is, your project is based on a specific origin story, but you are more invested in the notion of queerness as a shift in how we think about identity—trans or otherwise—rather than as fixed. Is that right?

WP: *Endless* is a hypertextual story of desire, loneliness and illusion that verges on the border of reality and hallucination, documenting the convulsive beauty and the uncanniness of identity in the process of transformation. The characters look upon each other and flow into one another, giving way to multiple hybrids of identity: supra(mental), supra(psychological), supra(gender), supra(racial), and (supra) sexual. So, yes, my interest is in queerness as a possibility to create bold, broad, and fluid worlds that can shift and expand fixed point of views, as nothing is what it seems. This also concerns the usage of porn and how codes of porn are read by people. I already mentioned curators, producers and gallerists, who told



me that it would be nearly impossible to find actors for this kind of film, but they were shocked by the explicit descriptions in my script. When I used words like “dick,” “tits,” “cock,” “cum,” “squirt,” and “fucking” they probably reflected on their codes of perception—what they “translate” as pornographic, based on their experiences.

AP: I remember when I visited you on set that we discussed how much landscape was a big part of your characters— that is, their bodies could not be seen as distinct from the world around them. Can you elaborate on what I provisionally termed “queer landscapes”?

WP: I loved the music of these words and I fell in love with your idea of queer landscape. Through the years I see that definitely I use the image of the body and the specific locations to create the feeling of unity between the characters and the landscape in terms that you can feel that the landscape is shaped somehow by their experiences, thoughts, sexualities. Imaginary and at the same time very real. In Germany, when we filmed in Schloss Kalkhorst, I decided to use the drone to shoot the landscape. Later in the film it will be merged with the CGI drone shots flying over bodies of Szymon and Magdalena. So, their bodies will literally become a landscape.

AP: Thanks, Wojciech, for taking some time out of your schedule to tell us more about *Endless*. It’s a fascinating project. Where can readers find out more about it as well as your other works?

WP: Thank you! There are excerpts from *Endless* as well as my other projects here: <https://www.youtube.com/user/wojciechpus>. Also, there’s some more info here on me: <https://culture.pl/en/artist/wojciech-pus>.

Endless

Cast: Szymon Czacki, Magdalena Wawrzyńczak, Josef Ostendorf, Pierre Emö, Lina Bembe, Anton Tsyhulskyi, Jorge Benavides, Pat Dudek

Director/cinematography/screenplay: Wojciech Puś

Sound design and music: Thomas Köner

Additional music: Wojciech Puś

Animation/VFX: Jerzy Tabor

Camera assistant: Tomasz Lechicki

Gaffer: Michał Bratkiewicz

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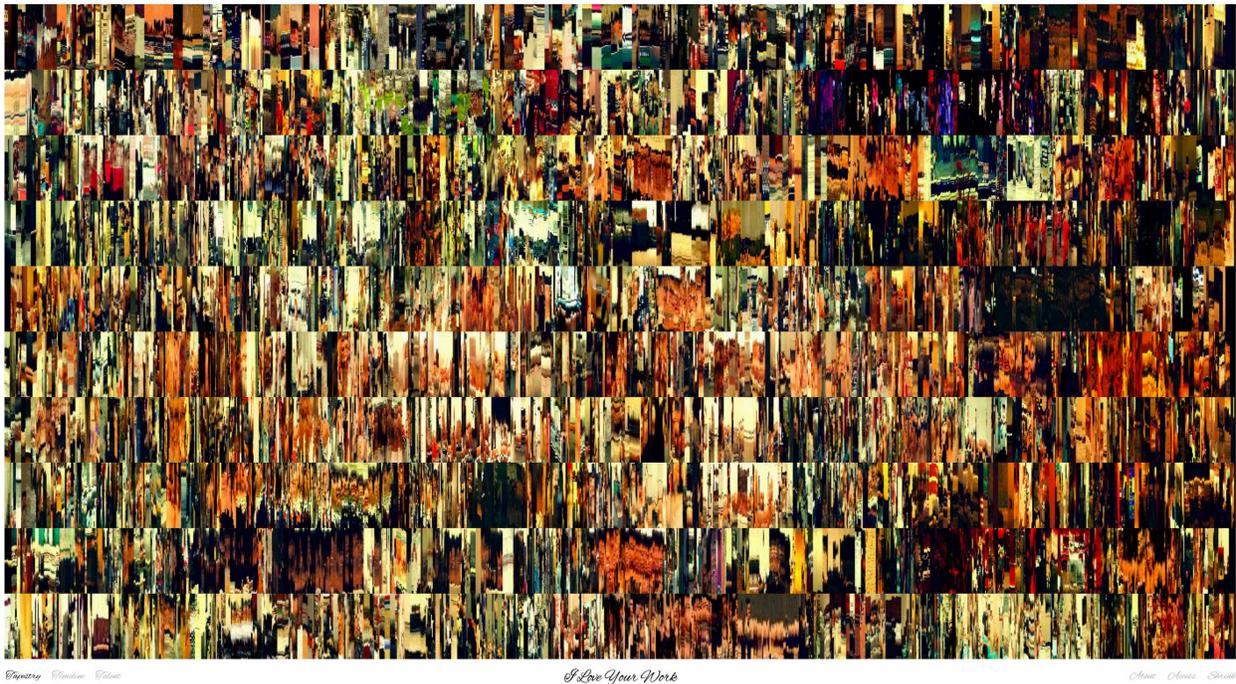
Make Your Own Neverland

Where Nonfiction Film Interacts with Lesbian Porn

JASPER LAUDERDALE

Jonathan Harris's *I Love Your Work* (2013) is an interactive documentary environment that depicts "the realities of those who make fantasies."¹ Alternately referred to by its creator as a film and a portrait, the piece collates fragments of the quotidian lives of nine women who make lesbian pornography. Harris follows each woman for one full day of a consecutive ten-day shooting schedule (one is featured twice), capturing one ten-second video clip every five minutes to create a six-hour timeline of a total of 2,202 clips. The navigable environment is freely previewable, but costs ten dollars per twenty-four hours of access and is limited to ten scheduled views per day, evoking the exclusivity and expense of paywalled online porn sites (a premium package is also available for just three hundred). Harris limits his clips to ten seconds to invoke the format of free teasers that elicit payment from horny surfers, claiming that these "fractured windows... are partially teasers for porn, but primarily teasers for life" and generating what Maria Engberg calls a procedural or combinatory aesthetic (2016, 38). The paradigm-shifting rise of tube sites in the early 2000s brought instantly and freely accessible amateur content, promos linked to subscription-based material (which frequently terminate just before the money shot), and pirated professional video, arranged spatially to allow maximal simultaneous engagement before selection. But Harris's film emerges at a moment when demand for specialized or upmarket, even ethical, pornography is on the rise.² *I Love Your Work* is an innovative and potentially problematic incursion into the privacy of those who make it their business to make public that which is most intimate.

I Love Your Work is a new media artifact, and due to its countless possible permutations, the piece can never be read the same way twice, or perhaps more appropriately, engaged with or participated in twice. Its interface constitutes both an amalgam of the ten concurrent timelines and a rhizomatic tapestry of moments, each of which displays a timecode and the name of its subject. The possibility of conventional formalist textual analysis or close reading is dubious, for in the case of interactive documentary, according to webdocumentarian Alexandre Brachet, "Interface is content" (Rose 2014, 208). Thus, I will attempt to bring my exploration of the material and its database into constellation with two disparate fields of scholarship: feminist (and lesbian-feminist) approaches to lesbian pornography from the aftermath of the mid-eighties feminist sex wars, and more contemporary theoretical analyses of interactive and web documentary practice and spectatorship. It is important here to not consider the emergent

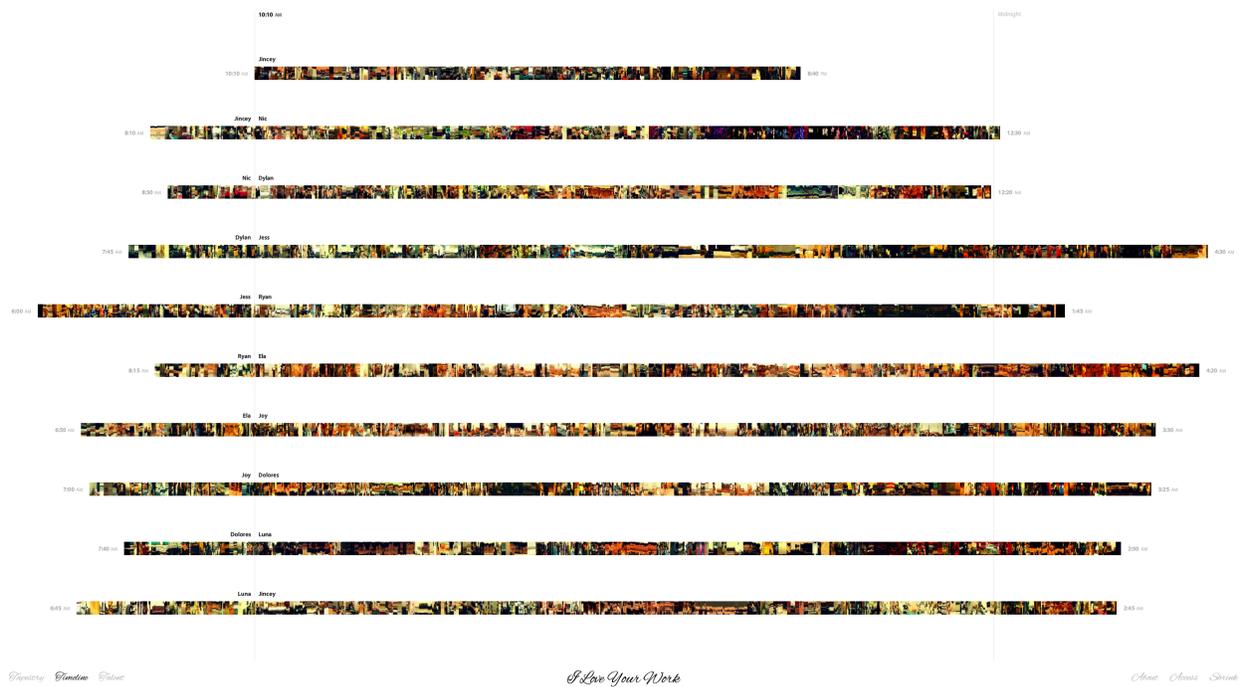


interactive documentary mode as an innately new, novel, digital evolution of the form, but as Judith Aston and Sandra Gaudenzi suggest, as “a form of nonfiction narrative that uses action and choice, immersion and enacted perception as ways to construct the real, rather than to represent it” (2012, 125).

A number of complexities and potential problematics arise, for I am dealing with a male-authored text that presents the female body both in the context of private life (see scopophilia and voyeurism in dominant cinema) and erotic lesbian imagery (so often appropriated or exploited in mainstream porn for the heterosexual male gaze). What can it mean that *I Love Your Work* shares in so many ways a point of access, however reflexively, with cyberporn? Does limited voyeurism (thanks to the ten-seconds-every-five-minutes model) actually succeed in interrupting or interrogating scopophilic pleasure? How do scrubbing the image and toggling between coincident timelines reflect the actual ephemeral experience of online porn consumption? To what extent can the pleasure of the performer subversively preclude the pleasure of the hidden onlooker? And whose gaze is variously solicited in mainstream heterosexual porn, in mainstream woman/woman porn, in feminist lesbian porn, and in the documentation of the making of feminist lesbian porn?

In *I Love Your Work*, the viewser (a popular portmanteau of viewer and user intended to succeed the traditional cinematic spectator in the field of new media, one that is here remarkably and amusingly apt) participates in the construction of the construction of sexual fantasy. The interface is a mosaic of filmed moments, shot and organized linearly, but nonlinearly navigable, effectively allowing its viewser to edit their own narrative to taste. We are enabled by the precise,

Figure 1.
Tapestry view.



mathematical infrastructure to select and reorganize clips at will, which calls into question the filmic notion of a finished product and refuses the mastery over the image permitted by traditional montage. As the architecture dictates, all clips must end at ten seconds; such truncation precludes the duration needed to gain spectatorial purchase on a character or story, to be sutured into a scene. Time itself is distilled and synthesized, and the sheer number of moments that take place in transit (cab, sidewalk, subway) make us consider how our own time is allocated in urban life. The experience is rhizomatic in the sense that the interface provides interminable and nonhierarchical points of entry and exit and truly infinite navigability between these points, but also because all nine women know or know of each other and exist within a shared community of lesbian porn makers. Beyond the day Harris spends with each of them, many reappear on other days, most often in the context of sex work. Indeed, eight of them are involved, as performers or facilitators, in the production of a ten-part self-pleasure series by Juicy Pink Box Productions called *Therapy* (Jincey Lumpkin, 2010).

As noted, several concepts gleaned from the critical scholarship on lesbian and woman/woman pornography in the context of the feminist sex wars are useful in unpacking Harris’s film and its implications, including especially Deborah Swedberg’s identification of an oppositional or resistant lesbian pornographic gaze. She suggests that the lesbian consumer of heterosexual male depictions of lesbian sex can in fact reappropriate and reclaim pornographic images of women without sacrificing her pleasure or subjectivity, thus destabilizing the very structure of erotic representation: “As her sexual pleasure is foregrounded, unlike in other contexts, a lesbian may easily fill in the gaps in intelligibility” (Swedberg

Figure 2.
Timeline view.

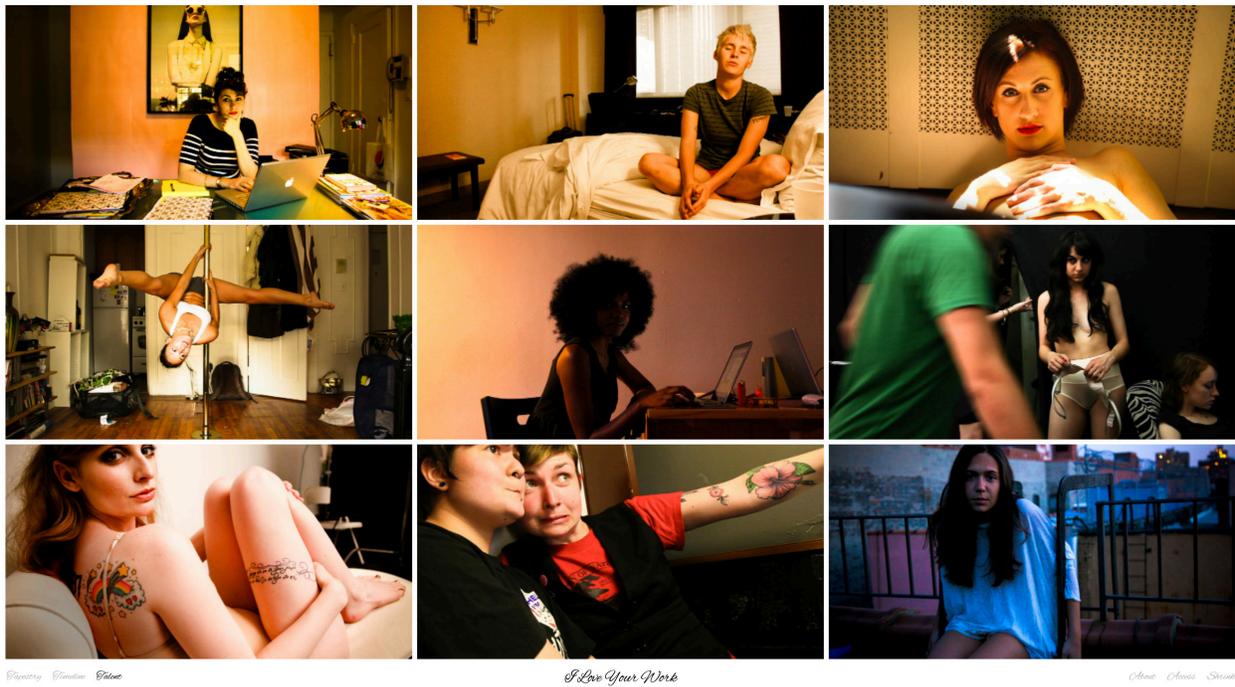
1989, 607). Cherry Smyth similarly attempts to realign pornographic analysis to account for a lesbian gaze and to reclaim lesbian filmic desire as an act of assertion and self-representation. She addresses the significant and subversive absence of the money shot in lesbian porn, arguing that the woman performer signifies “her pleasure by sound and gesture ... Coming, unlike in much heterosexual and gay male porn, does not immediately signal the end of the sexual act and thus the video. This openness challenges the values of dominant cinematic structures which insist on narrative resolution” (Smyth 1990, 156). I find that the interactive architecture of *I Love Your Work* reflects this endlessness native to lesbian porn; there is potentially no end to the film, just as there need be no decisive end to the acts of lesbian sex depicted and discussed therein.

Terralee Bensinger traces a shift from spectator to community in process as collective fantasy (here the Juicy Pink Box community) and demonstrates how a reframing of pro-sex lesbian pornographic activity can disrupt hegemonic representational practices, but most importantly for us, how such a redefinition of community stimulates a displacement into what Teresa de Lauretis calls the realm of elsewhere:

Such spaces are likely to be located at the margins of already existent culture, appearing as gaps or interstices within the dominant representational formations.... These (no)places are what de Lauretis speaks of as the ‘elsewhere of discourse here and now, the blind spots, or the space-off, of its representations,’ and it is here that the feminist subject, now figured from a lesbian nuanced perspective, can begin to move more freely...onto a pro-sex lesbian scene of desire within which traditional pornographic ‘ways of seeing’ can begin to be deconstructed and transfigured through displacement and re-vision. (Bensinger 1992, 77–78)

In my view, *I Love Your Work* takes place in and renders partially visible this interstitial realm of elsewhere, this (no)place scene of lesbian desire. As Joy, a production assistant and stylist on the set of the *Therapy* series, suggests, “Well, I guess Neverland just, you know, doesn’t exist, so, you can make your own.” Harris’s film solicits us, through interactivity, to fill in Swedberg’s gaps in intelligibility and to construct our own Neverland from the fragments available in de Lauretis’s displaced elsewhere.

Two powerful emblems pervade *I Love Your Work* and so deserve a brief aside. For Heather Butler, the butch, as “the visible marker of lesbianism,” proffers maximum visibility and destabilizes dualist conceptions of gender, overthrowing heterohegemony in the process: “She is the certificate of authenticity in lesbian pornography for lesbians; she turns the screen into a potentially safe space for the visual representation of lesbian desire; and she inspires trust in her lesbian viewers”; in conjunction with the femme, she “can provide us with new ways of viewing pornography” (Butler 2004, 169). Two of the women in *I Love Your Work* identify as “dykes” or “babydykes,” and their presence both in the film and in the film within the film establish authenticity because they constitute a threat to the male porn spectator; by emulating him, they resist being sexually consumed by him, complicating and ultimately wresting from him his scopophilic drive. The



second symbol is that of the dildo, which for Butler importantly “functions as a pleasure-giver, not a pleasure-seeker”; it doesn’t come, stays hard and is detachable, displacing dominant Lacanian ideas of phallic power: “the phallus does indeed belong to any and everyone...[it] is not the penis, but, rather, a detachable, performative, even phantasmic object that nobody owns and that everybody can play with, wear, or discard” (2004, 183). The strap-on in particular provides a kind of agency to its wearer and can, for Smyth, “subvert the potency of the penis by reasserting women’s sexual sufficiency and proving that the woman lover is more powerful than any male rival...[it] signifies the lack of fixity of gender.... Women control the phallus as never before” (1990, 157). As actor and educator Nic, one of the film’s nine performers, puts it, “Sometimes you just want a cock.”

As an interactive environment, *I Love Your Work* constitutes what Gaudenzi calls a “living documentary,” a relational entity based on the dynamic relationships that form between user, author, and code via a human-computer interface and its attendant ecosystem (2013). By her logic, Harris’s film is an adaptive, autopoietic assemblage of interdependent elements. As users, we are “internal to the system. It is not one object ... but a cloud of possibilities that depends on the possible relations between several dynamic systems: a user, an interactive structure, a database of content and a technical and cultural context” (Gaudenzi 2013, 90). *I Love Your Work* also deploys what Marsha Kinder terms database narrative structure, exposing “the dual processes of selection and combination that lie at the heart of all stories and are crucial to language” and revealing “the arbitrariness of the choices made and thereby challeng[ing] the notion of master narratives

Figure 3.
Talent view.

whose selections are traditionally made to seem natural or inevitable” (2003, 349). The ruptured images intrinsic to *I Love Your Work* carry a subversive potential: they expose the normally hidden architecture of the database and enable us to see (and indeed operate) the narrative engine. For Kinder, “the process of retrieval necessarily involves ideology and desire: where are we permitted to look and what do we hope to find”; such questions are tellingly applicable to the experience of seeking databased porn online (349).

For Adrian Miles, faceted, granular, multilinear works like Harris’s have crystalline structures that irrevocably alter the role of the filmmaker: the filmmaker no longer determines fixed relations between shots through editing, but rather assembles sets of possible relations that will be uniquely realized as permutational sequences by the user in conversation with the interface (Miles 2014). Miles posits that while interactivity “is often regarded as the addition of complexity and choice to what we make and how we view it, it is in fact best considered a reduction, a choreography of the radically open of the virtual and the crystalline through the reducing interest of decision ... reducing the set of all that could be to what is” (2014, 76–7). Finally, Sally McMillan acknowledges the extent to which “interactivity may be in the eye of the beholder,” a sentiment that sounds suspiciously like the old “I know it when I see it” rationale for recognizing and categorizing obscenity and porn without clear parameters (2002, 165).

I hold that by rendering limitedly visible de Lauretis’s realm of elsewhere, her (no)places and blind spots of (re)presentation, and Butler’s potentially safe lesbian screen space, Harris succeeds in effacing the stigma that surrounds lesbian pornographic production without falling prey to the exploitative capacity of (some) traditional nonfiction filmmaking. In turn, he provides us with the tools to fashion our own elsewhere Neverland, consequently placing on us the onus of exploitation and (re)presentation. Elizabeth Cowie observes that documentary film aligns our scopophilic and epistemophilic drives, “a curiosity to know satisfied through sight ... the wish to see what cannot normally be seen, that is, what is normally hidden from sight” (1997). And Belinda Smaill, addressing specifically what she terms the pornography documentary and affective responses that attend the figure of the woman porn star, notes that works at the intersection of the ethnographic and the erotic, those that turn especially on the aestheticization and fetishization of the sexualized female body, necessarily confound both drives—the admixture of these two nonfiction modes forecloses the possibility of being entirely satisfied by either the pleasure represented or the pleasure in knowing the other (Smaill 2009). The pornography documentary ambivalently aims to pull back the curtain on a commercial industry while also offering “a pleasurable viewing experience in which a sexual spectacle is always immanent but almost never fully realized” (2009). Harris’s film betrays forbidden images, but its ruptured multilinearity precludes voyeuristic pleasure. The act of navigating and interacting with *I Love Your Work* achieves in its viewer an embodied hyperawareness of their gaze and choices, productively subverting the traditional safety of pornographic spectatorship via the complicity of constructing a narrative and the juxtaposition

of extreme erotica with the quotidian experience of city dwelling and labour. It is an exposé bereft of exposure.

Regarding the perennial question of authorship, much pornography is subject to the same contradictions of gender and power regardless of authorial intent due to the fact that dominant pornography is always already such a highly codified mode. Like documentary, porn is up to the beholder to assign, interpret, and/or appropriate meaning. Porn can be fruitfully thought of as a predigital interactive mode of image-making and consumption, and in its current networked iterations, according to Harris himself, “is the staging ground for almost every new digital technology ... Porn is the elephant in the room of the Internet.” The spectator is interpellated in a much more significant, dare I say embodied, way than in mainstream film practice and is engaged by a medium intended for arousal, self-pleasure, and masturbation. Linearity is present in porn, but matters less than in other modes, if at all; the rhizomatic, archival, and databased structure of access to online porn in the digital age already involves toggling between clips, fragments, and segments, finding one or several that generate the appropriate desired response in the viewer’s body. Scrubbing the image to locate the money shot and assembling compilations of particularly affective moments are part and parcel of the contemporary porn consumer’s experience of spectatorship. Indeed, porn flicks tend to end not when the narrative or the experiment reaches completion, but when the user does, finishes up, achieves what they came to do. *I Love Your Work* reflects and critiques this pleasurable relation to the image, and succeeds in exposing the apparatus, refusing a fixed spectator position, denying (or at least displacing) pleasure, and (con)fusing modalities of documentary and fiction. It interrogates film language, practice, and the depiction of reality, and constitutes an innovative and productively countercinematic work of visual culture, one that reveals the fantasy hidden in the everyday.

Notes

1. *I Love Your Work* can be found at <http://iloveyourwork.net>, and all quotations attributed to Harris herein appear on the site’s frequently asked questions page.
2. A popular Reddit thread (https://www.reddit.com/r/AskReddit/comments/arhrhi/people_who_pay_for_porn_what_is_everyone_else/) from early 2019 revealed that consumers continue to pay for porn in an era of ostensibly limitless access for a number of reasons beyond evading persistent ads on tube sites, including having niche interests and using novel media (e.g., virtual reality), a partiality for camming and following particular performers (who often end up performing emotional as well as sexual labour for their clients), and millennials’ generational willingness to pay a premium for content they care about (along with a general shift to à la carte subscription-based models in other areas of life and media consumption).

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THOUGHT
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Porn Poacher

Coming Out as an Aca Porn Fan

MADITA OEMING

Thank you so much for fighting the good fight to destigmatize and humanize the adult industry...and for being a fan, too :P It means a lot to me, and so many others, that you recognize the value in what we create.
– twitter DM from Angela White

I find many pleasures in porn. As a cultural scholar, I enjoy unraveling the evolution of this multifaceted medium and industry that has so much to teach about gender, power, and biopolitics. As an Americanist, I revel in understanding the US, its taboos, and its complicated relationship to the body through the lens of pornography. As a teacher, I am rewarded with highly motivated students who often catch the Porn Studies fever. As a feminist, I find a lot of pain in the ongoing turf war about pornography,¹ but at least as much joy in connecting with a sex-positive community. Sex workers have taught me more than I could ever return. As their ally, I give but also receive genuine solidarity. As an activist, I have found a voice, unknown strength, and a purpose in ending stigma against porn. As a cinephile, I go to porn film festivals, appreciate porn's aesthetics, am entertained by its humor, celebrate this form with others in the shared space of the porn cinema. As a consumer, I am rooting for its producers and performers at award shows, follow their lives through social media, subscribe to their OnlyFans, tip them. As a sexual being, I find healing in porn from much of my own sexual shame. And yes, I masturbate to porn. I am, in short, what has been labeled an “academic-fan” (Hills 2002)—an aca porn fan.²

When I said these words in my talk for the Porn Studies section at the 2019 MAGIS Film Studies Spring School in Gorizia, Italy, I did not think it was something daring to say. In contrast to the rather hostile academic contexts in which I often find myself the porn scholar outlaw, this room was filled with colleagues who I assumed would not only share my belief that pornography deserves scholarly attention, but also a certain affection for it. Yet, what I saw in the eyes staring at my slide saying *aca-fan* in bold black letters was, if not shock, at least surprise. When I heard each syllable of *mas-tur-bate* reverberate in awkward silence, I realized how much we had desexualized and disembodied our shared study object and along with it, ourselves. After my talk, a dear colleague came to me and said: “I apologize for the lack of more inclusive language, but what you just said took balls.” Another whispered to me: “Bold!” It was only then that I became fully aware of the lack of conversation we have around our personal, physical

relationship to porn, even within our own, close-knit research community. I felt like I had named the elephant in the room, a taboo among those who consider it part of their profession to break taboos.

The paucity of outspoken aca-fan culture in Porn Studies is hardly surprising. Working in a field that still finds itself in a constant state of justification, “researchers identifying as ‘users’ of pornography, let alone as fans, might be constructed as politically suspect and ethically compromised,” as Feona Attwood and I. Q. Hunter point out (2009, 549f). When Routledge launched *Porn Studies*, the first academic journal entirely dedicated to research on porn, prominent anti-porn feminist Gail Dines called its editors “cheerleaders for the industry” (qtd. in Cadwalladr 2013). When scholarship that strives for neutrality instead of being explicitly anti-porn is already vulnerable to such attacks, how is there supposed to be any room for actual celebration? Maybe the only public form of fandom you may commonly come across in our field is what David Church has fittingly called “Vintage Pornoisserism” (2016, 151), which could be described as more of a nerdy film buff / collector type, though, who finds safety in historical distance and presents as disconnected from any masturbatory practice; an enthusiast of the 1970s more than of porn, really. As a lot of porn’s stigma is transferred to studying it, we cannot afford, it seems, to mix academic business and physical pleasure—even less so as women and, Heaven forbid!, as feminists. Too little has changed since Linda Williams wrote in her introduction to *Hard Core*:

I should want to protect myself against the perceived contaminations of a ‘filthy subject’—lest I be condemned along with it. For even though I know that the slightest admission that not every image of every film was absolutely disgusting to me may render my insights worthless to many women, I also know that not to admit some enjoyment is to perpetuate an equally invidious double standard that still insists that the nonsexual woman is the credible, ‘good’ woman. (1989, xi)

It was the genderedness and the notion of self-protection in these lines that would haunt me later that sunny weekend in Italy and became a major motivation to write this text.

“So that was quite the confession you made, huh?” says the professor smirkingly when sitting down across from me on the train to the airport after the conference. We had not spoken before. “Do you see yourself in porn?” he continues, “You’d sure find an audience.” His eyes travel across my body. My thoughts instantly get lost in so many different directions that I cannot remember what or whether I replied. Out of nowhere, he tells me how much he is turned on by donating sperm. “Too much information!” is what I want to respond, but say nothing at all. It makes me feel uncomfortable how his knees touch mine. I feel trapped in this crammed wagon. I get off at the next stop and sitting there, waiting for the next train, I catch myself thinking: “Well, I was asking for it!” It took me weeks to understand that this was nothing other than internalized victim blaming. We should not have to pay for presenting as sexual beings. It should not be a ‘confession’ for academics to acknowledge that we do have a body. And yet, it is still a reality, which especially female porn scholars have to face, that

our research invites violations of our personal space. Let us talk about how we can protect ourselves in other ways than by erasing our own sexuality. This text is a way of reclaiming mine. I can be a sexual woman and a credible one, to use Williams' words; I can be a qualified porn scholar and an ardent porn fan and still have boundaries—and so can you.

“I suppose I have always been something of a fan” (1992, 4) writes Henry Jenkins, one of the earliest and most outspoken self-identifying aca-fans, in *Textual Poachers*. He explains that “it was [his] fannish enthusiasm and not [his] academic curiosity that led [him] to consider an advanced degree in media studies” (5). In my case, it was studying porn that turned me into a fan. Even though I have always watched porn, I was a mere consumer beforehand. Neither did I particularly appreciate the medium, nor the people in or behind it. I did not even know their names. Porn was something happening to me. Despite actively seeking it out, it never felt like a conscious choice. Nothing I reflected on or cared about. By contrast, I felt ashamed for watching. I deleted my browser history just like so many other people do. Never would I have considered myself a fan.

Only when I turned my academic attention to it, my relationship to porn changed. I started to engage. I mingled with the Berlin indie porn scene and twitter played a major role in connecting with porn people in the US, so did podcasts such as *Holly Randall Unfiltered*. In her intro, Randall says: “I’m grateful to have this show to sit down with performers and be reminded of their humanity.” So am I. Hearing them speak about their kids, pets, or hobbies was a much-needed reminder for me, too, that these people exist outside of their scenes; that these bodies have personalities, anxieties, dreams, and deserve respect and rights. I strongly believe that being a porn fan is essentially about humanizing porn. Especially at a time when the intransparency and contextlessness of tube sites have done their best to dehumanize it.

The digital age has brought a lot of positive democratizing and diversifying changes to the adult industry, but the ensuing overabundance and endless availability of online pornography has also enabled a public perception of porn as disposable. To quote industry veteran Mike Quasar: “Nobody’s gonna be reminiscing by the fireplace, going: ha, I remember EXACTLY where I was when Interracial Cheerleader Cuckhold 14 came out” (qtd. in Randall 2017). I wonder: Is that really true for all porn? And if so, does it matter? Can’t porn just be a momentary pleasure, like a delicious snack? Does longevity truly define value? Quasar goes on about how he cannot believe anyone would “pay for this shit” (qtd. in Randall 2017) – indeed, most people do not. In a capitalist society, how are you supposed to consider something valuable that is so easily accessible for free?

Listening to Quasar, I laugh at his refreshing signature sarcasm, but also feel a strong resistance to his understanding of porn as utterly worthless. I think of author Saskia Vogel, who tenderly wrote about tearing up while watching Jiz Lee masturbate in a porn scene, explaining: “it struck me how generous an act it is to share yourself, body, and pleasure in this way” (2020, 105). I can relate. It is precisely this vulnerability that often gets to me, but also the shame-free joy with which performers indulge in their sexual selves. All the more so, if their bodies

and pleasures have been marginalized or erased entirely by society. It frees me to watch them being unhinged, seemingly existing outside of social norms on my screen. This feeling can hit me in a genderqueer solo performance, such as the one Vogel refers to, as much as in a random amateur hotel threesome, a pup play domination scene, or a glossy studio produced gang bang. I'm not sure how to describe it, but it might be what empowerment feels like—even if my own freedom only lies in allowing myself to watch, without policing my fantasies. I let my body decide what to respond to. For better or for worse, lubrication has no conscience and no politics. I do not mean to romanticize porn, but to me, it has value. Beyond, but also through arousal.

I specifically remember the moment I first thought of myself as a porn fan. I was working at a b2b sex toy convention when I unexpectedly ran into Rocco Siffredi. I stopped and stared. He came over with a smiling “Ciaao,” kissed me left, right. And there I was, a 30 something porn scholar, PhD candidate, and feminist, shyly giggling, unable to say much more than ask him for a selfie. He put his arm around me, I could feel and smell him. Even though, visually, I know every inch of it inside out, it was hard to fathom that this body physically existed. Oddly, it was less of a sexual than a surreal moment. In fact, I realized I preferred fantasizing about touching Rocco—which is precisely how porn operates. Not all the millions of viewers clicking on fauxcest porn actually want to have sex with their stepmom. These reflections came later, however, when my scholar identity kicked in again that had temporarily abandoned me when next to Rocco. I posted our selfie that day, captioning: “I just had my first ever porn star struck fan girling moment.”

In contrast to other male porn performers, there is no single remotely intellectual argument I could bring forward about why I am fascinated with Rocco. He does not challenge notions of masculinity (like Michael Vegas does) or of fatherhood (like King Noire), does not bring bi (Wolf Hudson), trans (Jamal Phoenix), Middle-Eastern (Sharok), or queer Black (Bishop Black) representation to porn, does not share my politics (like Xander Corvus or Dante Dionys do), has no acting skills (like Seth Gamble), no distinct sense of humor (Tommy Pistol), no unique aesthetic (Owen Gray), and is no particularly beautiful mind (Mickey Mod)—I simply like the way he fucks on camera. Shouldn't that be enough? Though talking about a “body genre” (Williams 1991), I tend to justify my fondness of porn through rationalizing it, through retreating to a socially acceptable value system. I, too, do obviously not fully own my porn fandom and its physicality.

I probably feel most insecure in “my dual state as a fan and academic” (Jenkins 1992, 8) in the classroom. When I first taught a session on gonzo porn, I used the story of how I met Rocco as an ice breaker. My students laughed, it segued nicely into our material and yet, in the back of my head, I wondered: Is this appropriate? Whenever I ask myself this question, I remind myself of my mantra to treat porn just like any other cultural text. So, would it be appropriate for a literature professor to tell their students how they ran into their favorite author at a book fair and asked for a selfie? To mention in class that he loves reading? To put her favorite book on the syllabus? To sit on the jury for a literature prize? Is it acceptable for a film

professor to share an opinion on the Oscars? To have a favorite director? To tweet screenshots of beloved scenes? Can someone in game studies enjoy their PS4 or go to Gamescom without defending themselves? Can an art historian be married to an artist without losing credibility? May Bowie scholars mourn Bowie? The answer is: yes, yes, yes! “Enthusiasm for any other object of study is not taken as an indication of corruption or failed rigour,” finds Clarissa Smith, “but somehow when it comes to the sexual, the only approach should be at least dispassionate, if not disapproving” (2009, 579). This is no coincidence, but a common double standard. Alas, as Peter Lehman points out: “pornography is always a special case” (2006, 1)—one, it turns out, in which critical and fan appreciation are not easily reconciled.

None of this is to say that the role of the aca-fan is an altogether uncomplicated one when it comes to other, especially pop cultural, media. Hills noted with regard to cultural texts more generally that “when academics do take on fan identities, they often do so with a high degree of anxiety”—a “fear of a loss of respect” only granted to “the ‘good’ and rational academic who is expected to be detached” (2002, 12). Pointing to the same academic respectability politics, Alexander Doty explains that many scholars of (pop) culture “feel [they] have to play down or eliminate [their] fan excitement and play up [their] more serious role as theoretically savvy analyst” (2000, 13). However, twenty years have passed since these observations, during which both Pop Cultural Studies as a discipline and the aca-fan as a figure have become much more visible and accepted within academia. Neither of this is true for Porn Studies. Then and now, the balancing act between personal investment and critical analysis is by no means singular to, and yet much more complicated and urgent, for the porn scholar.

A major added challenge with aca *porn* fan culture comes with the fact that porn consumption in and of itself is already stigmatized—regardless of whether or not someone is an academic and whether or not porn is also their study object. Despite the shifts in porn audiences brought about through the digital age,⁴ the continuing taboo around watching and enjoying porn still leads to a lot of isolated, often secret fans with little organized fandom outside of largely anonymous online communities.⁵ In public discourse and consciousness, they almost exclusively exist as *white* heterosexual middle-aged male “masturbating loners” (Lindgren 2009, 175) at best, or as porn addicts at worst. Porn fans are an essentially invisible and, therefore, easily and heavily stereotyped group. Likewise, it is “a curious characteristic of research into pornography,” finds Alan McKee, “that in trying to understand pornography, the people who consume it are consistently silenced” (2017, 383). While figures of consumption have exploded with the easy availability of online pornography, we still know rather little about the 115 million people who apparently visit Pornhub.com every single day (“The 2019 Year in Review,” Pornhub, <https://www.pornhub.com/insights/2019-year-in-review>).

If we “other” the porn consumer, as McKee (2017) convincingly argues, how are we supposed to identify as such? For the academic, then, what comes on top are matters of class affiliation. In a milieu that loves to call anything pop-cultural ‘a guilty pleasure,’ how can someone embrace their enjoyment of a cultural product

that is commonly considered “the lowest of the cultural low” (Kipnis, 1999, 174)? In the case of porn, “the academic who also claims a fan identity,” as Hills phrases it (2002, 2), is experiencing the collision between a sophisticated self-understanding and a low-brow medium, between a sense of moral superiority and an industry often (mis)understood as unethical, between a disembodied and a highly physical identity, between reason and affect. The relationship with porn is thus conflicted for most intellectuals, even without the further complications of a potentially endangered scientific objectivity a porn scholar faces.

When people think of a porn fan, very few will picture a young *white* woman in academia—but here I am, typing this in my Sasha Grey fan hoodie. “In conflating the critic and fan, cultural critics fantasize that the academic can cross over and adopt the extra-academic, popular position,” writes Richard Burt critically (1998, 15). While I think there is an uncomfortable truth to framing aca-fandom as such an arrogant academic flex, I believe to be able to distance myself from such “fantasies of cultural omnipotence” (Hills 2002, 11). I am not writing this text to claim a “master perspective” (Burt 1998, 17) on porn and elevate myself in any way above non-fan porn scholars or non-scholar porn fans. This, to me, is not about interpretative power. Neither is it about freeing myself from the political consciousness of the intellectual (cf. Burt 1998, 16f). By contrast, the ongoing stigma around the production and consumption of porn, the century-long erasure and pathologization of female sexuality, the age-old dichotomy of mind over body, and academia’s relentless respectability game make coming out as an aca porn fan a political act for me. Without a doubt, it is also a privilege. I hope that those who cannot afford to do so will read this and maybe, quietly, feel seen. For I know I’m not the only one.

In writing this text I want to, as Jenkins put it almost thirty years ago, “participate in the process of redefining the public identity of fandom, to use my institutional authority to challenge stereotypes, and to encourage a greater awareness of the richness of fan culture” (1992, 7). May it serve as a reminder that “pornography fans do exist” and that “both porn studies and fan studies can learn from them” (McKee 2018, 519). Just as the people creating and performing in porn, those watching porn need and deserve to be humanized, too. As Laura Kipnis aptly put it: “Pornography isn’t viewed as having complexity because its audience isn’t viewed as having complexity” (1999, 177). As scholars striving to refute the former, we should also work on disputing the latter. Let us start with ourselves and overcome “our inability [as academics] to link ideological criticism with an acknowledgement of the pleasures we find within popular texts” (Jenkins 1992, 8). Let us practice what we preach and take porn seriously; not by trying to intellectualize it into something it is not, but by valuing it for what it is: a pleasure tool. Let us stop self-exceptionalizing our field of studies because of the stigma we have internalized. Take this text as a demand for equal rights to aca-fandom across disciplines, media & cultural hierarchies and as a plea to be bolder and prouder about what we do, to re-embody ourselves and our study object, and to allow ourselves to find many, intellectual and physical, pleasures in porn—unapologetically.

Notes

1. The 1970s and 80s, with their increased visibility of pornography due to loosened obscenity laws in the United States, saw the rise of the so-called ‘Feminist Porn Wars’: anti-pornography feminists considered all porn violence against women, as summarized best in Robin Morgan’s popular slogan “Porn is the theory, rape is the practice;” anti-censorship or sex-positive feminists, on the other hand, did not believe porn to be inherently problematic but, instead, believed in its potential for female empowerment and that, to quote feminist porn pioneer Annie Sprinkle, “[t]he answer to bad porn is not no porn, but to make better porn!” As Betty Dodson noted in 2014, “the porn wars rage on” (23)—she did not live to see them cease and, realistically, neither will I. For further reading, I recommend Lynn Comella’s “Revisiting the Feminist Sex Wars” (2015).
2. While it is difficult to pinpoint exactly when and by whom the term ‘aca-fan’ was coined, the concept emerged with the rise of academic interest in understanding fandoms in the 1980s and was popularized by Matt Hills’ 2002 *Fan Cultures*, which understands it as a “hybrid identity” (11) of scholars who are also fans. Hills builds on earlier work on fan cultures, by Richard Burt, Alexander Doty, and Henry Jenkins. The latter can be considered “one of the most ardent American proponents of finding productive ways to write and teach as a scholar-fan” (Doty 2000, 13). Jenkins had already approached the phenomenon in his 1992 monograph *Textual Poachers* and later consolidated the term with his ongoing blog *Confessions of an Aca-Fan*. Key concerns of aca-fan scholarship are questions of mutual skepticism but also synergies between (communities of) personal fascination and academic interest. For a more recent take, see Booth 2013.
3. For an interesting insight into the specific aca-fandom around Bowie and a new perception of the aca-fan conference, see Cinque 2019.
4. In one of the rare studies on online porn fandom, Simon Lindgren persuasively calls for the increasing need to revise “the image of porn consumers as isolated from one another” towards a more “interactive and creative collective of critical audience members” (2009, 175).
5. A major exception in the US context is the annual AVN Adult Entertainment Expo in Las Vegas, as Lynn Comella vividly describes in “Studying Porn Cultures” (2014).

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Going Public with Pornography Studies

Lessons from Creating the *Porno Cultures Podcast*

BRANDON ARROYO

Both being in academia and consuming pornography can be very lonely experiences. To complete either a master's degree or a PhD thesis, you must spend endless hours in a stand-off with a blank Word document struggling to conjure up just one more sentence before you can justify taking yet another writing break. And oftentimes, that writing break consists of merely moving your Word document out of the way so you can have an unobstructed view of that new pornographic video you have been saving as a "reward" for finally hitting your writing goal for the day. Though, honestly, it is sometimes hard to tell which came first, the earned break or the desire to watch pornography? Either way, both activities are decidedly solo affairs. So, what happens when these two lonely activities become the centerpiece of one's professional public persona?

Well, this is a dynamic that all media scholars face once they explain to their advisor that they want to dedicate their academic career to studying adult media and finally get their work published. There is a lot of trepidation about this type of academic *coming out* to your professors, parents, and friends that is repeated over-and-over again whenever someone asks you: "what are you writing about"? This apprehension is warranted, because while you have done all the hard work of reading the academic texts and analyzing the aesthetics, you are constantly confronted by non-academics who have *very strong* opinions about pornography, and they are not about to let you sway them from their reactionary thoughts about the genre. Because of this, there is no doubt that going public with your pornographic scholarly work is fraught with peril! This essay is an attempt to articulate my personal journey with *coming out* as a pornographic scholar in an even more public way than most. In addition to writing the traditional academic journal articles, books, and teaching classes about adult media, I have put myself in the unique position of creating and hosting a show titled the *Porno Cultures Podcast*, which attempts to make pornography studies accessible to the widest possible listening audience. And while associating myself with what many consider to be a "problematic" media genre might have its downsides, this podcast experience has taught me that there are a lot of fellow pornography studies academics who are excited about the opportunity to go *public* with their work within a culture that belittles the value of pornography.

A professor once explained to me that I should think of my dissertation in relation to my bookshelf. She said that I should look at my bookshelf and think about what book is missing from the self that would make your collection more

complete. And that I should think about my dissertation as that missing book that will complement every other book that I own. As practical advice, this helped me figure out what type of podcast I wanted to create. After decades of being interested in radio (I was listening to the *Howard Stern Show* in the 6th grade!), and listening to podcasts for a few years, I realized that while there were many entertaining podcasts about sex and pornography, and even a few that did invite academics on to chat, I started to look at my bookshelf and realize that a lot of the authors I was citing in my dissertation weren't among the guests being interviewed on these podcasts. The gold standard of pornographic podcasts is *The Rialto Report*. I'm not sure how the host Ashley West unearths the long-lost stories that he features on the show or how he finds these performers from the genre's golden age who haven't been heard from in decades, but the oral histories composing these audio documentaries constitute a detailed history of pornography from the 1970s and 1980s that is unmatched by any academic. Appreciating the reach and success of this podcast, I knew that whatever I did would need to maintain a safe distance from the historical approach of *The Rialto Report*.

And when evaluating your potential skills as a podcaster, you also need to know what you're good at and what you're not good at. And when listening to podcasts like *The Peepshow Podcast* hosted by Jessie Sage and P.J. Sage or *Sex Out Loud* with Tristan Taormino, I admittedly get intimidated by what seems to me as their ease in speaking in such a casual manner with minimal reliance on a script. These hosts sound as natural in front of a microphone as they would in a casual conversation. I'm in awe of them! And I'm aware that I don't have their capabilities as a host. So I knew that my show needed to be far more scripted, because once I have that script in front of me, it gives me the confidence to jump off script at times and that helps to give me the confidence to sound more natural throughout the podcast. Essentially, by figuring out what those podcasts do well, I was able to figure out what I wasn't so good at and work to ameliorate my own shortcomings. And since the *Rialto Report* perfected the pornographic history angle, and the other podcast are great listens for the general masses, I figured that I could offer a more niche option for listeners looking for more insight in terms of pornographic theory and applying an academic perspective to the public pornographic discourse. Ultimately, most people don't know what "pornography studies" is, so by inviting pornography scholars on to talk about their books, the *Porno Cultures Podcast* is offering listeners the opportunity to learn about the academic study of pornography in an accessible and (hopefully) fun way. So in the spring of 2017, I decided to take the plunge and start a podcast of my own.

Thankfully, because of the Society for Cinema and Media Studies and the Adult Film History special interest group, having access to most pornography studies academics has never been easier. By going to this yearly conference, I've been able to meet the authors of the most exciting books about pornography being produced today. So far, my strategy for choosing guest has been as simple as reading the newest books and then inviting the author on for an interview. In the future, I'd like to invite authors whose books could be considered "classics" in the discipline. However, I also think it's important to invite anyone on the show

who's helping people think about pornography in new and interesting ways. This is why I've also interviewed Alan Bounville to talk about his immersive play *Adonis Memories*, which has a script composed of various stories from men who frequented the gay pornography theater named The Adonis in Hell's Kitchen, which operated in that capacity from 1975 to 1989. The play was not only sexual, but also touching when listening to these real-life stories of people who genuinely had life-changing experiences making friends and discovering new aspects of their sexuality within a pornographic theater. I've also had the pleasure of interviewing an actual pornographic performer on the show who wrote his own one-man show about his experiences growing-up gay in North Dakota and becoming a burlesque and porn actor after moving to New York City. Chris Harder couldn't have been more kind, and I'll admit, it was quite thrilling conducting the interview in his bedroom!

Embarking on an academic journey to study pornography on a deeper level is not a decision that is taken lightly by any scholar. Therefore, I had a suspicion that the professors I would be interviewing for the podcast would have interesting personal anecdotes that would help explain the origins of their pornographic obsessions. This is why I tap into my inner Bernard Pivot and begin every interview with the same question—"describe your first experience with pornography." It has been funny to see the look on interviewee's faces when I ask them this question. I think there is an unspoken understanding between us just how formative this experience is in most people's lives, and crucial to the ways in which each scholar understands the role pornography plays in their work. Peter Alilunas and Whitney Stub recounted stories from their childhoods about their efforts to watch pornography within a highly religious family environment. For these two men, pornographic censorship was a foundational aspect of their family dynamic. It's no wonder that their respective books *Smutty Little Movies: The Creation and Regulation of Adult Video* (2016) and *Perversion for Profit: The Politics of Pornography and the Rise of the New Right* (2010) focus primarily on corporate and religious efforts to censor pornography. Laura Helen Marks admitted that she grew-up being vehemently anti-pornography. And it wasn't until she watched pornography for the first time with a boyfriend as an older teenager that she realized that there wasn't anything for her to be afraid of. I suppose it is not surprising that her first book, *Alice in Pornoland: Hardcore Encounters with the Victorian Gothic* (2018), centres on the tension between sexually repressive Victorian aesthetics and pornographic expression. On the other hand, Amy Werbel very casually described seeing her first pornography by looking through her brother's stash, and even had a babysitter bring her and a friend to a pornographic theater! For someone growing-up in early 1980s New York City, sexuality was not taboo, but just another piece of the fabric of the city. Considering her experiences, it's no surprise that her book, *Lust on Trial: Censorship and the Rise of American Obscenity in the Age of Anthony Comstock* (2018), does such an amazing job of historically recapturing just what a pathetic and mocked character Comstock was. Comstock was the first United States Postal inspector and secretary of the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice. Werbel argues that Comstock was anachronistic even

for his own era where brothels accommodating both gay and straight customers were a normalized part of urban life. The book illustrates that throughout New York City's history, public displays of sexual art and information was never as big a scandal for the masses as it was for a small cabal of moralistic prudes with far too much political and religious money empowering them. Of course, I am no psychologist, so it would be inappropriate for me to draw too many conclusions about how youthful experiences centered around pornography dramatically influence the trajectory of someone's entire academic career. However, these stories told on the podcast are not included in these author's books. So, being able to hear these stories firsthand from the authors themselves adds an important layer of relatability for readers who might feel intimidated delving into high theory or detailed history as it relates to pornography. Personally, perhaps the most enjoyable aspect of the podcast for me is being able to help humanize some of the figures populating the Ivory Tower. Doing so helps to make both academia and pornography studies more relatable. This is what makes podcasting an ideal platform for pornography studies. Perhaps by hearing the voice of a welcoming academic talk about their work without all of the typical jargon required when writing, the platform helps to strip away the mysteries of pornography studies for those who aren't acquainted with it, and helps listeners realize that pornography studies is just an extension of the best of what cultural studies has to offer.

It is easy to say that pornography studies—as well as pornography itself—is at a crossroads. It is easy to say that because the more you learn about the history of pornography, the more you realize that pornography continually finds itself at a crossroads. From the decades it was an illegal object that was covertly circulating amongst various public/private spheres, through the 1980s where the gay community embraced pornography as a rejection of the death rhetoric around AIDS, to the work of anti-porn feminists weaponizing pornography as the cause of capitalist and misogynist denigration and discrimination, to our contemporary moment when many are struggling to figure out the parameters sexual enjoyment in light of the #MeToo movement, sex and pornography are always in crisis mode! The podcast was unable to avoid the most contemporary sexual crisis. A large swath of the podcast was recorded while the #MeToo movement was at its peak. And I was interested to take the pulse of pornography scholars to get their thoughts on the intersection of pornography studies and popular sexual assault narratives. Of course, within the mainstream media, these two discourses are constantly intertwined with each other. However, within that context it is done to *prove* a false, yet convenient, causality to explain away sexual assault as merely the result of men consuming “perverted” pornography. Believe it or not, my guests had far more nuanced opinions about the matter.

In the “Grad Student Roundtable” episode of the podcast, German scholar Madita Oeming worried about the #MeToo movement becoming too centered on men and whether or not their attempts at flirting and sexual initiation would be perceived as “politically correct” in the future. She explained how the mainstream #MeToo rhetoric was less focused on how to solve the problem of sexual abuse, and instead shifted the burden of blame to any type of male-initiated sexual

contact. Essentially, framing any type of male sexuality as *dangerous*—turning female trauma into male trauma. It takes someone who knows the history of pornography and sexuality in the West to be able to pick-up on the well-worn discourse of reframing all sex as threatening.

In my interview with the host of *The Rialto Report*, Ashley West, he recounted a party that he threw in Los Angeles for pornographic performers from the era’s “golden age” where the topic of #MeToo came up. He explained how the female performers who tried to crossover to mainstream work had “casting couch” experiences that they were not comfortable with, and that these experiences never happened on a pornographic set because the divisions between on-camera and off-camera sex are so definitive and well-respected within the industry. The performers at the party did not have any sexual harassment stories to tell related to their pornographic experience. And since pornographic performers’ voices are totally absent from mainstream conversations about sexual assault, I was honored to provide even a small platform where their experiences could be validated.

Ultimately, I think my favorite moments of the podcast are when I get to explore the cracks and crevasses of a guest’s biography or academic approaches that do not fit comfortably into a think piece, journal article, or book. For me, it is the relatability and the humanity of the scholar that helps to make pornography studies worthwhile. And these are the areas where I believe we need to be exploring deeper when looking towards the new frontiers of pornography studies. The work of pornography studies does not lie in digging deeper into the archives or formulating more abstract theory, but in building on what has been done, and taking it to the masses with personable scholars speaking compassionately, empathetically, and quite frankly, erotically! We are socialized in North America to spurn voices that speak in nuanced terms about pornography. Popular discourse wants us to believe (just like with our political parties) that there are only two legitimate opinions to have about pornography—it’s either the worst thing that has ever been inflicted upon humanity or it’s the greatest thing since sliced bread. The media cannot think beyond binaries. Thankfully, there has never been a more robust time for alternative media outlets and a group of professors eager to have their work reach as many people as possible. The pornography studies community is both close nit and generous with their work because we know that we must rely on each other if we are to successfully fight off critics who question the legitimacy of pornography studies. Perhaps all of this sounds too much like a neoliberal marketing scheme. Fair enough! But it’s important to remember that for a lot of people, pornography is a very personal, idiosyncratic, and an essential part of their sexual health and enjoyment. Hence, why should anyone seek to expand their knowledge of the genre from an impersonal scholar? In “the personal is political” equation, academics have done a good job of expanding their mindset as it relates to the “political,” but we are still woefully behind when it comes to accentuating the “personal.” Therefore, the next generation of pornography scholars must strive to make their work public and personal. Without that, we sacrifice the discourse to the loudest reactionary voices.

From the Classroom to the Theatre

Public Porn Viewing as Counter-public Engagement

DAVID CHURCH

As I write, it is early August 2020, and SECS Fest is currently preparing for its fourth annual film festival in September. Like many other festivals large and small, the organizers are adapting this year's accepted programs to be accessible via a virtual platform, since indoor theatres remain shuttered during the COVID-19 pandemic. Even as streaming technologies may allow film festivals to proceed in attenuated form, with their offerings more widely available to a geographically dispersed audience, grumbles over the loss of in-person, communal viewership remain a common refrain across the festival circuit. Yet, for SECS Fest—a sex-positive erotic film festival run by the Seattle Erotica Cinema Society—this year's contingency plan to adopt a virtual platform is particularly ironic, due to the very nature of the festival's primary focus on sexually explicit films.¹

After all, pornography is most often considered a “domestic” genre today, since the post-1970s rise of successive home video technologies, from analog videocassettes to web-based video, largely privatized porn's consumption. Although the privatization of porn meant that viewers no longer needed to venture to a theatre to watch sexually explicit films, these moves have reinforced the longstanding perception that porn's sole *raison d'être* is masturbatory gratification—thereby upholding the notion that its viewing *should* remain behind closed doors, its “shameful” uses seeming to foreclose more thoughtful discussion of artistic or cultural merit. While not all SECS Fest programming is necessarily “pornographic” or even sexually explicit, its focus on films predominantly about—and therefore often visualizing—sex (including films about sex work, relationships/intimacy, etc.) already makes it a niche-interest festival for adults only. Yet, as one node in the global network of erotic/pornographic film festivals that have arisen since the mid-2000s, largely based in European and bicoastal North American metropolises (Ryberg 2013; Moreno Morillas 2020), SECS Fest is one of the few theatrical venues for independent films whose explicit content would otherwise limit their opportunities for public, collective viewership.

Of course, the growing number of Porn Studies courses at universities offer a notable exception, providing one (semi-)public space where enrolled students might collectively view and discuss adult films—albeit with films typically chosen for their pedagogical value in demonstrating theoretical concepts, historical periods, representational tropes, industrially prominent trends, and so on. But, in most cases, classrooms at public universities are not open to the general public in the same way as a movie theatre, since tuition costs and educational prerequisites

(Porn Studies courses, for instance, are often taught at the graduate level) present greater barriers to access than simply buying a ticket. So where, then, are newly produced forms of erotic cinema able to garner the attentive, reflective, and evaluative mode of viewing more often associated with the communal film-festival experience than the solo masturbation session (Hanich 2011; Hanich 2018, 73–110)? In this piece, I will briefly reflect on my programming experiences for SECS Fest and elsewhere, and how these attempts to bridge the divide between the classroom and the movie theatre might represent a pedagogical-cum-spatial *praxis* by physically grounding adult cinema's ability to generate sexual counter-publics.

The first pornographic feature film I ever saw in a movie theatre, *Café Flesh* (1982), remains one of the most memorable moviegoing experiences of my life. Using a rare 35mm print housed at the Kinsey Institute, I included *Café Flesh* in the inaugural season of a Midnight Movies series that I programmed at the 260-seat Indiana University Cinema from 2011–13. Arthouse theatres and university cinematheques occasionally screen adult films as part of their repertory programming—not always without some degree of trepidation, depending on their intended audience and funding sources—though, in this case, the trepidation was largely my own. After providing a brief introduction, I nervously settled in to observe how a full house, mostly comprised of students, would respond to what might also be their first public, collective porn experience. Although the film's avant-garde influences and ironic metacommentary about porn watching have long made it an object of cult appreciation, an immediate hush fell over the audience during the first hardcore sex scene, but their initial shock at viewing such imagery on the big screen, amongst their peers, gradually lifted. To my knowledge, no one abandoned the screening or lodged complaints afterward, and the audience's post-film conversations were extremely enthusiastic (especially for 1:30AM).

Overall, my first stab at programming a pornographic film for a public audience—in the U.S. Midwest no less—was extremely successful. At a time when most extant cult or adult films can be found online and consumed at home, the sheer novelty value of viewing a 35mm porn film in a public movie theatre recalled, in part, a much earlier era of theatrical exhibition: the early-1970s “porno chic” period in the United States. Unlike that era, though, it may be nothing new for most viewers to encounter a pornographic film today, but the occasion of collective public spectatorship for such content still offers a historical thought experiment that can only properly happen when porn is taken out from behind closed doors and rendered an object for contemplating both the text's design and the mental designs of one's fellow viewers. Indeed, if we consider that adult cinema's erotic, political, and educational uses are difficult to cleanly separate, then the public movie theatre can serve as a vital incubator for encouraging audiences to reflect on adult cinema's multivalent appeals to both body and mind, precisely because such venues physically distance adult films from the private home as a privileged space for autoerotic uses.²



Several years later, I taught a six-week History of Porn class as part of the Seattle International Film Festival's year-round education programs (Figure 1). As a course taught outside a university system, and at a cost far cheaper than college tuition, it attracted an older and more diverse range of students than one typically sees in the university classroom: from workers in the adult video industry, to a recently divorced woman taking the class as a “fuck you” to the husband who had given her grief for watching *Fifty Shades of Grey* (2015), to an older second-wave feminist curious to learn whether porn was more complex than the anti-porn party line had trumpeted decades ago. The course offered a breezy overview of adult cinema, ranging from early staggs to contemporary documentaries about sex work, but still included assigned readings by major porn scholars.

Figure 1.

History of Porn course, part of Seattle International Film Festival's year-round education programme.

After the course concluded, several of my students co-founded the Seattle Erotica Cinema Society, dedicated to establishing an annual erotic film festival. To this day, DeAnna Berger still serves as SECS director and Amber Adams as head programmer; alongside a rotating cast of volunteers, the three of us have constituted the core of the festival's programming committee since 2017. DeAnna had previously programmed a sidebar of films at the 2013 Seattle Erotic Art Festival (SEAF) but became frustrated by the SEAF organizers' greater interest in arranging erotic play parties with visiting artists than attending the films themselves. SEAF's organizers, the Foundation for Sex-Positive Culture (now Pan Eros Foundation), typically offer classes on kink and erotic technique, as well as hosting a space for play sessions. Piggybacking on this organizational structure, SECS was first formed as a non-profit organization beneath the Foundation's aegis (and has since broken from the Foundation altogether). Hence, from its start, SECS Fest has operated within a tension between erotic art and sexual practice, much as it also originated at the intersection of two very different pedagogical settings outside the academy.

SECS Fest was also created to offer an artistically richer variety of films than Seattle's existing HUMP! film festival (founded by Dan Savage in 2005), whose submission parameters are closer to a 48-hour student film festival (e.g., 5-minute limits, deliberate calls for amateur/homemade films, bonus points for incorporating humorous "extra-credit" items). Although lacking Savage's name recognition and promotional muscle (one of Seattle's alt-weekly newspapers, *The Stranger*, is at his editorial disposal), SECS Fest was instead intended as a showcase for the vibrant world of feminist, queer, kink-friendly, and sex-positive independent cinema circulating through the PornFilmFestival Berlin (and its international spinoffs), CineKink (New York City), Hot Bits (Philadelphia and Baltimore), and similar festivals.

Although some submissions come from non-professional and student filmmakers, many films are from internationally acclaimed feminist, queer, and indie porn creators, whose work is—sadly—too often left off public screens outside the erotic film-festival circuit. In an average year, perhaps 80% of SECS Fest's accepted submissions are made by women, queer, and trans/nonbinary filmmakers, who together constitute the heart of alternative, "fair-trade" porn producers, and submissions arrive from all over the world. Thematically linked programs of short films comprise the festival's core, frequently addressing fourth-wave feminist issues and providing a vital place for trans/nonbinary folks, people of color, and sex workers to speak their own experience, especially since documentaries, docu-porn films, and experimental works are as numerous as narrative fictions.

Following Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner's (2002) theorization of the "counter-publics" formed when collectively witnessing public sex acts, it is precisely because eroticism can blur the lines between discrete identity categories that such sex-positive content also troubles the "safer" forms of identity-based programming so often found, for instance, at LGBTQ festivals. This transgressive quality further justifies why SECS Fest does not segregate its programs along the lines of queer

vs. straight or kink vs. vanilla content; rather, each short program will ideally offer something for everyone, using artistically accomplished films to help viewers find beauty in erotic difference. This means that the selection committee must include people with diverse enough sexual tastes—including members of the kink/poly/sex-positive community—to ascertain what might be “erotic” to a wide variety of potential viewers. For the 2021 festival, I also invited students in my Porn Studies graduate seminar at Indiana University to join the online programming team as a semester-long project, allowing them to put their academic knowledge into real-world practice.

At the same time, though, some submissions were originally made for independent porn websites, so the selection committee must consider which films an in-person festival audience will patiently watch vs. films that (due to length or repetitiveness) might be better suited for private autoerotic viewing—another example of the recurring tension between art and eroticism. Moreover, cultural differences can shape the transnational reception of erotic films when aired in different cities, since some of the stylistically abrasive types of European post-porn might be better received in places like Berlin than Seattle, whereas Berlin audiences might scoff at erotic films that feature more normative body types and seem more targeted at a heterosexual couple’s market (Moreno Morillas 2020, 3). Like any serious programmer, DeAnna regularly travels to other erotic festivals, scouting the year’s most promising new films, and networking with fellow festival organizers and filmmakers.



Figure 2.
Seventy-seat Grand Illusion Cinema.

Still, even in a socially liberal U.S. city like Seattle, a sex-positive film festival can face various logistical obstacles that might not be present in Europe. Many non-profit grants agencies will not help fund sexually explicit art, nor will many newspapers advertise such events, especially in the wake of the 2018 FOSTA/SESTA laws; likewise, some online platforms for submitting films and buying tickets have bans on sexually explicit content. Theatres willing to screen such material are also difficult to secure—but the seventy-seat Grand Illusion Cinema (Figure 2), a volunteer-run art house located near the University of Washington campus, has partnered with SECS for its periodic fundraising screenings and its annual festival. Indeed, the bulk of the festival’s submission fees go toward renting out the Grand Illusion for the multi-day festival, but these rental rates are discounted for educational events. Accordingly, SECS Fest and its associated screenings are often framed as “educational” for both pedagogical and pragmatic reasons, especially when archival films (such as new restorations) are featured alongside the newly created works. Scholarly introductions have been provided, for example, by Greg Youmans for *Thundercrack!* (1975), Erin Weigand for *The Sensually Liberated Female* (1970), Raymond Rea for *Matinee Idol* (1984), and by myself for various other films. Nevertheless, screening archival films for their historical significance occasionally generates friction with SECS Fest’s sex-positive mission, since some older films contain less enlightened attitudes and depictions; SECS Fest, for example, began to apply content warnings about depictions of sexual violence after complaints about a rape-fantasy sequence in *Nightdreams* (1981).

Over its first few years, then, SECS Fest’s programming has experimented with not just what might *turn on* audiences—since arousal may be triggered less by pandering to specific sexual identities than striking unexpected resonances in viewers (Paasonen 2011)—but also what they will legitimately *enjoy* and *appreciate* as artistic fare. When it all works, the intimacy of watching beautifully diverse erotic films, in a small theatre alongside guest filmmakers, creates a uniquely electric ambience that, because promiscuously breaking down the traditional boundaries between public and private spheres, arguably no other genre can emulate. At the same time, though, I have been guided by Linda Williams’ arguments that, in order to destigmatize pornography enough for serious consideration, it should be pedagogically framed as “a genre more like other genres than unlike them” (Williams 1989, 269), without requiring excessive justification or counterproductively over-applied content warnings (Williams 2004, 14). Outside of the classroom, after all, there is only so much context that a 5–7 minute introduction can or should deliver, especially when patrons have paid to see a film, not receive a pre-emptory lecture. But, for that small measure of educational framing to happen, these films have to be *allowed* to actually reach a public audience in the first place. Until the COVID-19 pandemic abates, sequestering erotic cinema in the realm of online, private consumption may be a reasonable stopgap—but once the overall state of public health returns to normal, public porn performance can help push back against more insidious forms of (sexual) “normalcy.”

To conclude with a point of contrast, I want to briefly return to the IU Cinema, where, earlier this year, a selection committee (consisting of academic representatives from across the university—many of them not film scholars) rejected a proposal for a kink-themed program as part of Ryan Powell’s “Queer Disorientations” series. Ryan originally founded Queer Disorientations to highlight films that “queer” the very boundaries of minoritarian identities like “gay” and “lesbian,” and we co-curated this iteration (subtitled “Thinking Kink”) to explore how kink transcends sexual identities and provides spaces for theorizing power within the bounds of fantasy.³ Despite a strong lineup of critically acclaimed films, plus co-sponsorship from the Department of Gender Studies, the Cinema & Media Studies program, and the Kinsey Institute, the IU Cinema’s advisory committee rejected the series for lacking “academic relevance” and “quality of the film selection(s).”

Of course, exhibiting films at a university cinemathèque *creates* academic relevance by virtue of the venue itself, but even though cinemathèques with deeper pockets of institutional funding may be less beholden to filling seats and therefore able to take more chances with challenging programming, fears of political backlash can also have a chilling effect—especially when sex is concerned. In this case, the committee objected that screening films about (consensual) sex and power dynamics required a pre-emptive defense plan (including post-film discussions featuring outside scholars), that kink was not a form of queerness, and that the relatively large size of Bloomington’s own BDSM/kink community was irrelevant to the proposal. Although both Ryan and I have published scholarship on several of the proposed films (Powell 2019, 164–222; Church 2020), our voices were apparently not considered “expert” enough to provide introductory context for the films—nor did the IU Cinema’s proposal forms allow us the space, or the inclination, to brief the selection committee on three decades of theorization about BDSM’s relation to queerness (Rubin 1984) or the feminist “sex wars” (Warner 2016).

Perhaps most troubling to the committee was the inclusion of Fred Halsted’s X-rated film *Sextool* (1975), whose 4K restoration had recently screened in February 2020 at the Museum of Modern Art series “Now We Think as We Fuck: Queer Liberation to Activism.” Had the Queer Disorientations series gone ahead, audiences would have seen an extraordinarily radical work—and one originally intended as a mainstream crossover film—dating from an era when gay porn cinema was well ahead of the curve in providing cinematic representations of queer sexuality, to say nothing of also providing lived spaces for fostering queer community (Delany 1999).⁴ Moreover, Ingrid Ryberg (2013) argues that feminist/queer erotic film festivals can create spaces calling back to the dynamics of second-wave feminist consciousness-raising groups, by forming not just overtly politicised *counter-publics* but *intimate publics* affectively united by shared recognition and belonging (Ryberg 2013, 142–44, 147–49). Conversely, by imposing unfair prerequisites for screening such films or by keeping them off public screens altogether, selection committees squeamish about more complex—and often more politically cutting-edge—films about queer and non-vanilla sexual

practices also resurrect a more regrettable legacy of second-wave feminism: sex-negative attitudes masquerading as political correctness.

Indeed, Ryan and I pitched our series as counterprogramming to the local PRIDE Film Festival, where affirmational, desexualized narratives about coming out and overcoming adversity abound. In our homonormative era, when queer sex is itself expected to remain privatized and domesticated in the service of cultural assimilationism (Warner 1999), turning one's back on erotic cinema's *past* centrality to queer life thus represents not only a form of historical erasure, but also a foreclosing of erotic cinema's *present* potential for queer/feminist world-building beyond minoritarian, identity-based understandings of desire. If sexual desire is as complex as it is, then why shouldn't the cinematic art be that reflects it? To educate the wider public of this fact, though, requires the work (and the courage) to connect such films with an audience—a job perhaps better handled by a merry band of perverts outside the academy than a board of university functionaries.

Notes

1. Shine Louise Houston's Pink and White Productions developed this virtual platform, via their existing server for PinkLabel.TV, with additional crowdfunding, for use with the San Francisco PornFilmFestival. However, they offered free use of the platform to other erotic film festivals affected by COVID-19 theatre closures, proof of the collaborative/DIY nature of the independent erotic film-festival circuit.
2. This is not to say, however, that autoerotic uses can be fully disentangled from such public venues, as I have occasionally witnessed surreptitious masturbation at SECS Fest screenings. Ironically, though, these acts transpired during softcore films, not hardcore ones—thus demonstrating that, much as hardcore films are not necessarily more politically problematic than softcore ones, less explicit sexual content is no sure predictor of audience behavior.
3. The following opinions are solely my own.
4. As part of foregrounding the film's "academic relevance," our introduction to *Sextool* would have discussed Halsted's status as among the most important gay filmmakers of his era, as well as stressing that even its "rougher" BDSM is entirely consensual (thus avoiding the representational gray area flagged in the aforementioned *Nightdreams* example). One of the series' proposed aims was, after all, highlighting the crucial differences between consensual BDSM and non-consensual violence—an especially timely concern amid the #MeToo era—but the series' rejection deliberately sidelined these questions about power and consent.

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Porn and/as Pedagogy, Sexual Representation in the Classroom

A Curated Roundtable Discussion

PETER ALILUNAS, UMMNI KHAN, LAURA HELEN MARKS, THOMAS WAUGH, AND KYLER CHITTICK

Graduate students writing a dissertation on pornography and/or sexually explicit media experience a great deal of anxiety connected to academic (un)employment and the perceived (un)seriousness of their work. While the scholarly journal *Porn Studies* is now in its seventh issue and the Society for Cinema and Media Studies has a Scholarly Interest Group dedicated to adult film and video, pornography remains a source of tension at academic conferences and in various graduate programs. As two of the contributors to this roundtable attest, the #MeToo movement, while an important intervention, has also led to trepidation about sex and sexuality both in the classroom and in academic discourse. Current social and political movements aside, many scholars simply do not take pornography studies seriously, while others remain stuck in the discourse of the feminist sex wars, unable to see pornography as a series of theoretically rich and historically specific cultural objects that need not be analyzed in terms of “for” or “against.” As Lauren Berlant and Lee Edelman remark, many intellectuals see sex as *passé* (2013, 63). “Critical discourse,” they contend, “centers instead on questions of rights (civil, natural, and human), of sovereign power and states of exception, of the definition and limits of the human, and of the distribution and control of populations through the categories of citizen and noncitizen. Sex, in this context, can carry the odor of anachronism, narcissism, or something irreducibly and disconcertingly personal, and any impulse to linger on its place in the social, cultural, and political fields can suggest a stubbornly narrow gaze or a refusal to move on” (ibid). Provocative and precarious, hopeful and boundary-pushing, porn studies occupies a vexed place in contemporary academe. How might junior scholars in this field proceed?

From trigger warnings to the job market, this roundtable addresses some of the most pressing concerns for scholars of pornography and sexual representation in cinema and media. Do porn studies scholars have a harder time securing tenure-track jobs or other academic appointments? What institutional supports or drawbacks are there for pornography scholars? What are some of the most neglected research areas? The contributors to this roundtable all come to pornography studies from different angles but converge around the idea that studying pornography is necessary for understanding contemporary society and culture. I have selected my co-authors (or my co-participants) not only because of their superlative contributions to the field but because they have each been important to my own development as a junior film, pornography, and queer studies scholar.

Dr. Peter Alilunas, Associate Professor of Cinema Studies at the University of Oregon and author of *Smutty Little Movies: The Creation and Regulation of Adult Video* (2016), gave the first scholarly presentation on pornography that I ever attended. Titled “Closed Due to Pressure from the Morality Squad’: The Cinema 2000 and Pornography Regulation in Toronto,” his talk was at the annual SCMS conference in Toronto in 2018. I was in awe of his gifts as an orator and how passionate and knowledgeable he was about Canada’s history of draconian censorship and obscenity laws—a history that is touched on in this roundtable. Peter’s mentorship has also impacted me and many of my colleagues. He has gladly shared information and resources and conducted a vibrant workshop for graduate students at the University of Toronto in 2018. A remarkable historian, he is also one of the friendliest faces in cinema and media studies.

Academic work on queer theory and Canadian criminal jurisprudence would be incomplete without the work of Dr. Ummni Khan, Associate Professor of Law and Legal Studies at Carleton University and author of *Vicarious Kinks: S/M in the Socio-Legal Imaginary* (2014), who lends her passionate, singular, interdisciplinary voice to this roundtable. I admire Ummni’s intellectual temerity and her commitment to independent critical thought that crosses disciplinary boundaries. Not since I discovered the work of Shannon Bell (1995) have I encountered a scholar so willing to put it all on the line—to go the distance with and for her ideas. I appreciate her willingness to tackle controversial topics, from rape culture (2017) to the media coverage of the “Disney World Girl” (2009). I marvel at her commitment to sex-positive feminism even if the current social and political climate renders that difficult at times.

Dr. Laura Helen Marks, Professor of Practice at Tulane University and author of *Alice in Pornoland: Hardcore Encounters with the Victorian Gothic* (2018), also contributes to our dynamic roundtable. Laura has emerged as one of the most important voices in pornography studies, bridging her knowledge of classical and canonical literatures with contemporary film and sexuality studies. I discovered *Alice in Pornoland* soon after its release while completing a term/conference paper on the pornographic horror comedy *Dracula Sucks* (1978) and the precedent-setting obscenity trial that ensued in Edmonton in the early 1980s after the film’s release. I could not have written the paper without Laura’s exacting historical work on the film and her location of it within a larger trajectory of pornography inspired by the Victorian gothic.

Dr. Thomas Waugh, Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Film Studies at Concordia University and author of many works on pornography and erotica, including the seminal *Hard to Imagine: Gay Male Eroticism in Photography and Film from Their Beginnings to Stonewall* (1996), is our final co-conspirator, and possibly our most illustrious. Has anyone contributed more to queer cinema and gay pornography studies than Tom? From his admirable, relentless archival research to his battles against censorship, pioneering queer cinema and pornography classes, and mammoth books on documentary and Canadian cinema, Tom is one of the most important voices—in the West and internationally—on sexual

representation. He has also been an invaluable mentor for generations of queer scholars that have followed in his footsteps.

Many scholars have addressed the subject of pornography and/as pedagogy. Chuck Kleinhans, for instance, once argued that the porn studies classroom can serve as a unique space for objective, neutral discussion on pornography that research on the subject typically evades. Indeed, while Kleinhans could not pretend to be neutral as his scholarly work took a stance in the “sex wars,” his classroom “create[d] a space for discussion that allow[ed] frank expressions of difference on all sides” (1996, 119). Similarly, Susanna Paasonen argues for classrooms that are attuned to the myriad *responses to*—as opposed to merely *positions on*—pornography (2016, 435). Yet, with all that has been said on the controversies and potentialities of pornography in the post-secondary classroom, a transdisciplinary, intergenerational roundtable on the subject featuring scholars from different countries has yet to be published or archived.

Perhaps now more than ever, the voices of pornography scholars need to be heard. Humanities departments and arts faculties are being gutted as university administrators wield the language of austerity and scarcity. How will a field seen by many to be frivolous or irrelevant—or as having no “use”—survive cuts and “restructuring”? The university classroom is rapidly changing not just technologically but in terms of student engagement, experience, and expectations. On the one hand, teachers and scholars of pornography may find themselves in a bind if their classroom is averse to frank discussions about sex or unwilling to let go of ingrained beliefs about pornography. On the other hand, and as this roundtable attests, many instructors encounter classrooms that are ready to challenge archaic sex and porn myths. There does not seem to be a right or a wrong way to contextualize pornography and to address its place in the classroom. In this cultural and academic moment of uncertainty and liminality, my interlocutors form a representative sample of contemporary pornography scholars who have secured full-time employment in academia and continue to push the boundaries of intellectual discourse. How have they gotten to where they are, and what lies ahead?

Kyler Chittick (KC): Talk a little bit about your intellectual and pedagogical trajectory with respect to pornography and/or sexual representation. What led you to study pornography and/or sexuality in film and media?

Peter Alilunas (PA): My interest in pornography studies started with my interest as an undergraduate in feminist film theory. I was energized by learning about the dynamics of gender and power. As an M.A. student, I had a seminar on sexuality and film with Janet Staiger, where I had a realization that pornography is the ideal terminus for studying gender, something that Linda Williams pointed out in her field-establishing book *Hard Core* (1999, 267). Reading that book changed my academic life. But it was really during my doctoral studies where it all coalesced. It was Dan Herbert, my advisor, who put everything together for me. He hired me to be a research assistant on his brilliant book *Videoland* (2014), for which

he traveled across the United States tracing the remaining video rental stores. During that work I realized there was a gap in two adjacent sets of literature: home video histories mostly avoided adult film history, and pornography studies didn't really address the video era. Herbert was completely supportive when I proposed a dissertation on that topic, and other folks at Michigan such as Richard Abel were immensely foundational, too. The emphasis and training there on historiography made me the scholar I am today. I've also been really fortunate to have had informal mentors like Chuck Kleinhans, Eric Schaefer, Gayle Rubin, Lucas Hilderbrand, and Whitney Strub, all of whom really helped me start to understand what high-level research and argumentation looks like and how this profession works, not to mention just inspiring me.

Ummni Khan (UK): I was introduced to pornography vicariously. In the early 90s, during my undergrad years, some friends invited me to attend a screening of the classic—to some infamous—NFB documentary *Not a Love Story: A Film About Pornography* (1981). The experience skewered me with the double-edged sword of disgust and arousal. Like a good feminist, I channelled my ambivalence into rage. This was fueled by reading classic feminist analyses, most importantly MacKinnon's seductive reductionism, where all porn fit within the master narrative of patriarchy. I learned that the linchpin to all female woes (from rape to unequal pay to backdoor abortions) was the eroticization and naturalization of male dominance and female subordination, expressed most powerfully in porn. Caught up in my own zeal, I was able to gorge on hardcore pornography in rad feminist texts—mediated to be sure—but nonetheless, deliciously graphic. Then I fell in with a postmodern crowd. My new pals created an epistemological space for the inner conflict I had been feeling, but mostly suppressing, in the name of solidarity. They introduced me to writers like Gayle Rubin, Pat Califia, Carole Vance, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and to theories like anti-essentialism, queer theory, sex-radical and sex-positive feminism. What was so enlightening was not just the idea that pornographic images and text are unstable signifiers, but also, awareness that an erotic charge is embedded within the feminist porn debates, regardless of which side you're on. My interest in pornography continued through my legal education, during which I learned about Canada's "progressive" precedent-setting decision, *R. v. Butler* (1992). Incredibly, the judicial justification for censorship in that case more or less replicated the rad feminist assessment of the "violent," "degrading" and "dehumanizing" nature of porn, including not just depictions of force or kinky roleplay, but also consensual representations of fellatio (see Cossman et. al 2017). As I like to joke, the Supreme Court couldn't swallow that some women like to swallow. Who wouldn't want to theorize that?

Laura Helen Marks (LHM): I entered my Ph.D. program in 2005 with no intention of studying pornography or even film. Trash cinema and body genres had always been an interest, especially horror and action genres, but I had not considered pursuing these genres in graduate school. I did my Ph.D. in English, so I came to porn studies from a literary angle. My interest was cemented by a

trip to the local video store. At that time, I was taking a class on gender and sexuality in the South, and we had recently watched the 1970s exploitation film, *Mandingo*. Having spent my formative years subscribing to a rather naïve anti-porn brand of feminism, in graduate school I was exploring pornography with a wide-eyed enthusiasm, making up for lost time and rethinking my assumptions. So, I would browse the room behind the curtain at the video store. On this particular visit, I noticed a bunch of films starring a performer called Mandingo. I reacted with surprise and a mild horror. Why would a black man choose such a name? And, upon discovering a wealth of interracial titles that traded in nineteenth-century slavery rhetoric, I began to interrogate the rhetoric of interracial titles. This ultimately led to an about turn in what I planned to write about for my

dissertation. As an English major, I wanted to draw the literary and the cinematic together (as opposed to writing a film studies dissertation with a perfunctory chapter about literature) and wound up writing about pornographic film that draws on late nineteenth-century literature and tropes for erotic appeal.

Thomas Waugh (TW): I was part of the 1970s New Left baby boomer generation that launched the discipline of film studies. I chose research topics like most of my kindred spirits that were close to my heart and identity. Neither auteurist studies of Hitchcock and Ophuls that I was force-fed at Columbia nor the fashionable “Screen Theory” were my thing. As a committed New Leftie seeking to transform the discipline, but also caught up in the historiographical branch of the field, I had started out with Old Left documentary histories, with Québec direct cinema as my M.A. topic (1974) and Joris Ivens as my dissertation topic (defended 1981). Thereafter, having got out of my system for the time being left documentary with my 1984 anthology *“Show Us Life”: Toward a History and Aesthetics of the Committed Documentary*, and greatly influenced by the feminist film studies breakthroughs of the 1970s—both in terms of politicizing the “personal” and uncovering an archive—I determined that porn studies in general, and protoqueer porn studies in particular, fit these various agendas.

My first formal publications on the topic of porn were in the Toronto community newspaper *The Body Politic* beginning in 1982. My research scouting expedition to the Kinsey Institute Archives earlier that year had changed my life. That this came at the height of the “porn wars” only strengthened my conviction

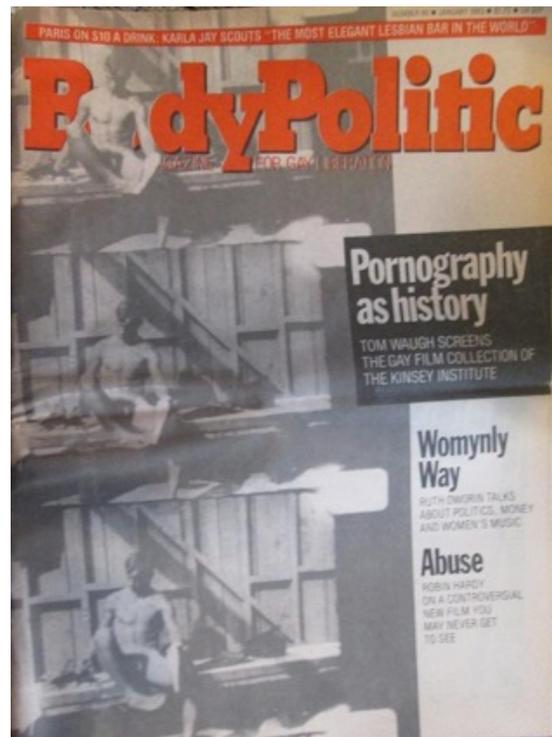
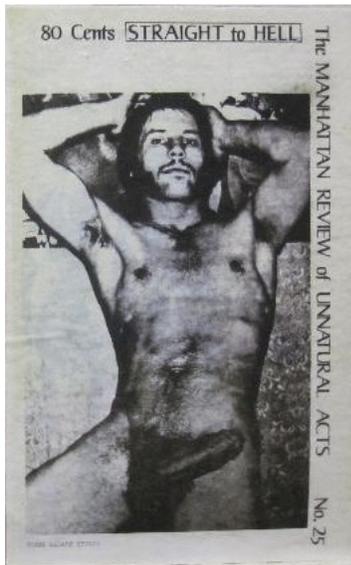


Figure 1.
Tom Waugh's first “formal publications” on porn. *The Body Politic* (Toronto), no. 90, 1983.



that my work must engage more with present struggles.

This work was a natural extension of several years of queer cinema reviewing in community media in both Toronto and Montreal as well as in the American *Jump Cut*. I was not personally an obsessive user of mainstream gay porn but rather an aficionado of esoteric vintage materials, that I would discover in Manhattan second-hand stores, and marginal media like what I would soon be calling “folk raunch,” e.g. the chapbook *Straight to Hell* with its recycling of rich first-person narratives and physique beefcake from earlier generations.

KC: In your view, what is the value of studying and/or teaching pornography and sexual representation?

PA: There’s a few different levels of importance to and value to what we study and teach. The first is pretty basic: all kinds of media should be studied, and their histories should be traced and mapped and understood. For adult film, that means the usual sorts of media-related questions. Eric Schaefer points out that adult film history adds some unique layers to these histories, things like the alternative aesthetics that characterize these films, as well as the fact they are unique documents of places, people, and behaviors (Schaefer 2005, 91-92). That this particular history is culturally charged (I mean, very few other disciplines even have to *think about* questions of value, which is a constant for us) only makes that clearer. The second level is a mix of basic media literacy combined with sexual literacy; it’s sad that college professors are tasked with this when that should really be the job of elementary schools, something that’s practically unthinkable in the United States, unfortunately. But it’s true: most of our students need to be taught some basic sexual media literacy. The third level is related to how *sexually explicit representations* become *pornography*, which really defines how I approach my research and teaching. I have always strongly subscribed to Walter Kendrick’s argument that pornography isn’t a thing, it’s a thought structure, so how that thought structure is created and changes over time (which is, in a nutshell, the process of regulation) is immensely important (Kendrick 1987, xiii). It links back to so many facets of life, industry, culture, politics, all of them constantly changing and shifting.

UK: I’m now a legal and cultural studies scholar who focuses on the criminalization of consensual sexual representations and practices that are labelled “harmful.” Included in this category would be some pornography, some BDSM, and all sex work. As many critical sexuality scholars have pointed out, the claim of “harm” has replaced accusations of “immoral” or “indecent” or “offensive” because harm has liberal traction. If you can convince people that a pornographic text is

Figure 2.

“Folk Raunch.” *Straight to Hell*: cover, c. 1975 (New York, Boyd McDonald, ed.)

“harmful” then you’re justified in criminalizing it, just as assault is criminalized. Of course, the supposed “harm” is always nebulous. For example, one overlapping legal and feminist justification for censorship is the prevention of “attitudinal harm.” The claim is that porn consumption leads male consumers to view all women as “sex objects” or to believe all women like it rough. Meanwhile, the argument goes, porn causes women to lose self-esteem and to base their worth on their sexual desirability. Such arguments perpetuate a sexual morality that disproportionately targets queer and kinky text as harmful. In order to confront the ideological underpinnings of these kinds of harm arguments, you have to deconstruct the claims and the legal semiotics, and if possible, engage with some of the criminalized text.

I also teach fictional films and TV about non-normative sexuality in conjunction with legal discourse, for example, in relation to BDSM. I do this, in part, to challenge legal positivist claims of law as a discrete arena unaffected by wider social processes. Instead, I position cases and statutes as cultural artifacts in conversation with multiple sectors and diverse discourses. Students then can study how legal claims regarding the harms of BDSM practice actually mirror fictional representations (instead of, unfortunately, empirical studies that overwhelmingly find BDSM to be a benign practice). For example, judicial decisions often suggest that kinky practices that are initially consensual and safe will escalate into dangerous and violent abuse, a slippery slope argument that is reflected in many pop culture narratives (Khan 2018). Another notable parallel between film and law is their overlapping tendency to afford greater tolerance to BDSM that occurs within heteronormative relations.

LHM: Tom (below) and Peter (above) articulate the bulk of my feelings quite beautifully. I would add that the study and teaching of pornography is vital to acquiring the language with which to articulate our own lives and interactions with a media form that is so present and yet so pushed to the edges of discourse. It is remarkable that, in 2020, students respond to discussions about pornography with an almost tangible sigh of relief in part due to how easily I talk about sexual representations and in a way that avoids embarrassment, excess, or titillation. My classes are probably the first time they have encountered someone talking about sexually explicit media in the same way they might talk about music. Students have told me how grateful they are to simply have the language and knowledge to navigate their experiences, their relationships, and their media consumption. This is an important aspect of porn studies.

TW: Quite simply, it’s about our responsibility to understand our cultural environment—70 years after the Sexual Revolution, a quarter century after the internet revolution. To maintain film and media studies’ contact with the culture at large, not only to propagate a museum subculture. The value is of course interdisciplinary and intersectional, and both terms are political as well as intellectual.

KC: What kind of institutional supports or drawbacks are there (or have there been) for you in terms of researching, teaching and/or publishing on pornography or representations of sexuality?

PA: I've been extremely fortunate that, for the most part, there has been support at every stage of my career for my work. Of course there have been challenges: I was frequently told early on by various people (to my face, but also in whispers and such) that writing a dissertation about pornography would not work, that it would prevent me from getting a job, that publishing a book on pornography would prevent tenure, and that teaching about pornography would lead to negative evaluations and reviews. None of those things have been true. These are common things I've heard from other folks, many times, and they all seem based on vague-but-widespread anxieties, all stemming from the toxicity of pornography. What has definitely happened to me, though, has been an increased level of scrutiny at various stages, a little more outside attention "just to make sure" that things are "serious" and "rigorous," a type of institutional surveillance that is sort of like the volume has been turned up a bit compared to other scholars.

But, ultimately, I have been supported at every stage of all of those processes, by universities, publishers, and editors. The University of Michigan was extremely supportive of my dissertation research, and the University of Oregon, my department, and my colleagues have been terrific supporters of my work as it has evolved. The University of California Press was an ideal home for my book (2016), especially given its history publishing pornography-related books. Mary Francis, who has since moved on to the University of Michigan Press, is the best in the business and an invaluable supporter of our work. I can't sing her praises loudly enough. SCMS has been a wonderful institution to our field, supporting the creation of the Adult Film History Scholarly Interest Group that Schaefer put so much work into creating. That's a really important part of his massive legacy. SCMS has also recognized many of us, including me, with writing awards, and regularly accepts a high rate of our papers, panels, workshops, and events. There have been a very small number of minor tension moments at the conference over the years, mostly with some other members who have some misgivings about our field of study, but, overall, the membership and the organization have been overwhelmingly supportive.

But my situation is not indicative of what many others have faced. The fact is, most senior faculty have actively steered students away from the topic or insist that it can only be a small part of something "bigger," or express relief when students choose not to work on pornography, which maddeningly just keeps alive the sad-but-real mythology of "you won't get a job." I have heard many stories about this, and all of them make me just feel sad, but definitely not hopeless. The only way we will change these myths and anxieties is if more scholars, and especially early-career, tenure track faculty *stop believing these myths have power* and absolutely, unequivocally *stop perpetuating them*. That includes perpetuation through silence or inaction. Here's the truth: the up-and-coming scholars in pornography studies are doing incredible, field-changing work, as vibrant and exciting as anything in

media studies. We need vocal, ongoing, enthusiastic, and field-wide support for those scholars, in hiring, promotion, and peer-review. That's how we will make permanent change.

UK: I've received a lot of support and mentorship throughout my academic career, including from Professor Thomas Waugh, who taught me film at Concordia! Since then, I've been blessed with inspiring mentors and supporters who encouraged me to follow my naughty muse in tackling taboo topics. In the context of my doctoral work at a law faculty, I did receive some advice from well-meaning profs and peers who said that I should change my topic (BDSM in law and society) because it was too fringe, or people would assume I had a personal stake in the topic. I didn't listen to them because of the support of my extraordinary supervisor, Brenda Cossman, and because I had been trained and encouraged by sex-positive feminism to take risks, methodologically and substantively. I also stuck with it because I was a brat who wanted what I wanted. I enjoyed scandalizing legal spaces where discussions of sexuality were usually confined to the themes of violence or same-sex spousal rights. To put pleasure on the table was fun.

LHM: This is a bit complicated for me. I started my Ph.D. in 2005 and started the dissertation process around 2007/2008. At that time, there was no *Porn Studies* journal, no social media group for porn scholars, and far less recognition of porn studies as a field. The initial years of my dissertating were an incredibly anxious and isolating experience with quite a bit of what felt like simmering resentment on the part of some faculty. I went from being pretty cocky to being frightened, reclusive, and nervous about putting my thoughts on paper. This was productive in some ways—my thinking became more nuanced and I was less annoying—but in other ways I regressed and really had to gather myself and regain my confidence. Happily, some of this self-gathering came as a result of a slow but sure burgeoning in departmental and university support in tandem with greater acceptance of porn studies as a discipline. I won a university-wide fellowship and other awards, achievements that demonstrated a shift in understanding of what I was working on. During these later years in my doctoral program, being “the porn girl” started to feel like it might have some benefits. My work was titillating and seemed novel, which generated interest in terms of publication and conferences where the editor or organizer wanted to sex things up (or, in some cases, recognized the value of studying porn and felt strongly about including my work). That was fine by me and gave me the opportunity to demonstrate porn's place in a multitude of disciplines. Certainly, I had to deal with overly intrusive conversations at academic functions, and I still felt quite alone in the world, but I was happy to have so many people from different fields taking an interest in my research and giving me a place to publish. (Now, thanks to social media and the expansion of the field, I enjoy the friendship and collaboration of a wonderful, supportive cohort of porn studies scholars.)

Still, I was regularly told why I would never secure a job and was keenly aware of not only the difficulties of selling porn studies to a potential employer, but also

the difficulties of categorizing my research. I was an English major, but I wrote about film. I wrote about film, but the films I wrote about were not considered to be film. I worked on adaptations of literature, but the adaptations were pornographic and therefore not really adaptations. I studied nineteenth-century literature and culture, but as a way of discussing twentieth and twenty-first century porn. Needless to say, I struggled to secure even an interview for several hundreds of jobs I applied to over those five years, although I don't know that my researching porn was the biggest obstacle. The academic job market is a struggle for everyone.

TW: I've been very privileged. Institutional support has always been impeccable. And I am speaking not only of academic support. Everything from agency funding to library infrastructure to our university film archive/teaching collection. I must also mention technical support: what a luxury to research and teach in an institution that has strong audio-visual infrastructure and funding built up over the generations! This includes professional projection in our seminars and lecture classes: I had to pinch myself sometimes as 35mm projection in our teaching auditorium continued well into the 21st century and our archival print of *Deep Throat* (1972) would unspool on that giant screen—just as it did in Times Square when I saw it in 1972.

This support was already in place in the years in the 1980s before the advent of the video porn revolution and the advent of legal accessibility of porn in the Canadian landscape. It's important to remember the climate here until well into the 1990s: obscenity prosecutions of paintings in galleries (!) continued well into that decade, especially in other provinces—not to mention Canada Customs' systemic harassment, including suppression of safer sex instructions in imported gay skin magazines.

State funding agencies are part of the landscape: the peer jury review process at both the federal and provincial levels for both arts agencies and scholarly research agencies has always favoured openness to the kind of work that frightens the horses in Washington. I remember once a couple of decades ago the Canada Council sent me a portfolio for a look: the jury had been perplexed by an art video that consisted of dozens of close-up vignettes featuring male masturbation with subject voice-overs—that is, a counterpoint of performances, verbal and corporeal—and wanted an “expert” opinion!

KC: Have there been any issues for you in terms of securing an academic position or receiving tenure/promotion as a scholar of pornography?

PA: I'm a broken record, but the truth is that I've been deeply fortunate that the University of Oregon has been so supportive of my work, first in hiring me, then in understanding and supporting my research, and then in tenuring and promoting me—not only was that a smooth process, it happened a year early. I'm equally grateful to the anonymous tenure evaluators who saw the value in my work and supported it. I have certainly had moments, especially early on in my career, where there was some interest in “what else I could do,” which is common

for all junior faculty, but I felt a few times like I might have heard it a bit more than others. Overall, though, my departmental colleagues, and colleagues across campus, have been great. Like most pornography scholars, I'm mostly isolated on campus, but that's not unusual. All departments are mixes of interest and expertise, which is a good thing and healthy for the field. Here's the important thing: tenure is a powerful mechanism that lends institutional weight and validity to research. We need to foster the development of more tenured faculty who specialize, and not just dabble, in pornography studies (Williams 2014, 32). It's essential to the stability and future of our field.

The other reality is that my inherent privilege—I am a cishetero, white, male professor—has given me a leg up in academia from the first day I stepped on a campus, and that has continued all the way through tenure. That has certainly smoothed my path, no question. Academia must dismantle its deeply embedded systems that continue to reward certain people over others, and to propagate inherent biases that have resulted in all kinds of imbalances, but especially around race, sexuality, and gender. Pornography studies scholars have an opportunity to help lead the way on those challenges, given our expertise and unique understanding of these intersectional disparities, and we absolutely must be at the forefront of those changes in our institutions.

UK: It's hard to know to what extent my scholarship may have interfered with my career. Unfortunately, when you don't get an interview, or, if you do get an interview but don't get a job offer, they never come right out and say they disapprove of your topic or arguments. The times when I did not get an interview or offer, if I was told anything, it was that I was not the right "fit." It's probably a self-serving narrative, but there is one faculty where my expertise fit the job description perfectly. I didn't get an interview and I'm convinced it's because my theoretical position conflicted with the anti-porn and anti-sex work stance of some of the senior professors there. I was lucky that Carleton's Legal Studies Department was hiring at the time I entered the market, and I got the position. This is an interdisciplinary department, and my colleagues are trained in diverse subject areas. Because of this, I think our differences are not just tolerated but appreciated, including our differences on issues like pornography. My experience may have been different if I had wound up teaching in a professional law school. But maybe not. Some of my most courageous and cutting-edge sex radical collaborators are positioned in law schools.

LHM: I explored this in my previous answer, but I should add that I have never been without a paid academic position. I am extremely lucky in this regard. I think this is due in part to the incredible job market guidance provided at LSU, especially under the guidance of Dan Novak. He did not put all of the emphasis on tenure-track jobs, which allowed me to understand the various different types of faculty positions available to me. I was also aware, again thanks to the wonderful English department at LSU, that rhet-comp positions are more bountiful and a more likely prospect than many others. I tailored my CV accordingly. After

graduating in 2013, I spent a year as a postdoctoral teaching fellow at LSU and the following year secured a teaching postdoc at Tulane University, teaching first year writing. This was a position I very much wanted. Initially, it was a five-year postdoc, an unusually long time that offered a substantial safety net for someone navigating a demoralizing job market. I was very lucky that, three years into my appointment, the department decided to convert all the postdoc positions into permanent Professor of Practice positions. The department conducted a national search and the postdocs had to reapply. I was offered one of these positions and enthusiastically accepted.

At no point during my time at Tulane have I experienced issues relating to my research. This is almost entirely due to my position, which is focused on teaching and does not require research. Even so, faculty and students have shown interest in my research and I have worked with undergraduate and graduate students in the capacity of committee member, independent study instructor, guest speaker, etc. Of course, all of these endeavours are for my own personal fulfillment, desire to share my work with others, and maintaining an active scholarly record—it counts not at all toward promotion. The school has been supportive of my teaching, though, which even in the first-year writing classroom intersects with porn studies and sex work policy and which definitely does count toward promotion.

Peter is right about the importance of tenure and recruitment of graduate students. Still, in our current job market (especially post-COVID-19), the reality is that many of us will not enjoy tenured positions and it is important to develop porn studies pedagogies in this context where, in addition to being more vulnerable, we are teaching survey and introductory courses. I think this context offers an opportunity to further normalize and validate the study of pornography via classes that are not exclusively about pornography and don't show any pornographic media. This is especially important to consider in the current state of academia where (despite what some departments continue to suggest), tenure is becoming increasingly antiquated as a career path. What will become of porn studies in an academic future where tenure is obsolete? Where, perhaps, humanities departments disband their graduate programs? In my case, as a Professor of Practice (a relatively secure, renewable position with no possibility of tenure) whose teaching assignments are primarily first-year writing, I have attempted to integrate porn studies (along with many other gender and sexuality related fields) into a required, gen ed course. Based on student work, evaluations, department/university assessment, and my own observations of the classroom dynamic and student learning, this effort has been remarkably successful.

Thanks to the profoundly interdisciplinary nature of porn studies, I can imagine this also being the case in undergraduate courses focused on media studies, gender studies, law, business, anthropology, statistics, technology, computer science, etc... This would not only normalize the study of pornography but (more importantly and the reason why normalization is important) also enrich higher education. The absence of pornography as a point of discussion and learning in courses that are not exclusively about pornography reveals a

problematic gap in higher education as well as a tendency to avoid engaging with challenging material in gen-ed courses. We needn't watch porn in class, or even discuss the content of pornographic media, in order to do porn studies. If we were to destigmatize, demystify, and de-sensationalize the study of pornography in gen ed courses, students would enjoy a more complex and relevant education that creates a foundation for those who do go on to take pornographic media courses or pursue porn studies at the graduate level.

TW: Again, I've been very privileged. Only once to my knowledge was I harassed for the content of my research and that was ineffectual: I was red-baited during my tenure hearing rather than queer-baited or porn-baited by a colleague I like to call Yosemite Sam, who is sadly no longer with us.

I've always been given full freedom to choose my syllabi and teaching load, by both my hands-off colleagues and the administration. Of course, since I started teaching porn in 1982, I believe, I've always been hyper-vigilant about issues around pedagogical ethics. Over the years, however, I've come to realize that students do not need to be babied or condescended to.

KC: What are the most urgent or neglected research areas in porn studies and/or sexuality and media right now?

PA: We still have only the most basic understanding of the history of adult film and pornography, all over the world. There will always be a need to theorize what pornography means, and why it instigates various cultural responses, but we've only scratched the surface on what happened, who did it, when, where, and how. David Bordwell's arguments about mid-level research have been profoundly influential on me, and really serve as a touchstone that guides my work and what I encourage in my students (1996, 3-36). Specifically, I really believe in problem-driven research about particular historical phenomena that examines intersections of industry, culture, and power, through lenses that account for the ideological motors that drive society. I think we need more of that kind of research. A lot more.

Non-adult cinema histories are deep, comprehensive, and thoroughly excavated. For just one example, look at something like the ten-volume *History of American Cinema* set, which gathered preeminent scholars to produce a staggeringly invaluable map of the trajectory of Hollywood cinema. Adult film scholars have, for years, had to piece together a woefully incomplete history from various places, with huge gaps and voids scattered throughout. Linda Williams' *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible"* (1989) was released thirty-one years ago—we've made tremendous progress as a field since then, but we have a long way to go. We need ten-volume collections, we need big, sprawling monographs that take years to produce, we need quick hit small books, we need edited collections, we need the microhistories that can target smaller moments, and we need a steady flow of journal articles, conference papers, and dissertations. Of course, these are the exact things that folks in our field have been saying for

years, so what I'm saying here is literally nothing new (Williams 2014, 24-40; Schaefer 2005, 79-105). But it's extremely important to keep saying it. There does seem to be a recent surge of energy and enthusiasm in our field that has been growing for 25 years and is ready to be harnessed in some exciting ways. Look at the work by people such as Finley Freibert, Desirae Embree, Daniel Laurin, Brandon Arroyo, Darshana Mini, Ben Strassfeld, John Stadler, and our wonderful host Kyler Chittick, along with so many others who I'm unintentionally leaving out—the people who are going to do that ten-volume set one day. We need more of that, and we need to support it.

UK: We need to bring some insights from the “porn wars” to the current moment. While mainstream feminism does not seem particularly preoccupied with porn anymore (although of course, there is still some anti-porn discourse out there, often in the guise of health or addiction discourse). However, in my milieu, there is a downright obsession with detecting “rape culture” in pop culture. Many of the same reductionist narratives are repeated. For example, the news media and blogosphere had a recent hate-on for the erotic mainstream film *365 Days*. This was yet another moral panic policing sexual fantasy, reifying female vulnerability and perpetuating the “attitudinal harm” arguments we saw with porn earlier. What is interesting to note is that those who object to “rape culture” often identify as sex-positive and even as porn-positive. But there appears to be a belief that mainstream audiences will naïvely interpret eroticized representations of force as literal prescriptions for real life. In other words, the critics implicitly promote the tired “media effects” theory without having to deal with messy empirical evidence, thereby ignoring the fact that most studies do not support the monkey-see, monkey-do hypothesis. There is also, it seems to me, a desire to perform one's superior erotic taste (à la Bourdieu) by labelling mainstream non-consent fantasies—like *365 Days*—as “rape culture” as well as “trashy” (see Bourdieu 1984).

Another burning issue is race. Thankfully, the new generation of anti-respectability scholars, particularly those coming from a Black feminist grounding like Ariane Cruz, Mireille Miller-Young, Jennifer C. Nash, and Christina Carney, are carving out cutting-edge approaches to theorize overlooked archives, as well as the relationship of racialization to sexual expression. Their work has been paradigm-shifting for rethinking pornography and racial fetishization within complex networks of power and marginalization. For me, it has also been affirming. When I was a student, and even sometimes now as a prof, some of my critics accuse me of being “white-identified.” Pleasure, they suggest, is a privileged area of research, an indulgence that only white women can afford. Such critics have insisted that the “real” and “urgent” work for racialized scholars is sexual violence, not sexual pleasure. I now have a roster of established racialized scholars whom I can cite who reckon with pleasure and agency alongside exploitation and coercion under forces like racial capitalism. It's not either/or, and in many ways, these scholars have provided ways to understand pleasure as a force to combat literal and epistemic violence. Not that I'm saying pleasure needs an instrumental alibi to be tolerated. In my view, pleasure is its own good.

LHM: In typical academic form, having just written the response above it occurs to me that research on porn pedagogy in the undergraduate gen ed classroom is a pressing need that I should start researching right away. But more seriously, the lack of attention to pornographies from outside the United States, beyond the security of traditional narrative film, and beyond the thrill of hardcore, is something that remains a stark gap in porn studies research. Here, I am echoing Linda Williams in her 2014 reflection on the area of study she helped to create, “Pornography, Porno, Porn: Thoughts on a Weedy Field” (24-40). Williams also points to the overemphasis on queer texts (or, perhaps, the lack of attention to hetero texts), something that has been partially resolved in the intervening years. In general, I think it is important to acknowledge the expansion of porn studies over the last decade as we have seen an uptick in single author books and sustained scholarship (as opposed to what I call “dabbling”—scholars outside of porn studies who spice up their research with some porn, never to return to the fold again). Much of this scholarship has addressed gaps in the field—race, the video era (thank you Peter!), global pornographies, sexploitation and softcore, specific filmmakers/films, gonzo and non-narrative porn, and so forth—yet I am still left with the sense that we are merely scratching the surface. Having been treated to Mireille Miller-Young’s *A Taste for Brown Sugar* (2014) and Jennifer C. Nash’s *The Black Body in Ecstasy* (2014) in the same year, will we now enjoy further books that get to grips with race and pornography? Will there be a book about the films of Gregory Dark? Interracial pornographies? Black masculinities in porn/sex work? I hope so. Yet (and this speaks to Peter’s point about ensuring the continued recruitment of students and expansion of the discipline at the graduate level), it feels as though there are so few dedicated scholars in secure, well-paid, flexible positions to shoulder the responsibility of such a massive undertaking. The topics I just mentioned in passing are the porn studies equivalent of, say, the films of Quentin Tarantino, interracial romance in Hollywood film, and masculinity in the Western. It is absurd to imagine a media studies landscape where those books were not plentiful.

This brings me to a consideration that intersects with my comments on pedagogy. Imagine if that book on masculinity in the Western included discussion of *A Dirty Western* (1975). Pornography is seen as so “other” that it rarely if ever gets included in scholarly work focused on “film.” A friend once told me about a paper she was working on about incest and the South in film. I enthusiastically told her about *Carmen Goes South*, a wonderful and weird David Stanley feature that includes incestuous scenes set against a backdrop of confederate flags and other stereotypical southern tropes. “Oh...,” my friend replied, “I’m not really working on...*that*.” In this way, the responsibility of covering all of pornography rests almost exclusively on the shoulders of a tiny group of hard-working nerds. It would be interesting to see if the proliferation of porn studies in neighboring fields might further cement and validate our field as well as enrich theirs.

TW: I will mention just one. Below I mention the “lacunae” that are evident in the research spectrum that has been explored by porn studies over the years. One

of these is unbridled research into the relationship of porn to the carceral state. I never tire of repeating that there are now more porn users locked up in North America than at any other time of history—all in cahoots with the privatization of the punitive penal system, the #MeToo weather system, the total lockdown on any conversation about youth sexual agency and intergenerational sexual relations, the industrialization of the sex offenders registries program, the pseudo-feminist therapy industry, and the lingering criminalization of consensual sexual exchange. We have only begun to explore the relationship of sexual imagery, commoditized or non-, to all of these dynamics.

KC: Comment on your experiences with “trigger warnings” and “safe spaces” in the classroom and where you stand with respect to this debate. On the one hand, many students claim that trigger warnings are important in order to guard against re-living traumatic events. Some instructors, however, have suggested that trigger warnings are not grounded in the current research on trauma and function to censor classroom content and stifle conversations around difficult knowledge. Some suggest that they infringe on free speech. Do you use trigger warnings in your classes? Do students ask for them or do you implement them on your own? What do you think about trigger warnings both in theory and in praxis?

PA: We should, first and foremost, center this topic within a framework of contemporary politics. “Trigger warnings” as a conceit have been weaponized in this latest iteration of the Culture Wars in the United States and have been co-opted by conservatives in an ongoing anti-intellectual war against higher education and, particularly, the humanities. Because of that, the concept itself has become devoid of its original meaning, and, unfortunately, the result has been that many students have fallen into a defensive mode in which they expect lots of classroom time devoted to parsing through all the ways something could be offensive, to whom, and why. It’s less about them *actually* feeling this way, I think, and more about them now being pre-conditioned to expect dialogue about it. In that sense, students have been directly impacted by the way conservatives have hijacked this topic in order to blame, falsely, liberal politics. I really don’t want any part of that in my classroom, and I work really hard not to feed that fire in any way. All of this means that this current landscape is completely separate from the *actual intention* of content advisories.

Early in my career, I was heavily influenced by an interview that Kevin Bozelka did with Peter Lehman and Linda Williams in 2007, where they talked about their approach to these kinds of topics (62–68). I agreed then and continue to agree with what Linda described: I put a warning on my syllabus about graphic material that advises students not to take the course if they are unable to discuss and study this material in a detailed and thoughtful way. But I’m cautious to go too far beyond that, since, as she points out, it can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. She says, “You set them up to be traumatized at some point in the class, and sure enough, they will be! They’re going to act out trauma because it’s expected of

them” (65). I’m really cautious about pre-conditioning students any more than culture has already done.

What I’ve come to realize, though, partly after really productive conversations with Whitney Strub, is that professors should absolutely not, even inadvertently, use our power as teachers to spring things on students, or to have a paternalistic attitude that subtly or unintentionally sends the message that “we know what’s best for you even if it hurts.” Also, it’s basically the definition of cishetero white privilege for me to suggest that I could even be capable of building some neutral learning environment where we don’t have to account for actual lived experiences, which are unquestionably and disproportionately unfair, and even fatal, for many people. To stick blindly to the mythology that the classroom is free from those systemic power imbalances will only result in being complicit in perpetuating them.

At the same time, there’s simply no way to know what will be painful or difficult for each student. I tend to reiterate clearly that many topics are going to be offensive, and that, in many cases, they were *deliberately designed* to be offensive. That helps students see their scholarly potential. As historians, sometimes our role is to contextualize and trace how, where, and when that process of offensiveness happened, or to examine why certain things are offensive at various historical points. It’s naïve to think we aren’t going to be presentist in our analyses, so I try to have a mix of presentism and contextual positioning. I always and continually invite students to meet with me and talk about their concerns, and I work really hard to create a welcoming and safe environment where that can happen. I stress that my goal is always the opposite of the sort of suspicious, judgmental, condescending, and paternalistic conversations that conservatives bizarrely seem to want to require and take pleasure in, which to me seems all a part of a deeply disturbing (and, sadly, growing) desire to punish people for practicing empathy. Empathy is the single most important professorial trait and should always be at the foreground of our pedagogy. Finally, it’s critically important to note that students receiving professional treatment and support for trauma—which is, as a general rule, outside of our expertise area as professors—are protected by a formal structure of accommodations and university policies and shouldn’t be casually folded into these cultural debates.

UK: I feel torn about trigger warnings. I do think they can have a chilling effect on what professors teach and what can be discussed. I am also concerned they might prime some students to interpret all negative affect as “traumatizing,” when in fact, what they are experiencing is sadness or anger in response to class material. While it can be distressing to have such emotions in class, they are not the same things as being triggered and re-experiencing trauma. My other major concern is the sexual exceptionalism that seems to accompany trigger warnings, such that depictions of non-sexual violence do not seem to garner as much concern. Nonetheless, I tend to give “content warnings” and even offer accommodations of alternate material if it occurs to me that something might be categorized as “triggering.” However, I also engage in dialogue about the topic. I like to address

the issue of trigger warnings in my first class, where students can discuss these issues. I convey my own concerns with them, which are actually shared by many of the students. In this way, we work to create shared norms around what kind of content warnings, if any, we will have, while being cognizant of the drawbacks of using them. It's a compromise, but at least it positions trigger warnings as a subject of critical inquiry.

LHM: Like Peter, I have found commentary by Linda Williams and Peter Lehman to be very useful in navigating the issue of trigger warnings and showing/discussing sexually explicit material in class. When I have taught porn studies, the first readings assigned grapple directly with this question: Peter Lehman's "Why Teach and Study Pornography?" (2006) and Linda Williams's "Porn Studies: Proliferating Pornographies On/Scene" (2004). Opening with these readings provides the opportunity to discuss this very question as a group and figure out how we will navigate our feelings and reactions to the materials we will study. My experience is a little different from those who teach porn studies as a regular course that any student can sign up for. I have taught porn studies twice, both times under the mantle of an independent study although in reality these independent studies functioned more like small (four people) classes made up of students I already taught and who requested I teach the course. It was pretty great. The students and I already understood each other's learning/teaching styles and the students were more actively opting in with a full grasp of the material with which they would be engaging than undergraduates who sign up online.

Beyond those initial readings, I make it clear that a good deal of our discussion will revolve around reactions, feelings, thoughts, questions. In other words, if you are triggered, let's talk about why. I would never force a student to talk about their discomfort, but in my experience it has always served as a valuable starting point for analyzing a particular film or scene. In short, I do not offer a trigger warning before every class or film. Instead, I try to integrate the experience of being "triggered" into the substance of the class.

TW: In principle, I am opposed to trigger warnings—I agree with the premises you mention, questions around censorship, difficult knowledge, and free speech. In practice, undergraduate teaching is different from grad seminars, required courses different from elective courses, and any teacher must navigate several different contexts. Also, quite frankly, Concordia Fine Arts and sexuality programs in cosmopolitan Montreal, which used to be the sin city of Canada (our administration building used to house a porn cinema) and still is in many ways—are light years away from the situation of say an untenured teacher in a state institution in rural Indiana, where Trumpite student spies are planted in their courses, and even feminist discourses are dangerous let alone explicit materials, both to careers and to institutional funding approved annually by state assemblies, etc. etc.

I'm not dogmatic though: when I would teach Deanna Bowen's *Sadomasochism*, the most "difficult" film in my sex rep syllabus, I would casually suggest that

viewers fasten their seatbelts. This is simply because the first time I showed this very complex interweaving of a diasporic voice with archival footage of police violence against African American protesters and with a suggestive BDSM narrative, a student had confided in me in a very pedagogically supportive way that the screening had been difficult for her as an abuse survivor. In general, “difficult” films often need contextual introductions for a variety of reasons.

As for the question of spoilers, I personally love them and secretly harbour the arrogant opinion that spoiler queens do not qualify as professional film users. The spoiler as a concept was created by the publicity industry. The role of surprise in cinematic narrative is greatly exaggerated: I love going to Bollywood movies with Indian friends who always know after the first five minutes exactly how a film is going to end, based on both narrative formulae and extra/para-cinematic discourses, and this never dampens my pleasure in the slightest.

KC: What are the biggest challenges you face as a scholar or teacher of pornography/sexuality?

PA: As a field, we face what feels like a permanent struggle against the cultural anxiety around our topic, something that Michael Warner perfectly explains as a struggle for control based in insecurity and fear (1999). These anxieties are deeper than sexually explicit media, they’re

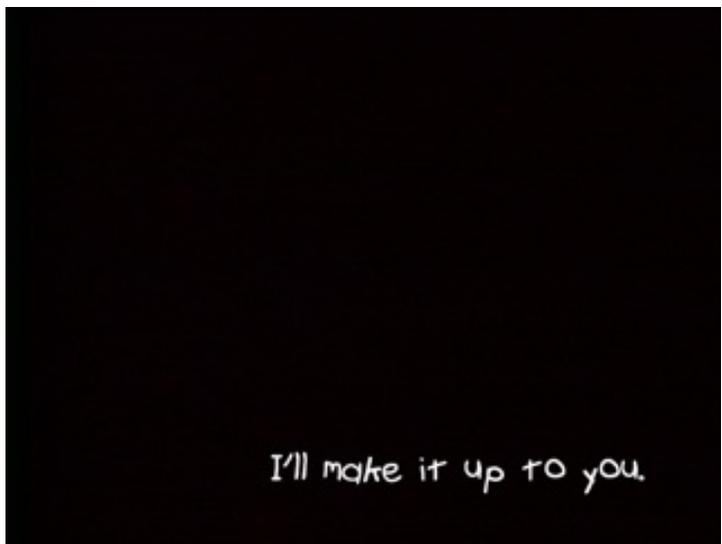


Figure 3.
Sodomasochism (frame grabs), dir. Deanna Bowen (1998).

about pleasure: what kinds of pleasure people are having, what kinds of pleasure people should be allowed to have, who should decide, and how. Sexually explicit representations often depict pleasure, and are often intended to produce pleasure, which means they're an ideal flashpoint for those tensions. The degree to which various regulatory mechanisms—be they religious, juridical, or cultural—become actualized changes over time, as does what constitutes pornography, but the tensions just continually simmer. For some people, scholars who study those representations embody the potential for normalization and acceptance of pleasure, especially pleasure for pleasure's sake, the most dangerous kind. Ultimately, pornography studies scholars make people nervous and anxious just by making pleasure legible on a most basic, bodily level. In other words, our literal presences remind people that pleasure is a thing that exists—and since pleasure is so contentious, we become the terrain on which those anxieties play out.

Sometimes these anxieties take very visible forms, such as anti-pornography feminism, which in its most recent form is the manufactured public health crisis, the rhetoric from which takes up a lot of airspace and time. It deliberately draws people into tired quarrels and arguments that are designed to create legitimacy through opposition and push opponents toward insidious and false middle ground discourses. These people are also just plain exhausting, and they know it. That's the strategy. They have (sometimes literal) religious zeal and an unending supply of moral righteousness, but they also are, at the root, just afraid. Other times these anxieties are more subtle, such as the way we're continually asked to justify our area of research, spend rhetorical time giving counter-arguments, or even just the mindless bureaucratic labor of explaining to university administrators why we need research funding for sexually explicit media, or reimbursements for travel related to that research, and so on. For example, I recently spent hours trying to convince an IT administrator that the university's email filters were sending many of my incoming emails to a spam folder because of their pornography-related contents; I guarantee other faculty on my campus aren't using their time for *that* problem.

What has served me extremely well in the midst of the occasional tension has always been to act as if my area of expertise is completely *normal*. When someone acts otherwise, I tend to respond as if those reactions are confusing and *abnormal*. We've kind of been conditioned as a field to act in the opposite way, and to be suspicious and defensive, given the past histories of how this work has been treated. But, in the end, I really believe that defensiveness only highlights the anti-pornography position that there's something suspicious about all of this. There isn't. It's endlessly important just to point out that the emperor isn't wearing any clothes, and not to accede any false middle-ground discourses, something that Gayle Rubin gave us a road map for a long time ago (1984, 267–319). Ultimately, I've found that the best strategy for dealing with these challenges is just making things ordinary. Really just plain old ordinary, which, by the way, it all is. From anti-pornography activists to wary department heads to suspicious neighbors, culturally driven anxiety makes people think pleasure and, by extension, sexually explicit media, are perverse and dangerous. Any chance we get to say

that they aren't, either literally or just by *being in this profession*, works toward making a new and better reality.

UK: One of the big challenges for me in this moment is trying to nuance conversations around sexuality and consent post-#MeToo (the current pop feminism version, not the original grassroots movement started by Tarana Burke). Of course, I believe this “reckoning”—as it’s been called—has created a safer space for survivors to share experiences while holding (some) perpetrators accountable for their actions. But there are also ways that the desire to expose sexual violence, call out the “predators” and demand that they “pay” for their misconduct (whether through the criminal justice system or shaming/cancel culture) is reminiscent of earlier conservative sex panics and a carceral mentality. Take the documentary *The Hunting Ground* (2015), an exposé that tackles the

prevalence of sexual violence on campuses and the victim-blaming responses by university administrators. While some of the scenes do important consciousness-raising work, the film also relies on a facile David and Goliath narrative that squashes the complexity of consent and the ways that racialized male students—particularly Black male students—are vulnerable to being branded as sexual threats. Furthermore, the ideology of the film suggests that the consequences for perpetrators are not sufficiently punitive, as if punishment and banishment are effective tools to address the complex factors that contribute to sexual misconduct. This is carceral feminism. Just the name itself, “the Hunting Ground,” relies on sensationalism, while the poster conveys a horror movie aesthetic. It’s another incitement to rape culture discourse that—as Foucault has taught us—proliferates its own kind of perverse pleasures. In my experience, such critiques of *The Hunting Ground* have been met with animosity and a sense of betrayal, as



Figure 4. Movie posters for *The Hunting Ground* (2015), *The Exorcist* (1973), *The Mist* (2007), and *The Conjuring 2* (2016).

if there is only one authentic feminist response to the film: whole-hearted and unquestioning endorsement. In response to situations like this, a big part of my work right now is to create opportunities for dialogue and disagreement within feminist and progressive circles, whether in my scholarship or with my teaching.

LHM: This challenge may start to wane as I move past middle age, but the biggest challenge has been lecherous and predatory individuals at academic conferences. I wrote about those experiences in an article, “How Did You Get Into This? Notes From a Female Porn Scholar” (2014). Some encounters of this type were genuinely traumatizing and I tend to be on guard when discussing my research, especially in boozy contexts like a conference. Another challenge is my fear that I will alienate woman undergraduates who have only been exposed to one feminist discourse on pornography. Most of the time, this is not an issue. The vast majority of undergraduate women are very excited to have their preconceived ideas challenged and even to have their simmering suspicions addressed in a scholarly context.

Oh, also I faced a challenge when purchasing a bookcase off Craigslist. Upon our first meeting, the seller thought I was the bee’s knees. By the time I came by to pick up the bookcase, the seller had googled me and, well, the encounter was....very uncomfortable. She refused to speak to me or even look at me. Family friends, family of your partner/spouse, or acquaintances outside of academia may well google you and see nothing more than publications out of context, many of which have provocative titles. This is something to consider when moving around in the civilian world and when applying to jobs outside of academia. In addition, you may find yourself on the receiving end of hostile anti-porn and anti-trafficking organizations that seek to publicly shame you, get you fired, or otherwise make your life difficult. This is especially stressful for those who do not have tenure and/or work at conservative institutions.

TW: One huge challenge might be termed “generational”: how to communicate to the PornHub generation the legacy of the history of sexual representation as a repository of emancipatory ideals and communities, of utopian glimpses of desire and fulfilment? Moreover, aside from this issue, Generation Y and Z students are having trouble developing skills in textual analysis, and understanding their applicability to porn studies, not to mention basic reading and writing. They’re also not interested enough in the archive, more focused on “WAP” than on its 1937 ancestor *Marked Woman*.

Struggles against censors are not as overwhelming as they were when I started (my 1982 *Body Politic* piece on vintage gay porn film was almost withheld because the journal’s legal advisers thought that it would be seen as baiting the Toronto police. And from another direction the Kinsey Institute would soon come after me because they determined a queer community publication did not count as “scholarly”—the word included in their researcher use contract).

However, the spectre of censorship still exists. With regard to my most recent book *I Confess: Constructing the Sexual Self in the Internet Age* (an anthology

coedited with Brandon Arroyo, 2019), an abusive peer reviewer almost succeeded in scuttling the publication because he was uncomfortable with some of our material.

Self-censorship is still an issue in this subfield. If you look at the tables of contents from the first decade of the review *Porn Studies*, obvious lacunae are visible (including the skittishness around using visual material). And then there's the job market: if you look at all the PhDs out there who researched porn but who are now jobless, a pattern emerges.

The challenge of diversity has been much discussed, but there's still a lot of catching up to do in terms of porn heritage. At Kinsey I watched 17 wonderful artisanal films in 8mm from the sixties by one Ben Dover, a Manhattan African American flamer who called his outfit "Big D Productions" and his onscreen persona "Iva Crusty Crotch." But I couldn't pursue this research because the materials were in 8mm and subsequent initiatives didn't pan out. Those films are still waiting there to be claimed... and the insights they offer into the erotic imagination of racialized queer minorities during the Sexual Revolution still waiting to be parsed... alongside no doubt many, many other films.

Introduction and questions by Kyler Chittick.

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- Williams, Linda. 1999. *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the “Frenzy of the Visible,”* expanded ed. Berkeley: University of California Press.
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Filmography

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- Białowas, Barbara, and Tomasz Mandes. 2020. *365 Days*. 114 min, colour, film.
- Bowen, Deanna. 1998. *Sadomasochism*. 14 min, colour and BW, Beta SP, multimedia video installation.
- Damiano, Gerard. 1972. *Deep Throat*. 61 min, colour, film.
- Dick, Kirby. 2015. *The Hunting Ground*. 105 min, colour, Netflix.
- Marshak, Philip. 1978. *Dracula Sucks*. USA, 95 min, colour, film.
- Robertson, Joseph F. 1975. *A Dirty Western*. 71 min, colour, film.
- Sherr Klein, Bonnie. 1982. *Not a Love Story: A Film About Pornography*. 69 min, colour, film.

Further Reading

- Albury, Kath. 2014. "Porn and Sex Education, Porn as Sex Education." *Porn Studies* 1 (1-2): 172–81.
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- Fischel, Joseph J. 2016. *Sex and Harm in the Age of Consent*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- . 2019. *Screw Consent: A Better Politics of Sexual Justice*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Fung, Richard. 1993. "Shortcomings: Questions About Pornography as Pedagogy." In *Queer Looks: Perspectives on Lesbian and Gay Film and Video*, edited by Martha Gever, John Greyson, and Pratibha Parmar, 355–67. New York and London: Routledge.
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- Hilderbrand, Lucas. 2020. "Trigger Warnings and the Disciplining of Cinema and Media Pedagogy." In *The Routledge Companion to Media and Risk*, edited by Bishnupriya Ghosh and Bhaskar Sarkar. New York: Routledge. E-Book.
- Joyrich, Lynne. 2019. "Keyword 8: Trigger Warnings." *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 30 (1): 189–96.
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- Matthews, Heidi. 2019. "# MeToo as Sex Panic." In *# MeToo and the Politics of Social Change*, edited by Bianca Fileborn and Rachel Loney-Howes, 267–83. Palgrave Macmillan.
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- Patton, Cindy. 1991. "Safe Sex and the Pornographic Vernacular" In *How Do I Look?: Queer Film and Video*, edited by Bad Object-Choices, 31-51. Seattle: Bay Press.

- Pozo, Diana. 2015. "Trigger Warnings and the Porn Studies Classroom." *Porn Studies* 2 (2-3): 286–89.
- Stadler, John Paul. 2018. "The Queer Heart of Porn Studies." *JCMS: Journal of Cinema and Media Studies* 58 (1): 170–75.

Pornography: Bodies, Sex, and Representation

Art History & Visual Culture, University of Exeter

JOÃO FLORÊNCIO

Module Aims

Pornography: Bodies, Sex, and Representation will introduce you to the main theories and debates that have surrounded and framed the production, dissemination and consumption of pornographic images. With a focus on modern and contemporary porn images, the module will approach pornography as a form of cultural production that can illuminate our understanding of the ways in which our societies have conceived and represented human bodies, their sexual desires and sexual pleasures. Tracing the “birth” of pornography back to the “birth” of modernity, we will follow the tense and complex relationships of visibility and invisibility that have given porn its currency, and we will map our changing understandings of obscenity vis-à-vis the histories of our cultural policing of both bodies and the visible. To do so, we will be critically engaging with materials ranging from literature to early visual erotica; from historically censored films to the so-called “Golden Age of Porn;” from gay porn to feminist and queer “post-porn;” from online amateur pornography to artists who blur the boundaries between art and pornography. Informed by scholarship drawn from feminist and queer theory, law, media and cultural studies, and the emerging interdisciplinary field of porn studies, the module will allow you to develop important porn literacy skills that you will use to engage with a form of visual production that is second to none when it comes to the scale of its contemporary output. In so doing, the module will enable you to think critically about wider issues of power, censorship, obscenity, sex, sexuality, subjectivities, desires and pleasures as they intersect with and are co-shaped by modern and contemporary visual culture.

Content Notice

Please note that, whilst the module will be guided by the highest standards of academic integrity and rigour, the nature of the topic and of the learning materials may make it challenging on a number of ways. Even if the assigned readings may be dense and difficult to read at times and/or challenge your assumptions, you will still be expected to read them in preparation for each lecture and seminar. Further, both the texts and the visual materials used may call into question taken-for-granted views of sex and sexuality, and their place in visual culture. Finally, given the module’s subject-matter, visual and literary materials of a graphic, controversial and/or explicit nature will be used which some students may find offensive. The module convenor will always contextualise the materials used and provide a ratio-

nale for their discussion, and no illegal material will ever be used. You will have the opportunity to bring up any questions or difficulties you may encounter whilst engaging with primary sources, but it won't be possible to pass the module by avoiding them. The classroom is a space where frank academic discussions on difficult topics can take place in a safer environment.

Learning Outcomes

Beyond developing discipline-specific methodologies and key skills in academic research, writing, and collaborative work, upon successful completion of the module you will be able to:

1. Summarise and discuss the concepts and debates in the emerging field of porn studies.
2. Critically analyse pornographic representations of bodies, sex, and sexuality in relation to the cultural, historical, and political contexts of their production, dissemination, and consumption.
3. Identify some of the ways in which pornographic images and their media have fed into modern and contemporary understandings of the human body, human sexualities, and subjectivities (including their intersections with race, gender, and class).

Assessment

Formative: 1,000-word mini-essay

Summative: 3,000-word essay (90%) + five 400-word response papers (10%)

Syllabus Plan

The module comprises two 1-hour lectures, seven 3-hour seminars, and 1 hour of individual tutorials, as well as an estimate of 126 hours of independent study.

Lectures and seminars will be structured thematically in order to introduce and explore key concepts and themes relevant to contemporary scholarship on pornography, sexuality, and visual culture. Seminars will be focused on close readings of interdisciplinary scholarship and pornographic sources.

Course Schedule

Week 1 (lecture): What is Porn?

- Laura Kipnis. 1999. "How to Look at Pornography." In *Bound and Gagged: Pornography and the Politics of Fantasy*, 161–206. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Susanna Paasonen. 2011. "Introduction: Carnal Appeal." In *Carnal Resonance: Affect and Online Pornography*, 1–29. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Susanna Paasonen, Kaarina Nikunen and Laura Saarenmaa. 2007. "Pornification and the Education of Desire." In *Pornification: Sex and Sexuality in Media Culture*, 1–20. Oxford: Berg.

- Linda Williams. 1999. "Generic Pleasures: Number and Narrative." In *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure and the "Frenzy of the Visible"*, 120–152. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Week 2 (lecture): Porn Histories

- Feona Attwood. 2018. "Regulating Sex Media." In *Sex Media*, 33–60. Cambridge: Polity.
- John R. Clarke. 2013. "Before Pornography: Sexual Representation in Ancient Roman Visual Culture." In *Pornographic Art and the Aesthetics of Pornography*, edited by Hans Maes, 141–61. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Lynn Hunt. 1993. "Introduction: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity, 1500–1800." In *The Invention of Pornography: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity, 1500–1800*, edited by Lynn Hunt, 9–95. New York: Zone Books.
- Walter Kendrick. 1987. "Origins." In *The Secret Museum: Pornography in Modern Culture*, 1–32. New York: Viking.
- Thomas Waugh. 1996. "Beginnings." In *Hard to Imagine: Gay Male Eroticism in Photography and Film from Their Beginnings to Stonewall*, 1–58. New York: Columbia University Press.

Week 3 (seminar): Stag Films

- Thomas Waugh. 2004. "Homosociality in the Classical American Stag Film: Off-Screen, On-Screen." In *Porn Studies*, edited by Linda Williams, 127–41. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Linda Williams. 1999. "The Stag Film: Genital Show and Genital Event." In *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure and the "Frenzy of the Visible"*, 58–92. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Week 4 (seminar): The Golden Age

- Jeffrey Escoffier. 2009. "Paradise and the City of Orgies." In *Bigger than Life: The History of Gay Porn Cinema from Beefcake to Hardcore*, 89–115. Philadelphia: Running Press.
- Elena Gorfinkel. 2014. "Wet Dreams: Erotic Film Festivals of the Early 1970s and the Utopian Sexual Public Sphere." In *Sex Scene: Media and the Sexual Revolution*, edited by Eric Schaefer, 126–150. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Neil Jackson. 2018. "The Pornographer." In *The Routledge Companion to Media, Sex and Sexuality*, edited by Clarissa Smith, Feona Attwood and Brian McNair, 428–33. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Linda Williams. 2008. "Going Further: *Last Tango in Paris*, *Deep Throat*, and *Boys in the Sand* (1971–1972)." In *Screening Sex*, 112–154. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008.

Week 5 (seminar): The Feminist Porn Wars

- Lisa Duggan, Nan D. Hunter and Carole S. Vance. 1993. "False Promises: Feminist Anti-Pornography Legislation." *New York Law School Law Review* 38: 133–63
- Andrea Dworkin. 1989. "Power," "Force," "Pornography," and "Whores." In *Pornography: Men Possessing Women*, 13–47, 129–224. New York: Plume.
- Catharine MacKinnon. 1989. "Pornography: On Morality and Politics." In *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State*, 195–214. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Gayle Rubin. 2011. "Misguided, Dangerous, and Wrong: An Analysis of Antipornography Politics." From *Deviations: The Gayle Rubin Reader*, 254–75. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Working Group on Women, Censorship, and "Pornography." 1993. *The Sex Panic: Women, Censorship and "Pornography," A Conference Report*. New York: National Coalition Against Censorship.

Week 6: Tutorials

Week 7 (seminar): Queer & Feminist Porn Gazes

- Richard Dyer. 1985. "Male Gay Porn: Coming to Terms." *Jump Cut* 30: 27–29.
- John Mercer. 2017. "History, Industry and Technological Change." In *Gay Pornography: Representations of Sexuality and Masculinity*, 44–74. London: I.B. Tauris.
- Lynn Comella. 2015. "Positively Fat and Queer: An Interview with Indie Porn Insider Courtney Trouble." In *New Views on Pornography: Sexuality, Politics, and the Law*, edited by Lynn Comella and Shira Tarrant, 371–80. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger.
- Whitney Strub. 2015. "Queer Smut, Queer Rights." In *New Views on Pornography: Sexuality, Politics, and the Law*, edited by Lynn Comella and Shira Tarrant, 147–64. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger.

Week 8 (seminar): Racialised Pleasures

- Mireille Miller-Young. 2013. "Interventions: The Deviant and Defiant Art of Black Women Porn Directors." In *The Feminist Porn Book: The Politics of Producing Pleasure*, edited by Tristan Taormino, Celine Parreñas Shimizu, Constance Penley, and Mireille Miller-Young, 105–20. New York: The Feminist Press.
- Mireille Miller-Young. 2020. "Exotic/Erotic/Ethnopornographic: Black Women, Desire, and Labor in the Photographic Archive." In *Ethnopornography: Sexuality, Colonialism, and Archival Knowledge*, edited by Pete Sigal, Zeb Tortorici, and Neil L. Whitehead, 41–66. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Nguyen Tan Hoang. 2014. "The Rise, and Fall, of a Gay Asian American Porn Star." In *A View from the Bottom: Asian American Masculinity and Sexual Representation*, 29–70. Durham: Duke University Press.

- Bryan Pitts. 2020. “‘Hung, Hot, and Shameless in Bed’: Blackness, Desire, and Politics in a Brazilian Gay Porn Magazine, 1997–2008.” In *Ethnopedagogy: Sexuality, Colonialism, and Archival Knowledge*, edited by Pete Sigal, Zeb Tortorici, and Neil L. Whitehead, 67–96. Durham: Duke University Press.

Week 9 (seminar): Trans Perspectives

- Jiz Lee. 2013. “Uncategorized: Genderqueer Identity and Performance in Independent and Mainstream Porn.” In *The Feminist Porn Book: The Politics of Producing Pleasure*, edited by Tristan Taormino, Celine Parreñas Shimizu, Constance Penley, and Mireille Miller-Young, 273–78. New York: The Feminist Press.
- Sophie Pezzutto and Lynn Comella. 2020. “Trans Pornography: Mapping and Emerging Field.” *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 7 (2): 152–71.
- Eliza Steinbock. 2018. “Representing Trans Sexualities.” In *The Routledge Companion to Media, Sex and Sexuality*, edited by Clarissa Smith, Feona Attwood and Brian McNair, 27–37. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Eliza Steinbock. 2019. “Shimmering Sex: Docu-Porn’s Trans-Sexualities, Confession Culture, and Suturing Practices.” In *Shimmering Images: Trans Cinema, Embodiment, and the Aesthetics of Change*, 61–106. Durham: Duke University Press.

Week 10 (seminar): Porn Workers of the World, Unite!

- Heather Berg. 2014. “Labouring Porn Studies.” *Porn Studies* 1 (1–2): 75–79.
- Heather Berg. 2016. “‘A Scene is Just a Marketing Tool’: Alternative Income Streams in Porn’s Gig Economy.” *Porn Studies* 3 (2): 160–74.
- Alan McKee. 2016. “Pornography as a Creative Industry: Challenging the Exceptionalist Approach to Pornography.” *Porn Studies* 3 (2): 107–19.
- Valentina Mia. 2020. “The Failures of SESTA/FOSTA: A Sex Worker Manifesto.” *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 7 (2): 237–39.

Week 11: Tutorials

Graduate Topics in Gender Studies: Porn Studies

Gender Studies, Indiana University

DAVID CHURCH

Pornography is a study in contradictions. As a concept, it is notoriously hard to define, and yet, we often think (to paraphrase U.S. Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart) that we “know it when we see it.” It is perhaps the most controversial moving-image genre, but also one of the most popular in terms of widespread consumption. And, at its root, it is a genre deeply invested in providing documentary evidence of sexual pleasure, but also in simultaneously creating the illusion of fantasies that viewers might never put into personal practice. The field of Porn Studies primarily emerged from second-wave feminist and AIDS-era queer debates around the politics of moving-image pornography. Drawing on the work of several generations of anti-censorship, sex-positive feminist and queer scholars, we will examine the history, theory, and criticism of moving-image pornography as a genre that exists at the intersection of not just gender and sexuality, but also issues of law, ethics, race, class, taste, and other social forces that can powerfully affect our bodies. This course is not chiefly concerned with whether pornographic media should or should not exist in the first place, but rather what cultural and political purposes these texts can serve. Broadly speaking, the first half of course traces the historical development of both moving-image pornography and the debates over spectatorship and gender/sexual representation up to the digital era; and the second half of the course explores more contemporary pornographies and scholarly interventions about increasingly diverse representations and changing modes of production/reception.

Note on Course Content: Given the topic of this seminar, we will be viewing and discussing—both within and outside of class—a variety of sexually explicit materials that feature unsimulated sex of many different types. Inevitably, some of these representations will not reinforce your own sexual preferences or political leanings, but all students are expected to engage with these diverse materials with an open-minded, mature attitude of intellectual curiosity. Students with known sensitivities to particular content should, however, consult with the Instructor early in the semester.

Required Books:

- Linda Williams. (1989) 1999. *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the “Frenzy of the Visible.”* University of California Press.
- Susanna Paasonen. 2011. *Carnal Resonance: Affect and Online Pornography.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

- Mireille Miller-Young. 2014. *A Taste for Brown Sugar: Black Women in Pornography*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Assessment:

30% — Participation

Regular attendance and discussion participation are expected of all students. If possible, please come each day with several questions or discussion points to share.

15% — Golden-Age Film Analysis (~1500 words)

Choose a feature-length narrative porn film made from approx. 1970-84 (not already viewed for class) to analyze for its use of narrative, representation, spectatorship, etc.

15% — Tube Site Analysis (~1500 words)

Explore the website organization, common genres/themes/tags, and major trends of a major porn tube site (e.g., Pornhub, xHamster, xVideos, Youporn).

5% — Proposal for Final Project (~300 words)

35% — Final Project

- *Option 1:* 20-25 pg. research paper on topic of own choice. This can be a substantial expansion of an earlier analysis paper, in consultation with the Instructor.
- *Option 2:* Semester-long participation in screening & evaluation/comments on SECS Fest submissions (submitted to FilmFreeway through end of semester), followed by 10 pg. reflection paper. Further instructions will follow for students interested in this option.

Course Schedule

Week 1: Course Introduction

- Linda Williams, *Hard Core*, chapter 1.

Week 2: The Stag Film

Screening: Early American & French stags (ca. 1915-30s; 28 min.)

- Williams, *Hard Core*, chapters 2-3.
- Tom Waugh. 2001. "Homosexuality in the Classical American Stag Film: Off-screen, Onscreen." *Sexualities* 4 (3): 275-91.
- Mireille Miller-Young, *A Taste for Brown Sugar*, chapter 1.

Week 3: Homoerotica Before Stonewall

Screening: *A Very Special Friend* (Pat Rocco, 1968; 15 min.)

- David K. Johnson. 2010. "Physique Pioneers: The Politics of 1960s Gay Consumer Culture." *Journal of Social History* 43, no. 4 (Summer): 867-92.
- Yvonne Keller. 2005. "'Was It Right to Love Her Brother's Wife So Passionately?' Lesbian Pulp Novels and U.S. Lesbian Identity, 1950-1965." *American Quarterly* 57, no. 2 (June): 385-410.

- Tom Waugh. 1996. "Cockteaser." In *Pop Out: Queer Andy Warhol*, edited by Jennifer Doyle, Jonathan Flatley, and Jose Esteban Muñoz, 51–77. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Whitney Strub. 2012. "Mondo Rocco: Mapping Gay Los Angeles Sexual Geography in the Late-1960s Films of Pat Rocco." *Radical History Review* 2012, no. 113 (Spring): 13–34.

Week 4: Sexploitation Cinema

Screening: *Office Love-In*, *White Collar Style* (Stephen C. Apostolof, 1968; 81 min.)

- Elena Gorfinkel. 2017. "Producing Permissiveness: Censorship, Obscenity Law, and the Trials of Spectatorship," and "Watching an 'Audience of Voyeurs': Adult Film Reception." In *Lewd Looks: American Sexploitation Cinema in the 1960s*, chapter 1 and 4, 27–96, 197–244. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- David Church. 2016. "Ephemerality between Fantasy and Reality: Sexploitation, Fan Magazines, and the Adults-Only Film and Publishing Industries." In *Disposable Passions: Vintage Pornography and the Material Legacies of Adult Cinema*, chapter 2, 61–102. New York: Bloombury Academic.

Week 5: Hardcore "Porno Chic"

Screening: *Inside Deep Throat* (Fenton Bailey and Randy Barbato, 2005; 90 min.); and *The Opening of Misty Beethoven* (Radley Metzger, 1976; 84 min.)

- Linda Williams, *Hard Core*, chapters 4–6.
- Mireille Miller-Young, *A Taste for Brown Sugar*, chapter 2.

Week 6: Gay Liberation and "All-Male" Pornography

Screening: *L.A. Tool & Die* (Joe Gage, 1979; 86 min.)

Golden-Age Film Analysis due

- Richard Dyer. 1985. "Male Gay Porn: Coming to Terms." *Jump Cut* 30 (March): 27–29.
- Tom Waugh. 1985. "Men's Pornography: Gay vs. Straight." *Jump Cut* 30 (March): 30–35.
- Ryan Powell. 2019. "Liberation Porn." In *Coming Together: The Cinematic Elaboration of Gay Male Life, 1945–1979*, chapter 4. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Jeffrey Escoffier. 2021. "Sex in the Seventies: Gay Porn Cinema as an Archive for the History of Sexuality." In *Sex, Society, and the Making of Pornography: The Pornographic Object of Knowledge*, chapter 3. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Week 7: Pornographic Spaces of Consumption

Screening: *A Night at the Adonis* (Jack Deveau, 1978; 82 min.)

- Amy Herzog. 2008. "In the Flesh: Space and Embodiment in the Pornographic Peep Show Arcade." *Velvet Light Trap* 62 (1): 29–43.

- Rich Cante and Angelo Restivo. 2004. "The Cultural-Aesthetic Specificities of All-Male Moving-Image Pornography." In *Porn Studies*, edited by Linda Williams, 142–66. Durham: Duke University Press.
- José Capino. 2005. "Homologies of Space: Text and Spectatorship in All-Male Adult Theaters." *Cinema Journal* 45 (1): 50–65.
- Peter Alilunas. 2016. "Panorams, Motels, and Pirates: The Origins of Adult Video." In *Smutty Little Movies: The Creation and Regulation of Adult Video*, chapter 1. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- David Church. 2014. "'This Thing of Ours': Heterosexuality, Recreational Sex, and the Survival of Adult Movie Theaters." *Media Fields Journal*, no. 8.

Week 8: The Emergence of Feminist & Queer Pornographies

Screening: *Suburban Dykes* (Deborah Sundahl, 1991; 28 min.); and *Mutantes: Punk, Porn, Feminism* (Virginie Despentes, 2009; 92 min.)

- Heather Butler. 2004. "What Do You Call a Lesbian with Long Fingers? The Development of Lesbian and Dyke Pornography." In *Porn Studies*, edited by Linda Williams. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Candida Royalle. 1993. "Porn in the USA." In "Explores the Sex Trade," edited by Anne McClintock. Special Issue. *Social Text* 37 (Winter): 23–32.
- Lynn Comella. 2013. "From Text to Context: Feminist Porn and the Making of a Market." In *The Feminist Porn Book: The Politics of Producing Pleasure*, edited by Tristan Taormino, Celine Parreñas Shimizu, Constance Penley, Mireille Miller-Young, 79–94. New York: The Feminist Press.

Week 9: Online Pornographies

Tube Site Analysis due

- Susanna Paasonen, *Carnal Resonance*, chapters 1–5.

Week 11: Black and "Interracial" Pornographies

Final Project Proposal due

- Miller-Young, *A Taste for Brown Sugar*, chapters 4–6.
- Ariane Cruz, 2016. "Interracial Iterations and Internet In(ter)ventions." In *The Color of Kink: Black Women, BDSM, and Pornography*, chapter 3, 125–68. New York: NYU Press.
- Whitney Strub. 2018. "No Sex in Newark: Postindustrial Erotics at the Intersection of Urban and Adult Film History." *JCMS: Journal of Cinema and Media Studies* 58 (1): 175–81.

Week 12: Asian-American Pornographies

- José Capino. 2006. "Asian College Girls and Oriental Men with Bamboo Poles: Reading Asian Pornography." In *Pornography: Film and Culture*, edited by Peter Lehman, 206–219. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Celine Parreñas Shimizu. 2007. "Racial Threat or Racial Treat?: Performing Yellowface Sex Acts in Stag Films, 1920–34," and "Queens of Anal, Double, Triple, and the Gangbang: Producing Asian/American Feminism in

Pornography, 1940s–1990s.” In *The Hypersexuality of Race: Performing Asian/American Women On Screen and Scene*, chapters 4–5, 102–84. Durham: Duke University Press.

- Nguyen Tan Hoang. 2014. “The Rise, and Fall, of a Gay Asian American Porn Star.” In *A View from the Bottom: Asian American Masculinity and Sexual Representation*, chapter 1, 29–70. Durham: Duke University Press.

Week 13: Contemporary Gay Pornography

- John Mercer. 2017. *Gay Pornography: Representations of Sexuality and Masculinity*, chapters 3–5. New York: I.B. Tauris.
- Tim Dean. 2009. “Representing Raw Sex.” In *Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections on the Subculture of Barebacking*, chapter 2. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Lucy Neville. 2018. “Sometimes It’s Hard to Be a Woman.” In *Girls Who Like Boys Who Like Boys: Women and Gay Male Erotica and Pornography*, chapter 5. Palgrave Macmillan.

Week 14: Trans Pornographies

Screening: *Mes Chéris* (Ethan Folk & Ty Wardwell, 2020; 13 min.)

- Sophie Pezzutto and Lynn Comella. 2020. “Trans Pornography: Mapping an Emerging Field.” *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 7 (2): 152–71.
- Jeffrey Escoffier. 2021. “Trans Porn, Heterosexuality, and Sexual Identity.” In *Sex, Society, and the Making of Pornography: The Pornographic Object of Knowledge*, chapter 9. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Marcel Barriault. 2016. “Bucking Heteronormativity: Buck Angel as Porn Performer, Producer, and Pedagogue.” *Porn Studies* 3 (2): 133–46.
- Carolyn Bronstein. 2020. “Pornography, Trans Visibility, and the Demise of Tumblr.” *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 7 (2): 240–254.

Week 15: Porn and/as Sex Work

Screening: *Hot Girls Wanted* (Jill Bauer and Ronna Gradus, 2015; 84 min.)

- Jeffrey Escoffier. 2021. “Gay-for-Pay: Straight Men and the Making of Gay Pornography.” In *Sex, Society, and the Making of Pornography: The Pornographic Object of Knowledge*, chapter 6. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Tristan Taormino. 2013. “Calling the Shots: Feminist Porn in Theory and Practice.” In *The Feminist Porn Book: The Politics of Producing Pleasure*, edited by Tristan Taormino, Celine Parreñas Shimizu, Constance Penley, Mireille Miller-Young, 255–64. New York: The Feminist Press.
- Heather Berg. 2021. *Porn Work: Sex, Labor, and Late Capitalism*, chapters 2–3. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Final Week: Final Paper due

Porn in the USA

University of Berlin and the University of Paderborn

MADITA OEMING

Course Description

“Pornography is emphatically part of American culture,” claims Linda Williams, US film scholar and founding mother of the young but by now established field of Porn Studies. Indeed, there is no other country that produces and consumes as much pornographic material as the United States. At the same time, however, America has a troubled history with porn, full of obscenity trials, censorship movements, and moral panics. In this class, our aim is to move beyond a moral judgment of pornography and towards a better analytical understanding of its history, aesthetics, production, consumption, and cultural role. Through critical readings and selected scenes, we will go back to the so-called “Golden Age of Porn” in the 1970s and the “Porn War” it ignited among feminists to then follow porn’s evolution, as a medium and as an industry, into the digital age. In doing so, key concerns will be questions of gender, visual language, technology, audiences, and the significance of representation always with respect to both changes and constants over time.

A note on content: Please be aware that we will look at sexually explicit material. If you think you are unable to engage with such media in a respectful and scholarly manner, this is not the right course for you. You need to be of legal age to participate.

Course Schedule

Introduction: Welcome to the Wondrous World of Porn (Studies)

Suggested Reading:

- Henry Jenkins. 2004. “So you Want to Teach Pornography?” In *More Dirty Looks: Gender, Pornography and Power*, edited by Pamela Church Gibson, 1–8. 2nd ed. London: British Film Institute.
- Constance Penley “A Feminist Teaching Pornography? That’s Like Scopes Teaching Evolution!” In *The Feminist Porn Book: The Politics of Producing Pleasure*, edited by Tristan Taormino, Celine Parreñas Shimizu, Constance Penley, Mireille Miller-Young, 179–99. New York: The Feminist Press.

Week 1: “I know it when I see it” – Defining Pornography

Screening: excerpt from *Pornography: A Secret History of Civilisation* (1999)

Required Reading:

- Laura Kipnis. 1998. “How to Look at Pornography.” In *Bound and Gagged: Pornography and the Politics of Fantasy in America*, 161–206.
- Walter Kendrick. 1987. “Origins.” In *The Secret Museum: Pornography in Modern Culture*, 1–32. New York: Viking.

Suggested Listening: “Porn Will Tear Us Apart.” *The Ersties Podcast*, episode 6.

Week 2: A Weedy Field? Understanding Porn Studies as a Discipline

Screening: selection from “What About Porn Studies,” interview series by Patrick Catuz

Required Reading:

- Linda Williams. 2013. “Pornography, Porno, Porn: Thoughts on a Weedy Field.” *Porn Studies* 1 (1–2): 24–40.
- Feona Attwood and Clarissa Smith “*Porn Studies: An Introduction.*” *Porn Studies* 1 (1–2): 1–6.

Suggested Reading: excerpts from Linda Williams. (1989) 1999. *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the “Frenzy of the Visible.”* University of California Press.

Week 3: *Deep Throat* and “The Golden Age of Porn”

Screening: selection from *Deep Throat* (dir. Gerard Damiano, 1972, 61 min.)

Required Reading:

- Eric Schaefer. 2002. “Gauging a Revolution: 16mm Film and the Rise of the Pornographic Feature.” *Cinema Journal* 41 (3): 3–26.
- Susie Bright “The Birth of the Blue Movie Critic.” In Taormino et al., *The Feminist Porn Book*, 32–40.

Suggested Watching: *Inside Deep Throat* (2005) and *Lovelace* (2013)

Week 4: Feminist Porn Wars I: Anti-Porn Feminism

Screening: news coverage of the 1979 March on Times Square by Women Against Pornography

Required Reading:

- excerpts from Andrea Dworkin. 1981. *Pornography: Men Possessing Women.* New York: Putnam.
- excerpts from Catharine MacKinnon. 1993. *Only Words.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Suggested Reading: excerpts from Carolyn Bronstein *Battling Pornography*

Week 5: Feminist Porn Wars II: The Feminist Porn Movement

Screening:

- MsNaughty “What is Feminist Porn” video compilation
- selected scenes from *Deep Inside Annie Sprinkle* (1981)

Required Reading:

- Tristan Taormino et al. 2013. "Introduction: The Politics of Producing Pleasure." In Taormino et al., *The Feminist Porn Book*, 9–20.
- Candida Royalle. 2013. "What's a Nice Girl Like You..." In Taormino et al., *The Feminist Porn Book*, 58–69.

Suggested Reading: Betty Dodson. 2013. "Porn Wars." In Taormino et al., *The Feminist Porn Book*, 23–31.

Week 6: Rocco Siffredi & the Era of Gonzo

Screening: selection from

- *Adventures of Buttman* (1989)
- *Rocco's Perfect Slaves #9* (2016)
- *ROCCO* (2016)

Required Reading: Giovanna Maina and Federico Zecca. 2016. "Harder than Fiction: The Stylistic Model of Gonzo Pornography." *Porn Studies* 3 (4): 337–50.

Suggested Listening: "John Stagliano: The Father of Gonzo Porn." *Holly Randall Unfiltered*, episode 107, podcast, 1:50:59 hr.

Week 7: Of Beefcakes & Cocky Boys – Male Gay Porn Then & Now

Screening: selection from

- *Boys in the Sand* (1971)
- *A Night at the Adonis* (1983)
- *Jake Jaxson's All Saints 2* (2018)
- *Brandon Cody & Carter Dane* (2018)

Required Reading:

- Michael Lucas. 2006. "On Gay Porn." *Yale Journal of Law and Feminism* 18 (1).
- excerpts from Lucy Neville. 2018. *Girls Who Like Boys Who Like Boys: Women and Gay Male Erotica and Pornography*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Suggested Listening: "Who is Pat Rocco," "John Mercer," "Chris Harder." *Porno Cultures*, podcast.

Week 8: Feminist Porn Now

Screening:

- *BBC Three* interview with Paulita Pappel "The Porn Star Feminist" (2018)
- *Trinity* (2017)
- selected scenes from *His was first in my Ass* (2015)
- *The Ultimate Kink* (2016)
- *The Bike Club* (2018)

Required Reading:

- Laura Mulvey. 1975. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Screen* 16, no. 3 (Autumn): 6–18
- Lynn Comella. 2013. "From Text to Context: Feminist Porn and the Making of a Market." In Taormino et al., *The Feminist Porn Book*, 79–94.

Suggested Reading: Rebecca Saunders. 2020. “It’s Like Being Paid to Fuck My Girlfriend’: Alternative Pornographies and Unalienated Labour.” In *Bodies of Work. Dynamics of Virtual Work*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Week 9: Race & Porn

Screening: selected scenes from

- *The Opening of Misty Beethoven* (1976)
- *Kitchen Talk* (2018)
- compilation from various recent *Blacked.com* productions

Required Watching: “Ask A Porn Star: Listen to Black Performers.” uploaded by Wood Rocket. YouTube, 1:36 hr.

Required Reading: excerpts from Mireille Miller-Young. 2014. *A Taste for Brown Sugar: Black Women in Pornography* Durham: Duke University Press, 2014.

Suggested Reading: Celine Shimizu. 2013. “Bound by Expectation: The Racialized Sexuality of Porn Star Keni Styles.” In Taormino et al., *The Feminist Porn Book*, 287–302.

Week 10: Fat, Hairy, Trans, Asian? – Fetishizing the Other in Porn

Screening: selected scenes from

- *Sexing the Transman* (2011)
- recent *Shape of Beauty* productions

Required Reading:

- April Flores. 2013. Being Fatty D: Size, Beauty, and Embodiment in the Adult Industry.” In Taormino et al., *The Feminist Porn Book*, 279–83.
- Buck Angel. 2013. “The Power of My Vagina.” In Taormino et al., *The Feminist Porn Book*, 284–86.
- Jiz Lee. 2013. Uncategorized: Genderqueer Identity and Performance in Independent and Mainstream Porn.” In Taormino et al., *The Feminist Porn Book*, 273–78.

Suggested Listening: “Natassia Dreams: BLACK TRANS SUPERWOMAN.” *The Pornhub Podcast with Asa Akira*, 1:10 min.

Week 11: Safe, Sane & Consensual: BDSM Porn

Screening: selected scenes from

- *Feminist & Submissive* (2017)
- on-camera consent from *Kink.com*

Required Reading: Gayle Rubin. 1987. “The Leather Menace: Comments on Politics and S/M.” In *Coming to Power: Writings and Graphics on Lesbian S/M*, ed. Samois, 2014_15. Boston: Alyson Publications.

Suggested Listening: “OH YES PLEASE with Caritia.” *POV Podcast*, 32:15 min.

Week 12: Porn Panics of the Digital Age – on “Pornification” & “Porn Addiction”

Screening: Gail Dines’ TedX talk “Growing Up in a Pornified Culture”

Required Reading:

- Valerie Webber and Rebecca Sullivan. 2018. “Constructing a Crisis: Porn Panics and Public Health.” *Porn Studies* 5 (2): 192–96.
- Clarissa Smith and Feona Attwood. 2013. “Emotional Truths and Thrilling Slide Shows: The Resurgence of Antiporn Feminism.” In Taormino et al., *The Feminist Porn Book*, 41–57.

Suggested Watching: *Don Jon* (2013)

Aftercare – Wrap-up, Class Evaluation, Feedback etc.

Statement

This syllabus was designed for an undergraduate class at a German university, taught in 90-minute sessions stretched over 14 weeks. As part of the American Studies program, it focuses exclusively on the US. Since I expected my students to have zero previous experience with the field of *Porn Studies*, I decided to go for a ‘slow start’ to ease them into discussing the topic. Endeavoring to treat porn just like any other study object, I find it important to actually watch porn together. However, that comes with extra challenges that I address openly in class. In my experience, selected scenes of up to 15 minutes accompanied by specific viewing tasks work best. I carefully select the scenes we watch, try to mix alternative and mainstream porn productions, and consciously start with scenes from the 70s because the historical distance, plus the humorous elements, make students feel more comfortable in this new situation. The chronological approach is useful to discuss porn as part of culture overall rather than an isolated entity and to be able to focus on changes and the impact of technological advances. The historical perspective takes away time for other, more contemporary aspects, that I would also like to include: Pornhub, porn parodies, hentai porn, OnlyFans, sex worker rights struggles to name just a few. There is never enough time to cover everything. Some sessions are rather reading-intense, but I stayed away from heavy theory such as Butler or Foucault which I would include in a more advanced group. It is crucial to me to include the voices of sex workers, which I do through texts but also podcasts which take you even closer to the people in the industry. When teaching this class in Berlin, I had the chance to include visits at the Feminist Porn Award, the Pornfilmfestival and a live panel with Jiz Lee, which I would encourage everyone to do who has the privilege of teaching in a place with a porn scene. Most importantly, though, transparency, respect, and a healthy dose of humor are key to teaching a successful porn class.

SYN

An Online Journal of Film

ARTWORK

**ARTIST
STATEMENTS**

Doll

Artist Statement

MARTHA MUSZYCKA-JONES

Doll seeks to broaden erotic imagery beyond the male gaze. It aims to show a complicated female desire that exists outside of the aesthetics of mainstream pornography. *Doll* asserts that a stereotypical “female gaze” can be just as problematic as a male one, and that female desire is allowed to be just as dirty as men’s. Furthermore, engaging in consensual acts of sexuality that mirror real-world violence can become a stage of resistance, and even healing, for many women. The pornography industry is a capitalist one that creates sexuality devoid of eroticism, and *Doll* offers an alternative to this. *Doll* is made up of images of myself in a vac bed, which can be best described as a latex sleeping bag that has had all the air sucked out of it, not unlike a vacuum sealer for humans! I have then collaged cut-up images of myself (from a photoshoot), which resemble the classic pin-up style and obscure the vac bed pictures underneath. The collages have been pasted together with liquid latex, which dries into a skin-like substance that crinkles the collages and fringes it with rubbery edges. *Doll* aims to show us what is possible when erotic imagery expands what sexuality can look like, rather than systematically reinforcing itself.

Being a kinky feminist sex worker/advocate has put me in a complicated intersection of women’s issues over the years. On the one hand, I am staunchly anti-censorship and advocate for the rights of sex workers. On the other, to simply suggest that all porn is feminist because a woman has consented to participate in it is absurd. There obviously needs to be some nuance between these two options, but in a lot of feminist discourse this seems to be the extent of the discussion. The porn industry is undeniably problematic, but this has very little to do with the medium itself. As Virginie Despentes, a pro-porn feminist, writer, and sex worker, explains, “Men alone conceive of porn, direct it, watch it, and profit from it. And female desire is subject to the same distortion: it must only occur via the male gaze. We have only recently begun to get familiar with the notion of female pleasure” (2010, 96). From this quote we can see that the problematic issues relating to the industry are not unique to porn, but are concretely intertwined with a systemic issue found in any field, namely, that men typically hold all the power.

For the purposes of this essay, I define mainstream pornography as material produced by professional film studios that exist within their own reinforcing classifications, and which build upon a history of tropes that cater to what the male gaze is supposed to look like. Perhaps most critically, mainstream pornography

ignores the existence of a female gaze, which exists only tangentially to its male counterpart. I would not consider independent creators who both produce and act in their own porn to be part of this structure. In mainstream pornography, the gender signifiers of the subjects are enhanced and emphasized. In *Doll*, the gender of the figure in the vac bed is obscured, therefore queering its desirability. The typical hierarchy of man viewing woman is not present, rather, we are viewing ambiguous flesh. Ambiguous flesh does not have a gender, and so the intended viewer does not necessarily have to be the heterosexual man, but anyone who wishes to look. This was an essential part of the work for me, because as Despentès explains:

Desire is an exclusively male domain. It's extraordinary that one can despise a young girl screaming her desire when John Lennon strums his guitar, but find it amusing for an old guy to whistle at a teenager wearing a mini-skirt. There is on the one hand healthy desire—approved by society, encouraged, looked on with benevolence and understanding—and on the other a necessarily grotesque, monstrous, laughable appetite which must be suppressed. (2006, 99)

This “healthy” male desire is represented by the classic looking pin-up images that are collaged onto the some of the doll figures. However, the bodies in the vac bed take desire out of the exclusively male domain. Furthermore, desire itself is potentially taken out of the equation when the displayed nude figure is viewed. The figure in *Doll*, obscured by layers of latex, both within the image and on top of the image, is so abject that it is not desirable, at least not in the expected sense. If the viewer does find the figure in *Doll* to be erotic, it is in the fetishistic sense that exists outside of most pornography, definitely all mainstream pornography. My aim is not to remove any possibility for arousal in the viewer of *Doll*, but if this is their experience of the piece, I want it to be outside of their usual experience with pornography. *Doll* hopes to highlight the desire which Despentès has described as “grotesque, monstrous, [a] laughable appetite which must be suppressed” (99). If my viewer learns that they can experience arousal from erotica that does not play to the established male gaze, then *Doll* is operating exactly as I had intended.

The solution to misogyny in porn is therefore not censorship, but instead an expansion of female-directed porn that includes the feminine gaze and values female desire. While “porn for women” exists, it is often as equally limiting to women’s sexuality as mainstream pornography is, as feminist pornographer Tristan Taormino explains,

The dominant view within the industry is that couples and women want softer, gentler porn. This notion both reflects and reinforces stereotypes about female sexuality: we want romance and flowers and pretty lighting and nothing too hard. And that’s true for some women, but *not all of us*. (2013, 258)

This representation of women’s sexuality is just as one-dimensional as what you find in mainstream pornography, and drips with condescension. More to the point, as Taormino states, it does not reflect the diverse reality of women’s sexuality.

Anti-porn rhetoric that was born of out the sex wars of the second-wave feminist movement critiques porn as violent, grotesque, dirty, and degrading to women. However, in my experience as a porn creator, my actual sexuality is much more violent, grotesque, dirty, and degrading than any of the pretty, highly curated content I have made for the male gaze. The problem with porn is not that it displays women engaging in and enjoying specific acts which we have coded as exploitative or degrading, but that it shows these acts and the supposed female pleasure that comes with them in a way that is only designed to titillate heterosexual men. No sexual act in and of itself should be labelled “degrading,” so long as the participants are enthusiastically consenting to it. Degradation is only a connotation that can be projected onto an act. Anti-porn feminists who try to proclaim that there is a “right way” to have sex, a way that is truly equalitarian, are ignoring the true complexity of female sexuality and desire. In “Pleasure and Danger: Toward a Politics of Sexuality,” Carole S. Vance illustrates this:

some feminist analysis runs the risk of overemphasizing sexual danger....

The anti-pornography movement in a sense restates the main premises of the old gender system: the dominant cultural ideology elaborates the threat of sexual danger, so the anti-pornography movement responds by pushing for sexual safety via the control of public expression of male sexuality...the focus continues unchanged in that sexual pleasure for women is still minimized and the exploration of women’s pleasurable experience remains slight. (1984, 6)

Vance is stating that when feminists emphasize only the dangers of pornography and call for censorship, they are doing nothing to advance an alternative for women. They are simply shutting down all expressions of sexuality, including women’s. She goes on to say,

Women’s actual sexual experience is more complicated, more difficult to grasp, more unsettling.... The truth is that the rich brew of our experience contains elements of pleasure and oppression, happiness and humiliation. Rather than regard this ambiguity as confusion or false consciousness, we should use it as a source-book. (1984, 5–6)

Vance proposes that we stop viewing women’s sexuality as a binary between pure, good equitable acts, and dirty, wrong, oppressive ones. Sexuality is more fluid and complex than that, and all these things can exist simultaneously.

So what erotic imagery can we present that does not fall into the trap of a binary? In Angela Carter’s *The Sadeian Woman*, she argues that pornography only appears violent because it explicitly reveals the misogyny that is usually kept under wraps in normal society. Carter believes that sex is innately inegalitarian and unjust in a patriarchal system. So how does Carter suggest we get out of this bind? As she explains, “Sade describes the condition of women in the genre of the pornography of sexual violence but believed it would only be through the medium of sexual violence that women might heal themselves of their socially inflicted scars, in a praxis of destruction and sacrilege” (1979, 26). Thus Carter suggests (through Marquis de Sade) that we do not avoid the exploitative elements of pornography by trying to purify it, but that by leaning into these elements,

women might heal themselves from the oppression they have endured. There is a reason for this, because by acknowledging this innate inequality, women can play with it on their terms and let their sexuality permeate in messiness, rather than a clean, pleasant, passive sexuality that in actuality is more appealing to the male gaze. *Doll* plays with a sexuality that is about restraints, and so could be considered sexually violent. But it is also a portrait of an individual, there is no other figure in the piece that the doll is submitting to. The body in the vac bed operates in a praxis of destruction and sacrilege entirely of its own volition, and there is something inherently healing about subjecting your body to extreme acts with your own agency. This suggests that reveling in sexual violence can be a way to resist oppression within a patriarchal society.

But why is our figure subjecting their body to such an objectifying act? Georges Bataille explores the origins of eroticism in his *Eroticism; Death and Sensuality* and says the following, “eroticism is assenting to life even in death. Indeed, although erotic activity is in the first place an exuberance of life, the object of this psychological quest, independent as I say of any concern to reproduce life, is not alien to death” (1957, 11). Throughout the book, Bataille expresses the overlaps between eroticism and death, danger, violence, ritual, and transgression. For example, he lays out the similarities between sex and ritual sacrifice: “It is intentional like the act of the man who lays bare, desires, and wants to penetrate his victim. The lover strips the beloved of her identity no less than the blood-stained priest his human or animal victim” (90). Contemporary mainstream porn pushes upon us the most explicit, hyper-stimulating imagery it can conjure, and yet it needs to continuously one-up itself to keep its audience interested. This is partly because porn operates like any other industry under capitalism, extracting its raw materials until they are totally depleted. As Maggie Nelson explains:

we’ve entered a new, post-Fordist era of capitalism that Preciado calls the “pharmacopornographic era,” whose principal economic resource is nothing other than “the insatiable bodies of the multitudes—their cocks, clitorises, anuses, hormones, and neurosexual synapses...[our] desire, excitement, sexuality, seduction, and...pleasure.” (2015, 111)

From this we can see that ethical issues within the porn industry parallel those found in all other industries under capitalism, porn just happens to be unique because in its case the raw material is human flesh. This constant need for new bubble-gum content that is easily chewed up and spit out by consumers exists because, ultimately, contemporary porn is not satiating their appetites for the eroticism that Bataille is speaking of. Pornography has an endless output of streamlined sexuality that is devoid of any eroticism. While independent, feminist, and small-scale creators are forced to operate within this capitalist system, their output offers a practical harm-reductionist approach. There is no completely ethical consumption under capitalism, and so, like *Doll*, they aim to expand possibilities within the existing system, and offer a transgressive alternative. *Doll* does not contain any explicit sexual content, but it is dripping with abject eroticism. The vac bed body in *Doll* is in ritualistic sacrifice, bound within latex, and its corpse-like look has elements of death, danger

and violence. Its ability to be sexual while containing aspects of ancient, universal, larger-than-life themes gives it an eroticism that pornography is desperately lacking.

Doll references the shallow sexuality that mainstream porn represents through its collaged images of classic pin-ups. In parts of the installation, these collaged images work to cover up the unmanufactured images of the dolls below. They all have severed heads, totally objectified and repetitive; one could easily replace another, representing how women's bodies are portrayed in mainstream porn. They are bodies exposed, as Bataille describes women's bodies before sex:

The woman in the hands of her assailant is despoiled of her being. With her modesty she loses the firm barrier that once separated her from others and made her impenetrable. She is brusquely laid open to the violence of the sexual urges set loose in the organs of reproduction; she is laid out to the impersonal violence that overwhelms her from without. (1957, 90)

Although these pin-ups could not be more aesthetically different than the latexed bodies beneath them, their positions are not wholly different. The bodies in the vac beds have all the similar tropes found in porn and in Bataille's description of real-life sex, they are the submissive female body: open, passive, on display, and conquerable. And yet, the layers and layers of latex act as a literal barrier between the viewer and the body, making them impenetrable and inaccessible to us. They maintain their agency.

American sexologist, artist, and sex worker Annie Sprinkle once said, "My feminist mother used to come into my room and joke whether I would grow up to be a whore or an artist. She was exactly right!" (qtd. in Williams 1993). Williams offers the following analysis:

In this quotation the feminist mother poses the question of her daughter's vocation as an opposition: will her daughter be an artist *or* a whore? Without confronting the mother directly, the 'postfeminist,' 'postporn' daughter counters her either/or with destabilising agreeability... The daughter unsettles the familiar opposition: she is neither artist *nor* whore but artist *and* whore. (1993, 177)

When looking at pornographic images of myself, even if these images do not reflect the "real" me, they are still *of* me. Furthermore, representations of the real me can only occur within the already existing system. Let us not attempt to shut down or censor the system, but rather work within it to expand what it can look like, what it can be. Just as it is not enough for there to only be my false manufactured sexuality, it would be too much for sexuality to *always* be as deep and transgressive as my doll's—maybe one cannot exist without the other. Perhaps the artist needs the whore just as much as the whore needs her.

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Figure 1.
Doll 1, latex on collage, 8" x 11"



Figure 2.
Doll 2, latex on collage, 8" x 24"



Figure 3.
Doll 3, latex on collage, 8" x 10"



Figure 4.
Doll 4, latex on collage, 8" x 20"



Figure 5.
Doll 5, latex on collage, 24" x 42"

Skin Pleasure

Artist Statement

MARIUS PACKBIER AND AÏLIEN REYNS

The pleasure of touch is the first part of a three-part video essay, produced and created by Brussels-based artist collective/production platform TRIPOT as a collaboration between audiovisual artists Marius Packbier and Aïlien Reyns.

The work investigates the different functions of the skin—as a protective barrier, a sensory organ, a producer of meaning, and as a surface that wants to (be) touch(ed)—and situates these functions in relation to the reception of amateur internet porn.

The work originates from a transdisciplinary research project that explores the use and experience of online pornography. Drawing from interviews with porn consumers, textual analysis of amateur porn videos, and from his own experience, Marius Packbier wrote an essay that is used as a voice-over for the work. The text alternates between analytical reflection and personal accounts based on the lived experience of the artist. The pervasive ambivalence of the voice-over informs the image and sound composition of the video essay. At times illustrating and explanatory, image and text approach each other, only to subsequently detach themselves from one another through abstraction and deconstruction.

The work consists of two kinds of images: pornographic amateur videos found on the internet and (extreme) closeups of the (male) artist's body. Both kinds of images are manipulated through analog and digital methods, resulting in a “tactile” aesthetic that emphasizes the materiality and texture of the video image and the human skin. Combining temporal and spatial montage techniques, the images are placed next to, over, and in each other, as a way of reflecting on the simultaneity, (inter)active reception, and sensory excess of the online-porn experience.

Sitting at the intersection between art and science, *Skin Pleasure* is fundamentally characterized by tensions between supposedly binary oppositions like body and mind, objectivity and subjectivity, proximity and distance. By questioning their boundaries, the work obliges the spectator to take up a (self-) critical position.

Below you'll find a source list of all the video material used in this work. All the material that is not produced by ourselves are amateur porn videos sourced from different pornographic video sharing websites. This sort of material is inherently characterized by ambiguity, particularly ambiguity about its authenticity with regards to its “amateur” character and ambiguity about the videos’

producers and participants and their intentions. As almost every amateur porn video on the internet is uploaded to different sites from (supposedly) different users, sometimes circulating for years, it is often challenging to find out more about the producers and participants. Did they intend that the video was widely distributed on the internet, and if yes, to what end? And did they even know that they were filmed?

This raises several ethical and legal issues about intellectual property, privacy, and consent. By addressing these issues we want to initiate a more extensive discussion about them while admitting that we are not able to completely resolve them.

Skin Pleasure is an artistic research project that sets out to investigate and represent a perceptual experience that is essentially a sensory encounter with multiple images. We therefore believe it to be indispensable to include records of these images.

As we consider this project falling under fair use we didn't feel obliged to obtain permission from the copyright holders to use their material. We did, however, try to find and contact the producers and protagonists of the videos to obtain clarification if they had consented to being filmed and their images placed online. In cases where we found proof or indication of non-consent we excluded the images or obfuscated the recognisable features of the protagonist who hadn't consented.

Source List

00:01:53:20–00:04:36:15
Self-produced material

00:04:42:08 - 00:05:19:18
unknown, “Wij samen!” xHamster, video deleted

00:04:19:22–00:04:24:16
Kenandshanpall, “s. Ebony Teen Ass,” XVideos. https://www.xvideos.com/video40238431/s_ebony_teen_ass

00:05:19:19–00:06:16:19
London2010, “young boy in socks jerking off,” xHamster, <https://de.xhamster.com/videos/young-boy-in-socks-jerking-off-1973042>

00:04:24:03–00:04:27:01
ocmachado, “foda,” xHamster. <https://de.xhamster.com/videos/foda-7984839>

00:06:30:18–00:07:00:01
sexsuechtig, “watching porn on pc,” xHamster, <https://de.xhamster.com/videos/watching-porn-on-pc-277512>

00:04:27:02–00:04:31:15
Titles: Voyeur MILF
Uploader: qqqwwe11223, “Voyeur MILF,” xHamster. video deleted

00:07:00:02–00:07:28:16
banduga, “Tempting bae caressing her body sensually in amateur video,” MyLust, <https://mylust.com/videos/244558/tempting-bae-caressing-her-body-sensually-in-amateur-video/>

00:04:31:16 – 00:05:19:12
rirwin, “bound dude gets handjob,” xHamster, <https://de.xhamster.com/videos/bound-dude-gets-handjob-4360095>

00:07:39:04–00:08:17:14
adridoc9, “looking my wife through the window with her bull,” xHamster, <https://de.xhamster.com/videos/looking-my-wife-through-the-window-with-her-bull-6565646>

00:08:19:20–00:08:47:14
Bigzo, “Big boy stroking,” XVideos, Link: https://www.xvideos.com/video40057873/big_boy_stroking

00:08:25:18–00:08:55:15
hungguy, “hot big cock young guy cums a heavy load,” xHamster, <https://de.xhamster.com/videos/hot-big-cock-young-guy-cums-a-heavy-load-4120140>

00:08:28:13–00:08:55:15
ahmed198, “young turkish 19yr old wankin,” xHamster, <https://de.xhamster.com/videos/young-turkish-19yr-old-wankin-2034021>

00:08:30:04–00:08:55:15
Title: Daddy wanking in the dark
Uploader: fmaster3
Website: xhamster.com
Link: <https://de.xhamster.com/videos/daddy-wanking-in-the-dark-7338770>

00:08:33:04–00:08:55:15
Irian Rod, “Cute Black Guy Jerk off on Chair and Cum Shot,” Pornhub, https://de.pornhub.com/view_video.php?viewkey=ph56d00563580b3

00:08:36:05–00:08:55:15
ricardes1948, Title: Wank & Spunk - 11th September.2017,” xHamster, <https://de.xhamster.com/videos/wank-spunk-11th-september-2017-8258597>

00:08:38:10–00:08:55:15
leglover45, “Jacking off to Rachel Roxxx with Giant Cumshot,” xHamster, <https://de.xhamster.com/videos/jacking-off-to-rachel-roxxx-with-giant-cumshot-1421306>

00:08:40:09–00:08:55:15
pnice1993, “Jacking off watching porn on ipad2,” xHamster, <https://de.xhamster.com/videos/jacking-off-watching-porn-on-ipad2-2075386>

00:08:43:02–00:08:55:15
Lazzplay, “Sexy twink wanks and cums hard watching porn,” xHamster, <https://de.xhamster.com/videos/sexy-twink-wanks-and-cums-hard-watching-porn-11210847>

00:08:47:15–00:09:02:22
ilikeitverymuch, “Watching porn,” xHamster, <https://de.xhamster.com/videos/watching-porn-5673636>

00:09:05:04–00:09:39:16
Popanut45, “Jacking Off to Porn 04,” xHamster, <https://de.xhamster.com/videos/jacking-off-to-porn-04-1249669>

00:09:40:24 - 00:10:00:18
kudoslong, “Kudoslong is naked on the bed watching porn,” xHamster, <https://de.xhamster.com/videos/kudoslong-is-naked-on-the-bed-watching-porn-9436875>

00:09:53:02 – 00:11:34:10
Self-produced material

SYNN

An Online Journal of Film

BOOK

REVIEWS

PORNOGRAPHY

Andrea Dworkin, *Last Days at Hot Slit: The Radical Feminism of Andrea Dworkin*.

Edited by Johanna Fateman and Amy Scholder.

South Pasadena, CA: Semiotext(e), 2019.

MADELINE BOGOCH

In *Last Days at Hot Slit: The Radical Feminism of Andrea Dworkin*, a recent anthology featuring the work of radical feminist Andrea Dworkin, editors Johanna Fateman and Amy Scholder have compiled a series of writings that serve to bring the controversial activist's work into the sphere of contemporary feminism, presenting it to an audience who may be more familiar with Dworkin as a militant anti-porn crusader than as a writer. Showcasing Dworkin's literary oeuvre and knack for style, the collection challenges the caricature of her as the original killjoy, seeking to litigate desire and embodying "feminism's most uncool margin" (Fateman 2019, 38).

The introduction written by Fateman (the only voice other than Dworkin's to appear in the collection), offers context and describes Fateman's own engagement with the work, recalling that "to read Dworkin at eighteen was to see patriarchy with the skin peeled back" (38). This is not to say that the editors subscribe to Dworkin's polemical and explicit analyses, nor do they anticipate the reader will; nonetheless, they make the case for a reconsideration of Dworkin's work. For many younger feminists, Dworkin's name alone stirs up trepidation, yet her enduring capacity to incite ardour, and even her polarizing legacy make

her a worthy candidate for such a re-visitation. Inevitably, the contemporary reader experiences this collection with a subtext of friction that implores them to confront their own aversion to Dworkin's radical prose which, in her own words, aspires to be "more terrifying than rape, more abject than torture, more insistent and destabilizing than battery, more desolate than prostitution, more invasive than incest, more filled with threat and aggression than pornography" (Dworkin 2019, 314–15). Through Dworkin's work, the editors provoke the reader to consider how dominant accounts of history exorcize those who contradict the narrative—a phenomenon Fateman describes as "the feminine/feminist race to perfection which renders our movement's dialectics shameful, our human arrogance, floundering, and failures unaccounted for in an honest intellectual history" (Fateman 2019, 38–39).

Dworkin's aggressive writing style was crafted with unambiguous purpose, yet the aim of this anthology is not to canonize the author nor to neutralize her divisive principles, but to pursue the value in that which culture-at-large has deemed undesirable. Dworkin's fiery indictment of pornography is strictly on moral grounds; she never considers that such material could function as anything but

a conduit for violence. Yet ironically, *The Last Days at Hot Slit* acts on a similar impulse as those who seek out the cultural or intellectual merits in taboo material, persuading the reader to approach the work with a critical and open-minded attitude. Revisiting these texts under a compassionate and reverent lens, the editors appeal to the reader to contend with Dworkin's work on her own terms, through her own words.

Dworkin writes from a deeply personal place, with experiences of sexual violence shaping many of her ideas. An incident in a movie theatre as a child, a violent medical violation after being arrested at an anti-war protest, and a brutally abusive marriage all factor prominently into her devotion to activism and writing. She makes no concession for comfort as she describes abuse after abuse, her words unsettling and the cadence by which she propels descriptions of violent acts exhausting. In a contemporaneous review of *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (1981), author and activist Ellen Willis concedes Dworkin's assessment of the perils of misogyny but can't endorse her approach, calling it "less inspiring than numbing" (Willis 1981). While Dworkin wholeheartedly believed in writing as a sharp tool, an accomplice in her war against misogyny, her relentless characterization of the experience of womanhood as being dictated by suffering and misery is difficult to reconcile with any outlook that includes joy or humour as part of the equation. That is not to say there is no value in Dworkin's unmerciful presentation of these events. Her forceful assembly of these stories offers solemn evidence to the atomizing experience

of abuse in a time when it was largely considered a personal misfortune rather than a culturally inflected condition. In a speech delivered to various university campuses (and included in the anthology) *The Rape Atrocity and the Boy Next Door* (1975-76), Dworkin illustrates her persuasiveness with language as she delivers her thesis that rape is not an isolated transgression against social norms committed by criminal outliers, but rather a logical conclusion of societal values that had formed around women (Dworkin 2019, 87). From a contemporary vantage point, this platform in particular is far from radical but underscores how much ground has been covered in the intervening decades.

Personifying the most polarizing battle of the second wave, Dworkin adamantly staked her polemical claim that pornography and the sex industry were driving forces in normalizing violence and dominion over women's bodies. She begins one of her best-known works, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (1981) by comparing the production and distribution of porn to Joseph Goebbels's campaign of Nazi propaganda, claiming "in life, the Jews didn't orgasm. Of course, neither do women; not in life. But no one, not even Goebbels, said the Jews liked it" (130-31). Dworkin's sweeping assessment of pornography as a dehumanizing tool used to degrade women created a rift between her and her more pro-sex counterparts. It also aligned her, momentarily, with more conservative figures who similarly lobbied against porn as obscene material. Though perhaps even more so than her views on pornography, it's her text *Intercourse* (1987) which has earned Dworkin her

contentious reputation. The common interpretation of the book reduces the thesis to “heterosexual sex = rape,” and while this is a callous summary of the text, which contemplates whether or not emancipation and penetration are mutually exclusive phenomena, Dworkin trespasses into fraught terrain with even the suggestion of adjudicating what women do with their bodies.

Dworkin writes with such ferocity that she leaves zero room for partial agreement—she isn’t interested in a compromised version of her ideas. It can be suffocating and disheartening, especially when she applies this rhetoric to sex workers, whose agency is outright dismissed. Again, Dworkin draws her theoretical premise from her own life, a quality in her writing which is both an advantage and a limitation. She deduces her evaluation of sex work from her own experiences, but in her effort to weaponize language against the pillars of misogyny she often sacrifices any chance of tenderness or nuance. But Dworkin’s style and whatever loss of substance occurred as a consequence, are chosen by her with dogged intention and precision. Fateman and Scholder’s framing of Dworkin’s work brings this emphasis of style to the fore. Included in the compilation is the afterword of her 1974 text *Woman Hating* (a work whose early manuscript lends the book its name), entitled “The Great Punctuation Typography Struggle,” which details Dworkin’s strife with an editor who refutes her wish to publish without punctuation. What begins as an internal conflict with her editor manages to coalesce into one of the more hopeful excerpts in the book. Likening the standardization of punctuation to

a social convention, Dworkin considers what is at stake for the writer, and what is the cost of their (her) compromise in the name of such conventions. She concludes by arguing that:

to permit writers to use forms which violate convention just might permit writers to develop forms which would teach people to think differently: not to think about different things, but to think in different ways. that work is not permitted. (74)

Ultimately, this collection adds new relevance to her legacy by emphasizing her range and sophistication as a writer and theorist, as well as highlighting her more redeeming and prescient arguments alongside those that remain difficult to swallow. Amongst her Second Wave cohort, Dworkin was an early adopter of intersectionality, occasionally producing compassionate and thoughtful considerations of how race and class collide with gender to produce the inequitable conditions of existence under patriarchy. Identifying the objectification of racialized women in mainstream porn, she leverages this contradiction by asking “how then, does one fight racism and jerk off to it at the same time? The Left cannot have its whores and its politics too” (166). But again, her analyses suffer at the expense of her myopia. Race and gender are sporadically pitted against one another to the obvious detriment of her argument’s integrity. In a memorial to Nicole Brown Simpson, Dworkin compares the Rodney King riots to the muted response of spousal murders (352), as if there is any value in prying prejudices apart at some imaginary seam to analyse them quantitatively.

In a previously unpublished piece, “Goodbye to All This,” which is included in *Last Days at Hot Slit*, Dworkin pens a letter to her opponents, identifying them on a first name basis and bidding them adieu. In it, she indicates a level of resignation, a poetic cadence crystalizing around cheeky, semi-affectionate characterizations of her critics as “swastika wielding dykettes” and “proud, pro-sex, liberated Cosmo intellectuals” (214). The letter critiques the liberal and pro-sex positions which Dworkin so vehemently opposed, and shows how the Left, perhaps even more so than the Right, had spurned her. From the vantage point of nearly four decades, many of Dworkin’s opinions have become outmoded. As she seems to predict in her letter, the pro-sex platform has become the dominant mode of feminist discourse. Yet even amongst the misfirings, Dworkin wields a sharp capacity to deliver poignant critiques of her Leftist opponents. The reduction of her legacy in the canon of the Second Wave is evidence of the Left’s compulsion to homogenize the voices within it, a tendency that unceremoniously expels outliers and radicals like Dworkin—and this is exactly why the compilation feels so timely. As feminist discourse has migrated to the mainstream, it has suffered a notable defanging. The contemporary brand of diluted rhetoric that centres on #girlboss culture and the like has essentially commodified the landscape and swapped out radical change for sloganeering and superficiality. This is undoubtedly a culture Dworkin would loathe, and while even those who take the mantle of radical outliers today, such as Andrea Long Chu or Jessa Crispin, seem genealogically distinct

from Dworkin’s principles, her legacy offers an important lesson in embracing dissent, even at the cost of cohesion or, god forbid, commodity. Chu’s work in particular seems aptly in dialogue with Dworkin’s. Her recent essayistic book *Females* (2019) adopts as its figurehead Valerie Solanas, author of the S.C.U.M. manifesto. But Chu seems to relish rather than resent her status as an outlier, treating her material with a provocative ambivalence that is completely antithetical to Dworkin’s tone. Addressing the question that Dworkin poses in her book *Intercourse*, Chu asks, “can women have sex without getting fucked?” Valerie’s answer is still the best one: “No, but who cares?” (Chu 2019, 88).

For many, Dworkin is a *persona non grata* banished to the wrong side of feminist history. A potential consequence of emphasizing Dworkin’s merit as a writer is that the focus shifts from what she is saying to how she is saying it. While this offers readers the chance to consider the complexity of her convictions and literary evolution, I also wonder: what are the stakes of doing so? How can Dworkin’s work be introduced to the ecosystem of feminist scholarship with an intellectual flexibility that she herself was so adamantly opposed to? Fateman’s tender and sincere introduction does offer somewhat of a roadmap for how she has come to terms with the paradoxical prose, but ultimately, readers will have to navigate this challenge for themselves.

Fateman refers to herself as “a different kind of loyalist.” She embraces Dworkin “right or wrong—right *and* wrong” (Fateman 2019, 38–39). An event in conjunction with the publication of

Last Days at Hot Slit featured readings by the editors, as well as other artists and writers (including Chu) who are mostly aligned with the sex-positive politics that are synonymous with the Third and Fourth Waves of feminism. The line-up indicates that perhaps (like Fateman) those who carry the torch of Dworkin's work do so not in perfect agreement with her, but in admiration of her radical and unrelenting spirit. Reviewing this book for *The New Yorker*, writer Lauren Oyler remarks how she found herself "trying to contort into agreement" with Dworkin (Oyler 2019). I too found myself struggling to see my politics reflected back to me by her words, a pursuit that was often compromised by Dworkin's hyperbolic absolutism. It is in moments when she describes her subjectivity as a writer, or as a Jewish woman, that her prose hits me intimately. However, I will resist the urge to declare "Dworkin! She's just like us!" Because while *Last Days at Hot Slit* certainly provides previously lacking attention and dimension to her legacy, it does not propose that Dworkin is ordinary or even relatable. Rather, she is shown as the radical she was—tenacious, zealous,

and uncompromising. A singular figure whose work is deserving of the care and consideration that Scholder and Fateman have offered it.

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Ricky Varghese, ed., *Raw: PrEP, Pedagogy, and the Politics of Barebacking*

Regina, SK: University of Regina Press, 2019.

ANTOINE DAMIENS

The edited collection *Raw: PrEP, Pedagogy, and the Politics of Barebacking* illustrates how difficult it can be to historicize and theorize barebacking—a “loaded” term that encompasses various historically-situated social practices, cultural meanings, and affects. As such, the term is inseparable from the cultural moment it emerged from: the late 1990s–early 2000s, a period marked by the arrival of new drug therapies that greatly diminished AIDS-related mortalities. Barebacking, a notion loosely defined as intentionally and willingly seeking condomless anal sex, captured many anxieties around HIV/AIDS: historically, it has been associated with HIV transmissions, promiscuity, and ultimately death. It has also corresponded to and was appropriated by a subculture of (mostly HIV-positive) gay men whose sexual practices helped create new forms of intimacy based on the exchange of semen (Dean 2009).

Today, the term barebacking is widely used to describe a wide range of behaviours and sexual practices—including but not limited to safer forms of condomless sex. This evolution clearly corresponds to both medical advances and changing attitudes (most notably: treatment as prevention [TaSP]; post-exposure prophylaxis [PEP], and pre-exposure prophylaxis

[PrEP]).¹ The question of what counts as barebacking is in part generational: PrEP and TaSP have rapidly redefined what counts as “risky” sex.² Nevertheless, the term has retained some of its transgressive aura and still animates cultural fears. For instance, it is regularly associated with so-called excessive sexuality and/or the use of recreational drugs as part of sexual intercourses. Barebacking carries with it the weight of its history—it simultaneously invokes and displaces past modes of queer relationality, affects, and community formation. As Tim Dean judiciously puts it in the Afterword to *Raw*:

The terminology for sex without condoms, as well as its import, continues to morph. What used to be called, in the early years of the AIDS epidemic, unsafe sex, has been variously renamed as unprotected, risk, bareback, raw, real, natural, or skin. Far from neutral, this shifting nomenclature inscribes competing values that suggest a lack of consensus regarding the phenomenon under consideration.... Bareback signifies variously risk, freedom, community, filiation, masculinity, queerness, vulnerability, irresponsibility,

closeness to others, disregard for others. The signifier “barebacking” is highly overdetermined, now more so than ever. (Varghese 2019, 258)

The anthology *Raw: PrEP, Pedagogy, and the Politics of Barebacking* refuses to define what counts as barebacking. Significantly, the title of the book contains three words traditionally associated with condomless sex (raw, PrEP, and barebacking)—each carrying a slightly different social meaning. As such, the book juxtaposes oftentimes contradictory analyses of condomless sex, simultaneously accounting for the messiness of our sexualities and stretching what counts as barebacking. This openness and willingness to use the nostalgic charge of barebacking (affectively, a *queer, bad* object) to contaminate our understandings of a wide variety of sexual practices is perhaps the book’s most valuable contribution to the field of sexuality studies.

Testing the Limits of Raw Sex: Barebacking as a Method

The first half of the book perfectly illustrates what I would call “barebacking as a method”: rather than analyzing actual condomless sex, the authors mobilize the affective ghost of bareback to propose momentary points of convergence—stretching, loading, and corrupting the meaning we traditionally associate with other forms of sexual practice. Significantly, the book opens with Jonathan A. Allan’s analysis of the foreskin—an overdetermined part of the penis which, just like barebacking, refracts many cultural anxieties around sexuality and race. This chapter illustrates the difficulty of theorizing the prepuce on its own:

the foreskin typically constitutes a bad object, rendered visible by and thinkable only in relation to circumcision. Bringing forth a theoretical apparatus traditionally associated with the literature on bareback sex and late 1990s queer theory, Allan teases some of the cultural meanings associated with the foreskin and timidly points to its erotic potentialities. In other words, Allan mobilizes the affective charge of the debate around barebacking in order to theorise an under-studied and often taboo object.

Three authors use the literature on barebacking and extend it to account for other forms of sexual practices and/or intersections of identity. Frank G. Kariotis argues that, for heterosexual men, unprotected sex signifies both virality and virility: playing on the opposition between barebacking scholar Tim Dean and straight porn actor/director James Deen, they underscore how straight men’s unprotected sexual practices both depend on toxic masculinity and redistribute the risk onto women. Elliot Evans’s masterful analysis of the works of Monique Wittig and Patrick Califia extends the gay male centric notion of barebacking to BDSM lesbian sex. Evans unearths a wide variety of materials that both depend on the exchange of fluids (blood, sweat, and semen) and question the limits of bodies. According to them, Wittig’s and Califia’s texts manifest a type of sexual pleasure that creates a form of intimacy not unlike that of 2000s bareback communities: it is through the exchange of potentially dangerous fluids, the swallowing of others, and the opening up of wounds that the authors simultaneously disrupt and eroticize the distinction bet-

ween self and others. This notion of a dangerous form of pleasure that can potentially create new, ethical ways of relating to oneself and to others is also at the core of Walcott's chapter—a brilliant analysis of the figure of the “Black cumjoy,” defined as a joy and pleasure of cum that refracts, echoes, and potentially subverts the cultural meanings associated with Blackness and the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Walcott reclaims pleasure in a racist epidemic: his Black cumjoys simultaneously reveal the centrality of Blackness in the construction of HIV/AIDS and locate incorrect forms of pleasure as producing new modes of relations and of being together. As he eloquently puts it, Black cumjoys “require us to think differently about the stakes of the present, and how our practices of sexuality produce modes of being human and less than human” (85).

When was Barebacking? Nostalgia and Desire in *Raw*

Other chapters more explicitly discuss bareback sex: they historicize the rise of condomless pornography (Tziallas), analyze the relationship between past and present forms of raw sex (González, Greteman), or theorize the ethics and politics of barebacking (Morris and Paasonen, Longstaff, and Semerene). While these chapters seem, at first, to follow a more conventional route, they do not necessarily adopt the same definition of what barebacking is and, at times, contradict one another. This is particularly clear in the book's last section, “Psychoanalytic and Pedagogical Limits”. Indeed, the section starts with a highly theoretical take on barebacking: Diego Semerene's use of Lacan enables him to discuss mascu-

linity, virality, and the body. It may, at times, ignore the realities lived by HIV+ people: as such, Semerene is invested in the *idea* of barebacking as it relates to the Symbolic.³ This chapter is immediately followed by a practical call to *queer* sexual education curricula: Adam J. Greteman argues that barebacking has the potential to reorient the ways we think about risk reduction and to challenge long-held conceptions about safe(r) sex.

This tension between different understandings of the notion and the value of barebacking is itself productive: it posits barebacking as a constantly shifting practice—simultaneously subversive *and* conservative; minoritarian *and* mainstream; safe *and* unsafe; past *and* present; real *and* symbolic. Most importantly, it understands barebacking as an *affective* category that necessarily brings forth and refuses to let go of past modes of queerness. In other words, the book's porous use of the notion of barebacking often echoes and replays our desire for a time retroactively seen as transgressive. As Dean argues in the Afterword, “naming the practice as bareback might be a way of holding on to a frisson that has become obsolete. I'm wondering whether the term ‘bareback’ already feels nostalgic” (262).

As an edited collection, *Raw* is fundamentally about the work performed by and the uses of barebacking: it simultaneously aims to reflect upon contemporary sexual politics and to refract the complex temporalities of the field. In aiming to rethink canonical texts on barebacking (such as Dean's *Unlimited Intimacies*) in the context of PrEP, PEP, and TaSP, *Raw* both comments on the evolution of the

field *and* replays our affective longings for modes of sex and scholarship that have historically been understood as transgressive.

Here, I am particularly interested in this temporal pull exercised by the notion of barebacking. Tellingly, most of the essays in the collection reference the same canonical texts: Bersani's "Is the Rectum a Grave?" (1987), Edelman's *No Future* (2004), and Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990). This framework heavily places barebacking in a specific disciplinary and temporal context—1990s queer theory. Put another way: while each chapter adopts a slightly different definition of barebacking or places it within a specific sociohistorical context, they are all haunted by the same historical moment. Mainstream or minoritarian, safe or unsafe, barebacking refracts the political project of queer theory: it remains a "bad object" that scholars can reclaim, deconstruct, or transform. This nostalgic pull corresponds to what Kadji Amin identifies as the stickiness of queer theory: it necessarily associates barebacking to "affective histories that influence, without it being acknowledged, what meanings adhere to queer, how this term is deployed, and what happens when it takes on life in new contexts" (Amin 2017, 183).

As an edited collection, *Raw* includes a wide variety of chapters, each bringing forth their own disciplinary apparatus and political project. Taken together, they ultimately illustrate how barebacking, an unstable category, is haunted by, replays, and aims to displace a set of emotions and politics associated with 1990s queer theory. This nostalgic pull may well be unavoidable; as such, *Raw* begs the que-

stion of whether sex—and bareback sex in particular—can be thought *for itself*, outside of the social practices which overdetermine its meanings. This issue is taken up in the book's last chapter: Christien Garcia's nuanced analysis of the expression "it's just sex" reveals how theoretical endeavours simultaneously overdetermine sex and do not manage to capture its bare essence. *Raw* certainly exemplifies Garcia's point: sex is everywhere yet it escapes the meanings we seek to ascribe to it. Perhaps, then, the book exemplifies another form of pleasure: the titillation caused by our choice of a bad object; the almost erotic energies we invest in academic writing; the subtle strip-teasing that comes with analyzing our own sex lives; and the jouissance built up and released through theoretical arguments.

Notes

1. TaSP is the idea that the use of antiretroviral treatment (ART) decreases the risk of HIV transmission: an undetectable viral load means that HIV cannot be transmitted. PEP is an antiretroviral treatment taken by HIV-negative people immediately after a potential exposure to HIV to avoid being infected. PrEP is an anti-retroviral treatment taken daily or on demand by HIV-negative people that greatly diminishes and almost nullifies the risk of transmission.
2. Given how quickly the attitudes towards and meaning associated with barebacking are changing, I often wonder how younger queers understand the term—whether they see it as related to past modes of queer relationality or as a mere

synonym for condomless sex. I offer the following short reflection on my own positionality as a way of locating my understanding of and experience with barebacking: I am a 30-year-old white gay man who grew up in rural northern France—without access to any form of positive queer representation. I forged my sense of self through HIV/AIDS activism: in particular, Act Up Paris provided me with a way of envisioning queerness as a *radical* political practice. I came of age in 2008, in the immediate aftermath of the “war” between Act Up and pro-bareback queer intellectuals/writers Guillaume Dustan and Erik Rémès: particularly violent on both sides, this debate created a real rift in the French gay community (see for instance: Broqua 2020). It notably led to the creation of dissident associations such as Warning that reclaimed barebacking as a viable, ethical political option. My personal experience with barebacking came a bit later: first, with numerous instances of (willingly and perhaps willfully) “forgetting” condoms, then with ongoing relationships with undetectable lovers. I started PrEP a couple of years later. Most of the sex I currently have is raw.

3. To some extent, Semerene’s chapter is interested in the *theoretical* idea of barebacking—in the idea of potentially dangerous condomless sex as it relates to psychoanalytical frameworks. To that end, this chapter contains many claims

that “make sense” at the level of the Symbolic but that could be understood as replaying damaging ideas around HIV. For instance, his analysis of dating apps leads him to argue, in a book about bareback sex, that “a rejection (...) is a deadlier interruption than a deadly virus itself” (197). The chapter includes other claims that may be experienced by some as violent. Dean raises this issue in the Afterword when he asks: “How are HIV-positive men supposed to feel about this argument?” (277).

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Thomas Waugh and Brandon Arroyo, eds. *I Confess!*

Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019.

LEAH STEUER

Confession is explosive; confession is pure; confession is dirty; confession is transient; confession begets permanence and truth. *I Confess!* (2019) is a chaotic and far-ranging anthology, which Thomas Waugh and Brandon Arroyo have ambitiously assembled in an effort to map the complex relationship between public and private queer life, art, pornography, and identity. Diverse lenses, styles, and methodologies unpack the ever-shifting uses of confession as a bodily and rhetorical device in an evolving media landscape. It is a volume both rewarding and frustrating: an exceedingly valuable tool for scholars seeking both old and new frameworks on sex, performance and selfhood, but also spliced through with contradictory interpretations of “confession” and a fascinating but disjointed mix of personal accounting and academic study. The editors tell us that “confession has become the last space for individual self-actualization, the enduring fantasy” (7) for queer existence outside neoliberal life and subjectivity. Often, however, the work in *I Confess!* leads us back to the sobering ways in which technologies and institutions capitalize on the aesthetics and affective affordances of confession in order to commodify (queer) identities and their performance. As a whole, the collection itself resists assigning “con-

fession” a stable definition or cultural function, recognizing its instability as an event, an act, and/or a tool.

The anthology is organized into two loosely defined halves: “scientia sexualis” and “ars erotica.” Foucault’s distinction between these approaches to sexual) confession is one of knowledge and power: “scientia sexualis” refers to a production of cultural truths around sex through the wresting of individual and everyday confessions—untaught, unschooled, and often deeply felt rather than examined. On the other hand, “ars erotica”—an approach more identified with non-Western constructions of sex, bodies, and desire - posits a master and a student, a passing-down of wisdom around the range and potential of human capacities for feeling. The former preoccupies itself with interrogating truths and falsehoods around sex *as* power, while the latter is concerned only with the nature of sex in and of itself: as discovery, sensation, connection, and so on. In short, these two frameworks are described in the introduction as “discourses of knowledge, sobriety, and empiricism [versus] those of aesthetics, affect, and desire” (15). The editors note a slippage between these two approaches to sensuality, sexuality, and pleasure, and that porousness is deeply felt throughout the volume. Although

the attempt to divide these pieces by this rubric is a brave and inspired one, certain chapters seem somewhat out of place (such as Jacob Evoy's personal reflections on the transformative potentials of a night out at a Lady Gaga concert, which seems more attuned with the vastly more intimate authorial confessions of the book's second half). Queer theory and cultural histories are difficult to corral and categorize, and memoirs even harder, especially when juxtaposed with the former; *I Confess!* imbricates all in a powerful editorial shift towards a futurism in sexual scholarship, and thus the occasional odd chord of a chapter remains in keeping with this mission.

Certainly the secondary organizing schema within these two broad categories leads us more successfully through coherent umbrellas of theory and method. "Scientia Sexualis" contains the sub-categories of "Activism" and "Author, Subject, and Audience," both of which contain chapters that deal with case studies of confession as cultural diffusion—from feminist blogging, to queer pornographic filmmaking, to YouTube coming-out stories, to the pitfalls and complexities of studying child sexuality in a new age of social media. These sections are distinguished, mostly, by their commitment to a sort of scholarly objectivity towards their subjects. Though many of the essays here are marked by a sense of playful transgression, this section begins the book powerfully with Tal Kastner's and Ummni Khan's dissection of conceptual artist Emma Sulkowicz's online installation "Ceci n'est pas un viol" ("this is not a rape"), a short film depicting an uncomfortable and occasionally violent non-consensual

sexual encounter in a dorm room. They effectively unfurl Sulkowicz's indictment of representation and polysemy itself as instruments of pain, violence, and oppression. Particularly, the authors concentrate on the screen as confessional, highlighting the artist's use of the virtual interface to enapture and even condemn the user—as well as its contribution to the instability of truths and facts within sexual experience. Andie Shabbar's chapter, "#Occupotty, Affect, and Confession as Activism" is useful not only for its framing of the selfie as an "assemblage," but also its explanation of social media campaigns around trans people in public bathrooms as a collective treatise on the "oppressive effects of both concealment and exposure" (56) and the politics of radical invisibility for bodies marked as gender-nonconforming.

The free-flowing exchange between two frequent collaborators in recent queer pornography, Naomi de Szegheo-Lang and N. Maxwell Lander, is refreshingly informed by Lander's frank appraisal of his own methods and aesthetics as well as the cultural studies/feminist histories/affect theory background of De Szegheo-Lang. Ela Przybylo and Veronika Novoselova's essay on the connections between second-wave feminist consciousness-raising and confessional blogging in the 2010s sketches a well-documented historiography, but falls somewhat short of extending those connections into the murky digital future. Silke Jandl's exploration of coming-out videos on YouTube is perhaps the least daring in this section, often frustratingly vague in defining the terms of this ultra-con-

temporary object of study. The analysis of Shane Dawson, as well as other satellite queer creators such as Connor Franta, misses a crucial comparison of the YouTuber to other types of celebrity; though Jandl describes the evolving transmediality of a YouTube persona, taking us through the connective confessional tissue of Dawson's book and short films, we miss the foundational knowledge of what constitutes identity, longevity, and fame in this particular sphere. This initial phase of chapters exemplifies *I Confess!*'s rocky, bold, and often cheeky struggle to coalesce around the Foucauldian notions of confession—open to interpretation and remolding as they are.

The next sub-section, "Author, Subject, and Audience," is distinguished by its coherence—perhaps not in rhetorical approaches, but in describing the relationship between two entities: confessor and receiver, author and audience, speaker and listener. Evoy considers his avowed, performative relationship to Lady Gaga through the influence of Ann Cvetkovich: through publicly exhibiting her own trauma, Gaga enables the audience to examine and "act up" their ways of working through a homophobic culture. Ingrid Olson's archival investigation of fan letters sent to porn star Nina Hartley is a brilliant standout in this section, peppering an exploration of truth-telling to an accepting, authenticating listener ("parrhesia") with numerous photographic examples of the letters and an attentive discursive and aesthetic analysis of their contents. Shohini Ghosh's chapter on Bengali filmmaker Rituparno Ghosh is personal in another way, tenderly considering, from the vantage point of a loved one,

the transformative possibilities of excess in confessional queer filmmaking. Nicholas de Villiers explores the ethics of filming, interviewing, and complicity between producers and performers in the context of the "gay-for-pay" documentary; his point that the format has a long and important history within queer communities, particularly those of sex workers, gives his analysis an added resonance. The anonymous collective "Intervals" closes the section with a meditation on the figure of the "masturbating boy" in popular culture and porn; though the prose here often veers into meandering reverie (to the detriment of didactic argument) their positioning of the academy in pursuits of the puerile is indeed interesting: "To be scholars of the masturbating boy, then, we must confess that we are masturbators" (Intervals, 196). The tension between scholarship and the topic of children and adolescents within the framework of confessional queer media is echoed in this volume many times over—as is the tension between poetics and declarative prose, a vexing conflict at the heart of writing persuasively on affect.

At this point, *I Confess!* switches gears to "Ars Erotica," which is considerably longer and more sprawling, and contains the sub-categories of "Pornographies," "Documentaries," and "Transmedia," which roughly correspond to investigations and histories of "arousal, sexual didacticism, and technological flux and innovation, respectively" (Waugh and Arroyo, 16). Connor Steele begins the first section with a very brief, alternately vulnerable and hilarious consideration of (dis)able-bodiedness and queerness in personal experiences of God. Eric

Falardeau (translated by Jordan Arsenault) deftly mobilizes Catherine Hakim's ideas on "erotic capital" to not only reconfigure the cam performer's confessional space as overmanaged and lucrative, but an affective-aesthetic construct: "Camming...transforms our way of perceiving the erotic and the pornographic. The space of the *mise-en-scène* is simultaneously real and virtual, private and public. We are in 'pornspace'" (256). Editor Brandon Arroyo contributes a chapter here, asserting an articulation of gay male identity, confession, and pornography by conceiving porn as a great illuminator: a total reveal of both inner and outer truth, often by de-emphasizing verbal communication in service of those undeniably authentic expressions of the body. Valentina Denzel's comparison of punk-porn writer Virginie Despentes with the proto-feminist sensibilities of the Marquis de Sade shares DNA with Justine McLellan's later chapter on Lars von Trier's *Nymphomaniac* and the death of the author in the wake of #MeToo; though Denzel valorizes the connection with de Sade, McLellan mourns the unfortunate demons which may lurk behind a powerful male figure's defense of feminine sexual confession and empowerment. Daniel Laurin provides a considered take on the quasi-documentary porn film "Fuck Yeah Levi Karter!" as "metatextual pornographic authentication" (319) of both performer and company brand. Shaka McGlotten's "Porn Fast," an irreverent reflection on the textual mechanics of pornography and the notion of "speed" as it plays into reception, returns us to a humorous confessional tone—"If you are currently abstaining from porn, this

essay is itself pornographic. For the rest of you, enjoy" (353). At the same time, McGlotten balances this tone with thoughtful, tantalizing towards possible technological and affective futures of pornographic engagement.

We then move into "Documentaries," which gathers scholarship under this loose umbrella and is marked by an increased attention to *mise-en-scène* and editing as they intersect with the purpose and efficacy of sexual confession. Rebecca Sullivan's "I Was the Girl in the Shadows" begins the section on an odd biographical note, which feels indulgent where other personal interventions in this volume are more vital and urgent. The chapter intersperses personal recollections of feeling marginal as a young adult with a celebration of prosaic queer married life and a muted rallying call to recognize the revolutionaries of second-wave queer radicalism. Editor Thomas Waugh follows with a vast, ranging history of auto porn, which provides a groundwork for subsequent contributor Susanna Paasonen's chapter on filmmaker Jan Soldat's body of work—particularly *The Incomplete*, a casual, deliberately banal look at a man who avows the identity of "slave" and forgoes the spectacle of confession and outing for the mundanity of everyday living. Sarah E. S. Sinwell brings in the unique texts of small-screen-based documentary web series, discussing the spatial and operational affordances of viewing queerness online through the portable device. Damon R. Young concludes the section by exploring the double-sidedness of Jonathan Caouette's *Tarnation* (2003), which he claims straddles the paradigms of older cinematic forms and

the benignly narcissistic world of social media and self-documentation.

The final sub-section, “Trans-media,” deals with perhaps some of the most daring, uncomfortable, and methodologically unorthodox scholarship in this volume. It begins with the provocative chapter, “Looking, Stroking, and Speaking: A Queer Ethics of [Minor-Attracted Person] Desire” by an anonymous author, which is not only among the longest pieces here but also the most defensive in terms of its content (including a long exploration of the moral and legal dimensions of viewing public media of teen boys not intended for adult sexual consumption). Gears shift rapidly with Stephen Charbonneau’s chapter on gaming; he describes the process of playing through the confessional games *dys4ia* and *Her Story* through the schema of affective maps, couching game play as a mapping of self onto the experience of another. Both Milan Pribisic and Ron S. Judy undertake textual analysis of films and multimedia works, with their respective analyses of Derek Jarman and Ming Wong’s “i-narrator” queer/trans films, and perversion and social subversion in the “hentai” film *Moonlight Whispers* by Akihiko Shiota. Eleanor Ty’s essay on Marie Calloway’s detached, voyeuristic, hauntingly affect-less writings is among the standout pieces in this section, particularly in terms of Ty’s clever comparison of Calloway’s style to the resistant, dull bounds of “influencer”-style imagery post-2010s. Annamaria Pinaka provides a reflective framework of “pornographing” to describe her own praxis as a visual artist; she points out that artists such as herself and others, who jump off their

own sexual lives to create work, are continually reshaping personal and cultural trappings of “dirtiness.” Tom Roach closes the section with a strongly persuasive argument for the generative, politically resistant presence of ridiculous and satirical communication within the world of queer dating and sex apps, arguing that poking fun at the technologies, bots, and corporations which commodify confessional behaviors may unlock audience potential to transcend a trapped neoliberal subject position.

Both the arrangement and tone of *I Confess!*—its tumultuous flow, its emotional extremes between joy, numbness, paranoia, despair, and raucousness—seem to point jointly to the shift in public and private queer life brought on by the introduction of the internet. Waugh and Arroyo state in their introduction that the volume deals directly with this “cataclysmic paradigm shift” marked by “ominous implications of surveillance and control,” as well as “utopian glimmers of community and liberation” (5). It would seem that *I Confess!* cannot quite settle on a cohesive thesis of queer sexual confession that knits this alternately brilliant and foreboding mediated landscape; the anthology’s strength lies in its pulsing spirit of futurism, tied to a tender and loving veneration of gay, trans, queer, and gender-non-conforming histories past. The editors’ decision to include anonymous authors is discussed at length throughout; though the anonymous scholarship all shares a somewhat troubled and troubling perspective on adult-child sexual attraction as a discrete sexual identity, the authors’ point that queer studies must attend to this problematized

aspect of study is well-taken. These chapters may well be generative to future scholars who attend to the subjects treated within academia as most taboo—indeed, porn studies gains a huge foothold in this anthology, not least because *I Confess!* demonstrates how much the fields of celebrity studies, audience studies, ethnography,

and more owe to the study of pornography, its consumers, and its secretive and proudly public confessors.

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Damon R. Young, *Making Sex Public and Other Cinematic Fantasies*

Durham: Duke University Press, 2018.

HALEY HVDSON

Damon R. Young's *Making Sex Public and Other Cinematic Fantasies* (2018) arrived in my mailbox at an idiosyncratic conjunction of transformations of *the* public sphere and *my* sex. In March 2020, California Governor Gavin Newsom and Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti respectively declared their March 2020 "Stay at Home" and "Safer at Home" orders as attempts to mitigate—ultimately, unsuccessfully—the potential collapses of already-failing state and city healthcare systems, simultaneously caused and accelerated by the confluence of ever-expanding austerity regimes of "anti-state state"¹ racial capitalism and the COVID-19 pandemic. The public/private binary felt at once redoubled and eviscerated. On the one hand, presence and participation in the *scenes* of the public sphere, with its differentialized and differentializing interpersonal and structural pleasures and violences, felt unevenly wrenched away amidst lockdowns within the space perhaps most paradigmatic of the fantasy of the private sphere—the home. On the other hand, the promise of the public and the private's constitutive, yet phantasmatic, distinction, if not already eradicated, felt increasingly liquidated by an intensification of the dispossessive forces of housing crises and general precarity exacerbated by an incipient

economic depression. What, now, was the *public* I saw emblazoned across Young's monograph?

And, if the explorations of *Making Sex Public* mobilize, in part, from the historical co-occurrence of "a reinvigorated feminist critique of the private sphere and a new visibility of queer sexuality in the public sphere" (Young 2018, 3), what too now was this *sex*? The question stuck as my body marked six months of hormone replacement therapy with the softening of skin; the budding of breasts; and the sense of the loss of a scopic regime, concomitantly phobic and fetishistic, through which my sex could be made public—or even hold as *sex*. At first glance at the book's chapter structure, I found myself split and sutured in the interstitial space between the "Women" of Part I and the "Criminals" (cis gay men) of Part II. Still, I, and this review more broadly, follow *Making Sex Public* through a syntactical loophole crafted by Young and indeed performative of a central tension—the aesthetic of attempts to resolve the irreducible particularity of sex/ual difference with the "unmarked universalism" (11) of the republican social contract—charted by the book. Whereas Young, for instance, offers what he cheekily terms "a (gay male) analysis" (11), I offer here a reading through a similarly haunting

parentetical of a (*white trans woman of faggot experience*) that equally toggles presence and absence, public and private.

Young's *Making Sex Public* takes a transatlantic approach to the study of how French and U.S. cinemas after the 1950s were precipitated by and participated in the industrial shifts, historical-political conditions, and latent psychosocial anxieties around "the imaginary convergence of the sexual subject and the political subject of modern liberal democracy" (5). Across the six chapters, Young gently twists key normativities of queer theory, such as the preeminent status of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's closet as the figural "organizing trope of Western sexual power/knowledge" (12), and Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner's investment of "anonymous or depersonalized queer sexual practices" with "an inherently radical-political valence" (182), through careful aesthetic analysis of an array of filmic genres, forms, and narratives.

Making Sex Public turns on representational shifts following "[t]he collapse of the Production Code and the rise of an auteur cinema" (3) that brought figures burdened with the significations of sexual and gender transgression into what Linda Williams terms "on/scene" (2004, 3). The proliferation of cinematic representations of female sexuality and gay sex in the 1960s and 70s coincided with and served as a site for the working out of reinvigorated anxieties around the constitution of a liberal public sphere under the republican social contract. Tracing the metaphoricity of "democracy, liberalism, and the market" (Young 2018, 7) across the work of

philosophers and scholars of gender and sexuality, Young argues that "the way in which French and U.S. cinema makes sex public in the second half of the twentieth century" fantasizes and aestheticizes "a narrative in which ideals of equality and autonomy, introduced into the private domain of sexuality, generate a complex and often contradictory set of imaginaries, with women and queers at their center" (7). While the centering of *fantasy* would seem to lend itself to an analysis driven by a psychoanalysis around which cinema and media studies, as a discipline, has cohered and critiqued, Young instead suggests that the "liberal sexual subject" that takes hold across Roger Vadim's *Barbarella* (1968) to Catherine Breillat's *Une vraie jeune fille* (*A Real Young Girl*) (1976) to John Cameron Mitchell's *Shortbus* (2006) "assumes its significance in relation to concepts of social contract, public sphere, and nation" rather than "psychic interiority" (4). Twinned with the aforementioned reversals of queer theory, *Making Sex Public* will be of interest to readers engaged with pushing and reformulating the genealogies of psychoanalytic theory and queer studies in cinema and media studies. Indeed, for studies of pornography, Young's monograph makes salient how the appearance of sex and sexuality in narrative and non-fictional texts does not hold an inherent attachment to a radical political comportment, but is one that is aesthetically negotiated in the late 20th century.

Young's six chapters are organized into three sections: "Part 1: Women," "Part 2: Criminals," and "Part 3: Citizens." The individual chapters are tightly structured largely around for-

mal analyses of single films alongside their emplotment in film history. While the naming of the titles ostensibly lacks a clear schema by which the figure of the “criminal” becomes largely overdetermined by the “gay man,” and “women” can only stick to “women,” Young’s move takes hold through the oft repeated refrain from Guy Hocquenghem’s 1972 book *Le désir homosexuel* (Homosexual Desire) that “homosexuality haunts the ‘normal world’” (96).

“Chapter 1—Autonomous Pleasures: Bardot, *Barbarella*, and the Liberal Sexual Subject” tracks how two films by Roger Vadim, *Et Dieu... créa la femme* (1956) and *Barbarella* (1968), “gave visual and narrative form to female sexual pleasure, [and] contributed to the consolidation in the 1960s of what John d’Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman refer to as a paradigm of ‘sexual liberalism’” (Young 2018, 22). Young unearths an essay on Bardot from Simone de Beauvoir to consider how *Et Dieu* provides a critical augmentation to the understanding of autonomy that is considered central to the constitution of the liberal subject of the republican social contract. For Young, the climactic scene of Bardot’s Juliette feverishly dancing in a jazz club demonstrates how “[t]he unshackling of her sexuality from the stultifying confines of heterosexual coupling does not promise to improve or redeem society but rather to destroy it” (31), “not as nurturer of bonds but as a figure of their destruction” (32). The decade stretch between *Et Dieu* and *Barbarella* allows Young to reflect on how this “fantasy of a jouissance” so threatening to civilizational order has been “now reconciled with social order” (35). Young shows how

Jane Fonda’s *Barbarella*’s “unlimited capacity for pleasure is at once what occasions the possibility of a new world order...and what designates her as a subject without any depth, a subject of (transparent and transactional) pleasure rather than (hermeneutic and unsatisfiable) desire” (48). Both films mark out its configurations of femininity, however, in relation to racialized others: Black musicians of the jazz club in the former, and the racialized and lesbian practitioners of sadomasochistic sexuality on the planet Matmos in the latter. A relative weakness of this book is leaving under-theorized race and whiteness in relationship to the pressures that femininity and queer sexuality newly place on liberal fantasies, but Young’s framework nevertheless remains useful and instructive as a reparative mode for interrogating the prevailing schemas of gender, sexuality, and publicity.” Chapter 2 - Facing the Body in 1975: Catherine Breillat and the Antinomies of Sex” complicates the possibilities of reconciliation of “women” with the liberal sexual subject. In keeping with the smart inversions characteristic of this text, Young torques Mulvey’s formal conceptualization of the male gaze towards what he terms “vaginal vision” (59). Wielding film theory’s treatment of the face as simultaneously universalizing and particularizing alongside the vagina’s relegation as out of view or ob/scene, Young reads Breillat’s *Une vraie jeune fille* (1999) as a film that fleshes out the relationship between the two not in the form of a resolution—as in Agnès Varda’s attempt to overcome the antagonism between the face and vagina in *Réponse de femmes: Notre corps, notre sexe* (1975)—but as a bodily

irreducibility that absconds transcendence. Vaginal vision, then, works not through “differential and oppositional terms (the opposition fullness/lack)” but through “contiguity and analogy” (87, 90). Young’s analysis here will be of interest to researchers of porn insofar as Young provides an ingenious reading of the negativity that inheres in Andrea Dworkin, Catherine McKinnon, and Valerie Solanas alike.

The four following chapters follow a similar contrapuntal approach that helps locate Young’s argument inside the generative tensions that inhere in the constitution of the liberal sexual subject within the republican social contract. Part 2 shifts the figure from that of “women” to the queerness of gay men in its “imaginary conflation...with criminality” (125). “Chapter 3 - The Form of the Social: Heterosexuality and Homo-aesthetics in *Plein soleil*” takes up a perverse push of the necessary equality, the sameness, that makes possible the liberal social sphere; in Young’s terms, “the threat of homosexuality is not that of the unknown outside (or the unfathomable interior) but the fear of differences disappearance, of metastatic sameness” (98). Young’s pursuit of sameness structures in both “Criminal” chapters provides a critical torque to queer theory’s positionality of the queer/male homosexual as ultimate alterity. In Chapter 3, Young traces this threat in the formal and aesthetic doublings of characters Tom Ripley (Alain Delon) and Philippe Greenleaf (Maurice Ronet). This discussion of doubling finds its own double in a rather wonderful progression through William Friedkin’s *Cruising* (1980) from “look-alike men” (148) to *Cruising*’s reminder

“that the condition of the social contract that offers universal equality is the exceptional nonplace, permeating all places, of the contract’s violent enforcing” (149). Indeed, Young’s analysis offers an interesting path to an abolitionist film theory, showing how “*Cruising*’s ingenuity lies in the way it conflates the exceptional position with the agency of the law itself, its very force...incarnated as police officers” (152-53).

The final part “Citizens” builds on Young’s capacity for inventiveness in his discussion of the documentary *Word Is Out: Stories from Some of Our Lives* (1978). Here, Young engages in some significant interventions into Nancy Fraser’s “counterpublics,” as taken up by Michael Warner, and Warner and Berlant’s conception of the structurations of heteronormativity in their canonical essay “Sex in Public” (1998). Here, Young brilliantly pushes the rhetoric of “necessity” from Warner and Berlant to re-think the very terms of radicality and where the radical may take place. Young’s analysis will be of interest to documentary scholars, for he takes up the conventionalized “voice” of documentary and the frame of the “talking head” to reconsider how the film does not merely reproduce a gay liberalism but also “thematizes the fraught encounter between the private subject of sexuality and the public or social world to which she or he is called upon to craft a relation, a relation that is formative” (179). Insofar as *Word Is Out* engages documentary studies, scholars might take an interest in how Young’s text does not examine, but could be mobilized towards, examples of “useful cinema” (Acland and Wasson 2011) as well as

other fictional and non-fictional media like pornography.

Young concludes with a brief epilogue on “Postcinematic Sexuality,” some of which has been further refined in his recent 2019 article “Ironies of Web 2.0” and he plans to take up in his next book project “After the Private Self”. Here, Young bookends his discussion, from Susan Sontag’s claim that cinema is “the art of the twentieth century” (1) to her declaration at the end of the 20th century that cinema is dead (215). Young looks to two unusually paired films—*The Canyons* (dir. Paul Schrader, 2013) and *L’inconnu du lac* (dir. Alain Guiraudie, 2013)—to consider the new articulations of the liberal subject in the post-cinematic and digital 21st century. Here, Young locates “a paradoxical affirmation of a negativity, appearing at the cusp of a media transition from the cinematic to the postcinematic and where the transition is itself in question” (217).

Although *Making Sex Public* was written before the COVID-19 pandemic and its attendant restructurings, Young nevertheless stages an analysis of the aesthetics of cultural and political imaginaries that emerge through the inter-/intra-face of *sex* and *public*, and offers valuable epistemological approaches for critically interrogating, say, rapid Zoomification. While Young’s work focuses largely on film aesthetics, *Making Sex Public* provides epistemological and ethical frameworks for considering digitality and the screen to the legislation of anti-sex work bills that criminalize the work-

places of sex workers off- and online. Young’s *Making Sex Public* is essential reading for those working in queer and feminist cinema studies.

Notes

1. I borrow this term from Ruth Wilson Gilmore and Craig Gilmore, who define it as “a state that grows on the promise of shrinking”; see, Wilson Gilmore and Gilmore 2008, 152.

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Elena Gorfinkel, *Lewd Looks: American Sexploitation Cinema in the 60s*

Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017.

VIBHUSHAN SUBBA

In an interview with V. Vale, sexploitation director Joe Sarno claimed that he was a born rebel and worked “outside of the acceptable framework as often as possible” (Vale and Juno 1986, 90). Sexploitation films have for the most part remained outside of the “acceptable framework” of academia and beyond receiving but scant scholarly attention. In fact, Eric Schaefer goes so far as to say that sexploitation films have “always been a disreputable form” (2007b, 19). Tracking this marginal cultural object that has often been overlooked, considered “low,” disreputable, and unworthy of attention, Elena Gorfinkel’s *Lewd Looks: American Sexploitation Cinema in the 60s* leads us through the thick of this important cycle of films made between 1959–72. Moving across a decade caught between “different regimes of sexual representation” (2017, 4), *Lewd Looks* takes a historical deep dive into industrial contexts, audience receptions, aesthetic configurations, cultural and structural formations, production strategies, and censorship battles to illuminate a very special period of cinema history.

Researching outside the acceptable framework often means writing hidden histories in the absence of dedicated archives, working with fragmentary paper trails, rummaging through personal film collections or video rent-

als, and dealing with what Gorfinkel calls the “lack of a legacy or a sense of historicity” (2017, 16). Under such circumstances it becomes increasingly difficult to put together a historical account, yet this is precisely where *Lewd Looks* excels. Marshalling a wide range of materials from newsletters, advertisements, magazines, newspaper articles, publicity material, court proceedings, censorship elimination letters and other film ephemera, Gorfinkel recovers a lost period in cinema history. This narrative that benefits from her diverse methodological outlook and a materially rich thick description is an important intervention in porn and adult film history. Needless to say, the understanding of film history and screen cultures will remain incomplete if we fail to acknowledge the importance of these disreputable forms. *Lewd Looks* buttresses such groundbreaking scholarship in porn studies, exploitation scholarship such as Eric Schaefer’s (1999) “*BOLD! DARING! SHOCKING! TRUE!*”: A History of Exploitation Films, 1919–1959 and Linda Williams’s (1989) *Hard Core: Power Pleasure and the “Frenzy of the Visible”* by uncovering the salacious years that lie between the dwindling of the classical exploitation films and the emergence of hardcore pornography. Although scholarship on sexploitation

films have made brief appearances in collections such as *Unruly Pleasures: The Cult Film and its Critics* (Mendik and Harper 2000), *Defining Cult Movies: The Cultural Politics of Oppositional Taste* (Jancovich et al. 2003) and *Sleaze Artists: Cinema at the Margins of Taste, Style and Politics* (Sconce 2007), *Lewd Looks* is a noteworthy full-length monograph dedicated to sexploitation films.

Working at the margins of Hollywood with tiny budgets, on express production schedules, and with unknown actors, a cottage industry of independent productions emerged in the sixties with their salacious fares of sex, skin and everything in-between, promising quick returns, and filled up the languishing neighbourhood theaters. The post war era was gloomy for Hollywood as, after the “Paramount Decision” of 1948, the major studios were ordered to sell off their theatre chains, shattering their monopoly on the movie business. This damp climate of plummeting box-office attendance and a sharp product shortage created a space for the independent producers to peddle their wares. These lewd affairs were the Sexploitation films of the sixties that lured the audiences with the promise of sex and erotic spectacle. The history of exploitation lends itself to two distinct periods: the period from 1919 through to the late fifties which is considered as the era of classical exploitation film and a modern period when the classical exploitation films were displaced by more explicit fare like the sexploitation films. As the “black sheep of the film trade” (Gorfinkel 2017, 45), sexploitation films faced substantial censorship challenges at the national, state and local levels

from a range of civic, religious, political, and other pressure groups.

Pieced together from legal proceedings, elimination and licensing letters, court battles and the workings of state censor boards, Gorfinkel’s first chapter provides an extensive account of these clashes and how the sexploitation filmmakers negotiated a complicated and variegated terrain of changing definitions of obscenity and cultural anxieties. For instance, the New York State censor board was “generally quite strict in the rules that governed the evaluations of sexploitation films,” and tolerated no “scenes of female nudity, primarily exposure of naked breasts and buttocks, even when scant, as well as the suggestion of sexuality or the expression of sexual desires, orientations, and acts, when combined with nudity” (2017, 50). As the sexploitation industry was being increasingly targeted, the filmmakers and producers found creative ways to circumvent the censor’s prohibitive injunctions that resulted in such practices as striking “hot” and “cool” prints that served different audiences with different levels of explicitness. These evasive tactics, Gorfinkel argues, defined the sexploitation film’s form and syntax which is found in sexploitation’s unique “strategies of syntactical tease and erotic deferral,” that is a “dialectic of plenitude and absence, circumvention and titillation” (11). Another mode of address that the sexploitation film employed is what Gorfinkel calls the rhetoric of “guilty expenditure” in which “sex is avidly desired and consumed, but not without cost: narrative resolutions run the gamut from moral, emotional, and financial ruin to death and murder” (97). In a film like

The Immortal Mr. Teas (dir. Russ Meyer, 1959), the titular Mr. Teas (Bill Teas) is a salesman who can see through women's clothing. This bumbling character who often finds himself in comic situations is deployed to assuage the conscience of the audience for consuming such erotic spectacles by providing the "gawker in the text" (98). Through detailed analysis of film texts chapter two traces the transition of the sexploitation cycle from the "nudicuties" that negotiated female nudity through light hearted comedy like *Mr. Teas* to the "roughies" that were more aggressive and darker in tone such as Doris Wishman's *Bad Girls Go To Hell* (1965). Dwelling on the roughie form, chapter three explores the emergence of female sexual desire, agency, and the experimentation with sexual "deviance" that were found in such films like Joseph Mawra's *Olga* movies.

In the last chapter, Gorfinkel tracks the historical reception of sexploitation films by bringing together an impressive variety of archival sources. By examining the growing public discourse around sex films in the sixties, this discursive account finds the spectator of sex films entangled in a mire of stereotypes, connoisseurship, art, obscenity, adult markets and class and taste imaginaries. Accounts from publications like *Art Films International*, the recognition of certain filmmakers as auteurs reflected in the nods of acknowledgements in popular press or screenings in rarefied circles and being accounted for in newsletters like *Artisex* that reviewed and rated sexploitation films complicates the stereotypical idea of the spectator of sexploitation films being only a "dupe." Gorfinkel is not only interested in the

historical spectator of the films but also fascinated with the way the spectator was established and dramatized in the films themselves that teases out the conditions and anxieties of looking both within the context of the film text and the space of exhibition where the spectator is situated. The problems of looking are stitched into the sexploitation film's form and structures which facilitates the tension and nudges the boundaries between looking and doing where "the film spectator is central to sexploitation's generic, industrial, and social identity" (12).

In "Exploitation Films: Teaching Sin in the Suburbs," Eric Schaefer (2007a) foregrounds the difficulties of teaching exploitation films to students. One of the main challenges that he records is the struggle to establish the alternative aesthetic universe of the exploitation films, one where students have to get used to the "primacy of spectacle" and the travails of "choppy continuity" (95). However, Schaefer also adds that what makes exploitation films such great study material is that this marginal industry, this shadow economy allows us to understand how society grappled with the complex questions of sex, drug use, nudity, obscenity. Although all sexploitation films do not gain cult acceptance; its short-lived cycle, under-documentation, questionable preservation and idiosyncratic aesthetic configuration puts it well within the scope of cult studies. *Lewd Looks* is not only a great addition to porn studies, gender studies, studies of spectatorship and film studies broadly but also to studies of cult cinema in that through its deeply historical account, presence of major sexploitation figures like Wishman,

Sarno, Metzger, Mahon, Meyer, its close attention to form and the politics of films it throws new light to sexual representation and spectatorship. It is also a good resource for researchers and scholars outside the Global North who are uncovering similar hidden histories of marginal industries and film practice. Exploitation is not a genre but a mode that can be found in different forms of contemporaneous sexploitation and low budget cinema across the South Asian region. In South Asia, exploitation filmmakers and theatre owners have used ingenious tactics like the cut-piece during the celluloid era to evade the censors. In parts of Bangladesh, Pakistan and India, pornographic sequences were and in some instances are still expertly spliced onto the main reel in the darkness of the theatre. Since the cut-piece can appear and disappear at will, they have been used frequently to bypass censorship much like the striking of “hot” and “cool” prints in American sexploitation. Gorfinkel’s *Lewd Looks* offers rich methodological and theoretical clues to “historicize and theorize the implicit, rather than explicit” (4) image to scholars outside the Global North, narratives that might warrant methods beyond traditional avenues of research.

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Susanna Paasonen, Kylie Jarrett, and Ben Light, *NSFW: Sex, Humor, and Risk in Social Media*

Cambridge: MIT Press, 2019.

MAGGIE MACDONALD

The titular hashtag #NSFW grabs attention while warning users to proceed with caution, suggesting what we will encounter is simultaneously tempting and perilous (you will want to see this - but not in front of your colleagues!). In *#NSFW: Sex, Humor, and Risk in Social Media*, authors Susanna Paasonen, Kylie Jarrett and Ben Light parse the implications lumped together under the taboo label and reveal what sort of troubling behaviours evade this categorization. Their work spotlights respectability and safety as tools for social control when associating sex with risk carries consequences for both creators and audiences online. Recently massive platforms as diverse as Tumblr, Instagram, Twitter, OnlyFans and Pornhub have dramatically altered their terms of service with little notice to users. This selective and sudden moderation damages communities and livelihoods with little recourse, and shapes what kind of sexual content is made available according to the platform's economic strategies. This governance trend has been explored elsewhere in Katrin Tiidenberg and Emily van der Nagel's informative *Sex and Social Media*, also released in 2020. Both books compellingly make the case that platforms are de-sexing our social experience. Of the two, #NSFW utilizes its case-analysis

more broadly to ask questions about sex, risk, and identity off-platform as well as in situations bounded by these moderation norms online. Suitable to the theme of this special issue on "Porn and its Uses", the book convincingly shows an internet riddled with gatekeepers that have refused normalizing sex or pornography as ordinary social and economic interactions. Instead, the logics of #NSFW tags have served to further exile sexual content to limited and commodified spaces. This refusal to naturalize a sanitized social media landscape contributes to the field of platform studies by providing an in-depth look at a popular cross-platform affordance, and to porn studies by questioning logics that render sex risky and continuously barred from normal circulation in our interactions online.

The hashtag itself cuts a wide swath, encompassing porn, nudity and dick pics, gore and violence, and shocking pranks or gross-out humour in a rush of context collapse around what kind of content is deemed troubling. "Not safe for work" establishes norms and expectations around what is deemed permissible online, and when we ought to consume or avoid it. Content bundled under #NSFW is wildly heterogenous, and compresses the horrifying, humorous, and horny

into a flat generalized category of risky browsing. The authors make clear that the #hashtag signifier is not a passive one. Instead, the context of its deployment reflects and even generates social meaning through networks. #NSFW is identified as a permeable apparatus: in turns a straightening-out tool enforcing heteronormativity, a node around which publics assemble, a marketing tool for porn performers and other sex workers, a technique of engagement for clickbait, and a practical means of content moderation on platforms, all in one. The simultaneous promise and threat contained in the hashtag reveal content that is at turns forbidden, sexy, playful, and vulgar—but always compelling, especially when we are supposed to be occupied by the serious business of work.

This monograph brings together in collaboration experienced scholars working in porn studies, media studies, affect theory, feminist political economy and digital methods. Ben Light's body of work is grounded in digital methods with a particular eye for sexual subcultures and dating platforms. Kylie Jarrett's research examines social reproduction, labour, and digital economies through a Marxist-Feminist framework. Susanna Paasonen's research has been influential in exploring humour and affect alongside pornography, an excellent basis from which to launch the research entanglements of #NSFW. Paasonen further develops many of these research themes in another 2020 release: *Who's Laughing Now* with Jenny Sunden, which looks to feminist resilience tactics in navigating risk through humour on social media. Ideas explored in the book are rooted

in decades of honing respective research methods. The three authors' diversity of expertise shows in deft—but rarely dense—engagements with all of the above in the span of an economical 176 pages. Methodologically, this alliance sets up a mixed approach, where social science and humanities meet data and business studies. Content analysis emerges from an initial quantitative study conducted using digital methods. Scraping Twitter for a large data set makes clear the associations between tags, revealing #NSFW material to be predominantly sexual in nature, and featuring women squarely in heterosexual contexts. From this foundation, a prismatic analysis follows that engages with the hashtag's taxonomies, community assemblages, and pragmatic functions as porn marketing. The genesis of the book was through discussions at the *Association of Internet Researchers* annual conferences and the collaborative work was workshopped in subsequent years of AoIR conferences, so it is fitting that the authors were recognized with the 2020 *AoIR* Nancy Baym book award. Careful attention to platform specificity and nascent internet scholarship throughout avoids generalizations that could otherwise dilute the resulting analysis. Paasonen, Jarrett, and Light's multimodal approach is remarkably accessible given this methodological complexity.

The book opens by identifying “NSFW as Warning and Invitation” to potential viewers. To click these links is vaguely, but alarmingly, agreed to be moving beyond the bounds of workplace safety and towards the lure of troubling content. Respectable internet browsing and the implied safety

that comes with it is cast as mundane in comparison, tempting audiences to click, browse and divert their attention towards the risky posts. The resulting conflation of all things sexual with risky behaviour has affective and material consequences, and the book aims to make clear some of the paradoxical associations between risk, sex, humour and labour. The authors situate their close reading of the tag within Jodi Dean's framework of communicative capitalism (2010) which accounts for the management and monetization of data by grabbing user attention to drive traffic across sites. Consequently, themes of classification and metadata, engagement and applications, and governance and labour respond to provocations from platform studies, critical algorithm studies and data studies throughout.

In Chapter 2, the authors ask "What's with the Tag?", zooming in on the metadata of the tagging function itself to explore the communal, managerial, and ideological implications of #NSFW. Tags are identified as technological affordances that are not neutral but performative, encompassing human and nonhuman actors, including corporations and algorithms. The tag generates meaning through associations, codifying what is (in)appropriate to each community. The logic of NSFW is shown to equate sexuality as "objectionable content" across Twitter, Pinterest, Facebook, Instagram and Tumblr, among other platforms. By reproducing and reinforcing this cultural logic, user interactions and imposed platform affordances ensure a status quo of banishing sex under the pretense of risk. The chapter asserts that flows of internet traffic is mirrored by

the flow of discourse under the terms of Dean's (2010) communicative capitalism.

Chapter 3 zooms in on the culprit identified to be quintessentially #NSFW in the previous section. "Peek-boo Pornography" considers not only the products of porn, but the labour of making it, in relation to safety and risk. For efficacy, this segment focuses on MindGeek, the monopolistic company that operates the largest free porn aggregator sites. The ubiquity of porn makes its near universal ban on social media all the more absurd when considering what it is equated with. Female nipples, genitals, and sexual pleasure are lumped in with cannibalism, extreme graphic violence, and hate speech on most popular platforms. To circumvent this porn ban, MindGeek uses PR stunts, charity campaigns and neatly packaged statistics and infographics to circulate their brand respectably on social media. Mainstreaming of the pornographic has been a race to the bottom that devalues the labour of porn workers through both the oversaturation of the freemium model and the PR disavowal of queer, femme, amateur porn performers in favour of masculine IT expertise and a newfound PR respectability (Rodeschini 2020). As a result, porn work carries very material risks, not just of harassment and assault, but of banal economic exploitation under the precarious terms of the gig economy. The authors echo labour scholar Brooke Erin Duffy's (2017) reminder that, despite carefully crafted appearances of authentic pleasure, these precarious labourers are (not) getting paid to do what they love. This compels porn workers to seek out alternative

income streams, frequently turning to social media to market themselves while being discriminated against by the very platforms they rely upon. Paradoxically, heightened visibility of porn and sex workers in the mainstream also necessitates their management of perceived risk on social media through personal content moderation.

The fourth chapter is concerned with “The Ambiguity of Dick Pics”, a user-generated iteration of #NSFW content. Context is, once again, key to making sense of the dick pic, a hybrid of selfie culture and porn that can either function to arouse or harass recipients. Using viral examples of #NSFW links, the authors show the male body, and specifically the homoerotic, are routinely coded as disgusting in internet visual culture. Not all identities and acts are weighted equally in regard to desirability and grossness. Where nude female bodies are coded #NSFW under the connotation of sexuality and objectification, male bodies are met as hilarious, unfortunate and yucky. Despite this, shame and online harassment is disproportionately levied at women, racialized and queer folks, granting online nakedness markedly different levels of agency according to identity. While women’s nudes are routinely the target of revenge porn and circulated without consent, dick pics can be used variably as tools of intimacy or harassment. Taking examples of popular feminist activists and networks, the authors show the latter is increasingly being met with public shaming. The former, desired in the visual economy of Tumblr and gay dating apps, allow for a showcase of sexuality while protecting personal privacy. This analysis of the ambiguity

and mutability of naked genitals by gender show how #NSFW images can unequally facilitate or disrupt the flow of communication across networks, but that as long as the flow of traffic continues, platforms will benefit from their circulation and avoid intervening.

A focus on “Negotiating Sex and Safety at Work” in Chapter 5 latches on to changing parameters of work under the digital economy and interrogates how sex and sexuality are normatively deployed in the workplace. Personal and social relations do not evaporate under the umbrella of work, and it follows that the “dynamics of bullying, discrimination and harassment at work follow the familiar fault lines of identity categories” (112). This means that sex and humour deployed at work are means of articulating control and power hierarchies. Some jokes at work act as bonding exercises or reduce friction, and some sexual scenarios are advantageous to stable social formations. However, these are only permissible insofar as they increase worker productivity. Further, under conditions of increasing surveillance and precarity, labourers are facing intense scrutiny for informal and leisure activities, calling for a sanitized and well-managed public presence on social media and discipline in using it at work. This is complicated by increasing contract, gig, and mobile work environments, which disproportionately harm marginalized groups. However, just as porn scholar Mireille Miller-Young has identified resistance and pleasure in the work of Black porn performers who were normally portrayed as victims (2014), Paasonen, Jarrett, and Light suggest that sharing and viewing

#NSFW content at work can be coded as an act of resistance among labourers, reclaiming time back from the optimization demanded of the neoliberal work ethic.

Finally, Chapter 6 turns to the material considerations around sex work, the gig economy, the attention economy, and the evaporating divide between labour and leisure to examine “The Political Economy of Unsafe Work”. The designation of what is, and is not, considered “safe” reflects the frequently troubled offline relations between gender, sexuality, race, and labour. By mapping the political economy of abuse and harassment online, the authors reveal precisely who and what is really at risk in relation to #NSFW content. This chapter relies on case studies of high-profile harassment and an analysis of “toxic geek masculinity” (147) to show that racist, sexist, homophobic, and transphobic behaviour creates demonstrably unsafe work environments impacting many. Yet, while sex and sexuality are not inherently risky, they are named #NSFW while hateful and damaging “e-bile” (147) is routinely normalized. This analysis really takes flight when the authors move to consider the economic dimensions of platform capitalism, which reify structures of power that deny the systemic nature of harassment and deputize the individual to be responsible for their personal safety. The juxtaposition of perpetual workplace surveillance and ongoing refusal to moderate harassment make a mockery of the designations “safe” and “unsafe” for work.

The book makes a compelling case for the disciplinary functions of the

#NSFW designation, a tag frequently dismissed as unserious or distasteful. The association of sex with risk plays into an “economy of peekaboo” (170) where sex is sanitized, straightened out, and made safe for consumption only to realize an economic logic of centralization and accumulation. Simultaneously, objectionable content is teased as a means to leverage user attention and drive traffic around the web. The logic of “platform capitalism” (Srnicsek 2016) is revealed to be unconcerned with safety or harm as long as the flow of attention produces favourable material and economic outcomes in line with the status quo. This observation does not exclude academia as unique in this tendency and the researchers conclude by delineating the unique struggles in research and knowledge sharing surrounding a project which is constitutively #NSFW. Central to the analysis are questions of consent, levied at exploitative labour practices as much as they are sexual agency. Throughout, the authors refuse the taxonomic tendency of attaching sex to risk, and explicitly name the human and nonhuman agents that normalize giving violence, harassment, and labour exploitation a free pass. In its best moments, the book’s tone matches its twin topics of humour and risk, showing remarkable levity even as it raises crucial questions about what is considered legitimate content or work, and what kinds of bodies are deemed worthy of safety. Always a provocation, #NSFW is essential reading for porn scholars, platform scholars and for those looking to better understand the attention economy.

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BOOK

REVIEWS

GENERAL

Jennifer Fay, *Inhospitable World: Cinema in the Time of the Anthropocene*

New York: Oxford University Press, 2018.

MATTHEW ELLIS

The vision of the post-industrial sky was once infamously compared to the “color of television, tuned to a dead channel” (Gibson 1984, 3). But where those visions of a technologically mediated future eventually gave way to screens powered by fibre optic cables and wireless technology, today’s reality, as anyone recently looking to social media can see, is a much bleaker burning red. Wildfires in the Western United States—stretching from Southern California to Eastern Washington state, have engulfed the once clear Pacific sky in a soupy layer of smoke. The sun has been cast blood red, while entire towns—from Paradise, California to Medford, Oregon—are burned to the ground or evacuated, while helpless residents look on in fear. As if waiting around for the dystopia to emerge, its current arrival in a storm of glowing smoke seems to suggest a limit to prior conceptions of how ongoing environmental trends might emerge aesthetically. This arguably poses a problem for representations of climate change and can itself be seen reflected in the *Blade Runner* film franchise, its seminal film (1982) echoing the digital and concrete greys of a 1980s cyberpunk imaginary now giving way to the sandy orange of a warmed planet in its 2017 sequel (*Blade Runner: 2049*). But as Ian Bogost (2020)

recently noted, the ubiquity of the reds and oranges in images posted to social media during the 2020 West Coast wildfire season are less an authentic index of what is “really there” than a product of the way iPhone camera sensors are built to respond to the brightness of the natural light they pick up and automatically “correct.” And here we have the rub: as the early stages of the impact of climate change begin to be mediated on live screens and experienced in ever-increasing numbers, it seems representation yet again emerges as a philosophical problem and an exercise for culture writ large. Cinema might help point to what the unthinkable thing coming *looks like*, providing a visual language for making sense of the collapse of an all-encompassing Nature we only began taking seriously too late. But as a material technology, both in its celluloid and digital forms, cinema also actively participates in the worlding of an anthropogenic planet in which the line between a given Nature and human-built world has conceptually and literally collapsed.

Jennifer Fay’s compelling *Inhospitable World: Cinema in the Time of the Anthropocene* (2018) begins from this exact conjuncture. Her central argument is at first historical: that cinema and the Anthropocene are two inseparable phenomena, each of which emerge

both literally and epistemologically out of the nineteenth century Industrial Revolution through attempts to master time and space, or to preserve, protect, and expand human life or, in her words, that “[t]he Anthropocene is to natural science what cinema, especially early cinema, has been to human culture” (Fay 2018, 3). This provocative claim is, crucially, situated within Eugene Stoermer’s proposed geological periodization of the “Anthropocene,” in which human activity begins to impact the geological record at a level never before seen in history. It fits alongside what J.R. McNeill and Peter Engelke have called the “Great Acceleration,” or the mid-century point at which the rapid industrialization and speed of technological growth of civilization has resulted in a “coupling” of “the socioeconomic system with the biophysical earth” (Fay 2018, 11; also see McNeill and Engelke 2016). Film scholars here might begin to see why this proposed linkage of cinema and the Anthropocene—the late nineteenth century and 1945—is so crucial to Fay’s argument: rather than a simple historical rhyme on the timeline of history, Fay argues that the event of the Anthropocene and the emergence of cinema arrive with similar projects of collapsing the “distinction between a human-made world and a natural, given environment” (Fay 2018, 8). For what do films do, other than create and transform [a] world through human action, from sets to on-location shooting? And how might the desire to produce a more hospitable environment, both on screen and in nature, end up leading to the very emergence of the *inhospitable* in the end?

Fay’s approach here is a welcome

addition to recent work on the environmental humanities in film and media studies, approaches which in their disciplinary siloing all too often seem to elide what useful connections might be drawn between each. Fay herself, in the book’s final chapter on Siegfried Kracauer’s “extraterrestrial film theory,” describes this move between the material and the cultural as a “rejoinder, if not correction, to more recent aesthetic and ecocritical theory that moves beyond the fetishization of subjectivity, without abandoning sensual form or even love itself” (Fay 2018, 198). One might point here to ground-breaking work by scholars who draw attention to the geopolitics literally embedded in the heavy metals that make possible the celluloid frame, or the exploitation necessary for the production of the mined chip in the digital camera, alongside scholars still operating within a classical or contemporary film theory milieu that centers the importance of cinema as a cultural institution, a vehicle for re-presenting the world and making meaning.¹ However wide the gap between the materiality that constitutes the image and the image itself seems, to Fay, less a void than a constellation that can provide a useful tool for problematizing humanity’s relation to a changing environment and an increasingly unfamiliar future.

The work is expansive, which an initial reader might find incongruous. This is due in part to Fay’s intervention, which centers not on a corpus of “environmental” films documenting this or that climate phenomenon but rather this very dialectic between creation and destruction within Anthropocentric built or natural space. In five

sprawling chapters, Fay moves from construction of sets in early American silent comedy to the indexicality of nuclear test films, from the “social ecology” of film noir’s evocation of existential dread to the UFO in Jia Zhangke’s *Still Life* (2006) and the film theoretical work of Siegfried Kracauer. This scope is admittedly somewhat daunting, and Fay’s heterodox methodology might drive scholars in each previous camp to question precisely what through-line could unite such a complex approach. But Fay’s crucial insight is that the philosophical and political (and existential) problem posed by looming climate change unfolds across very similar lines. Rather than attempting to restore a world “out there,” Fay notes that our “always unnatural and unwelcoming environment” is always a “matter of production”: that any attempt to disentangle a Nature free from human intervention—albeit at a different scale—is a philosophical error (Fay 2018, 4–5). It is in this sense that the nature between cinema and the Anthropocene is made the most explicit: that both are historicizable events and technologies that produce their own “worlds” through attempts at making them more hospitable, leading to worlds which are, paradoxically, inhospitable (19).

It is the book’s first and final chapters where Fay most explicitly unites her materialist and classical film-theoretical approach. In doing so, she draws attention not only to the way these contemporary debates in the environmental humanities might be complementary, but rather, how any sober analysis of film and media for a changing climate must take up both problems as constitutive of one another.

Crucially, she does this by returning to film history itself. Cinema here must not be thought of as merely “representing” a collapsing Enlightenment Nature wholly outside of human culture—for as Fay argues, films themselves quite literally produce *artificial*, human-made worlds that themselves can be “undone by the force of human activity” in films such as Buster Keaton’s *Steamboat Bill, Jr.* (1928), or mid-century nuclear bomb test films produced by the US Air Force in the American Southwest (Fay 2018, 4). These are films that not only *depict* the destruction of their diegeses, but actually stage their destruction as lived events in a manufactured world that is quite literally the same as our own.

In order to make this argument, Fay rests on a central claim: that cinema emerges parallel to the historical event of the Anthropocene, situated precisely alongside the nineteenth-century Industrial Revolution, and both carrying with them echoes of distinct material and conceptual practices of worlding. But what if that periodization is incorrect? Recent critiques of the notion of a distinct geological period called the “Anthropocene” have been leveled by leftist thinkers from Donna Haraway to Jason Moore, the latter of whom proposed what he suggests as a more useful concept of the “Capitalocene” in an attempt to draw attention to the *specifically capitalist* way in which the organization of human societies and nature has driven the planet to its current ecological crisis, rather than the more abstract “human action” (Moore 2017). Crucial to Moore’s periodization is a not simply a claim that the planet has undergone immense and accelerating change after the Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth century—it certainly has. But

rather, Moore argues these ecological transformations cannot be thought of separate from earlier transformations of the world system beginning with the rise of European colonization in the mid-fifteenth century (Moore 2017, 3). In this sense, Fay's notion that the attempt to "make the planet more welcoming, secure, and productive for human flourishing" seems to tell us more about the paradox of contemporary liberal responses to piecemeal climate reform in the wake of increasing precarity than it does the roots of the crisis, which to Moore emerged out of a particular shift in the world system, not increasing material production. As Fay even argues, others who still find value in the term Anthropocene themselves begin the periodization elsewhere, such as a recent move to date the epoch's emergence in 1945, precisely after the detonation of the Trinity A-bomb (Zalasiewicz et al. 2015). Which one is it? Fay's middle two chapters on US Air Force nuclear test films and Film Noir are strengthened by this later periodization, suggesting something of a historical rupture around the Second World War that leads not only to the material and epistemological effects of what she calls "atomic inhumanism" in postwar cinema, but also for the use of cinema to help spectators "train for death" in a postwar world (Fay 2018, 83, 97).

Fittingly, this latter periodization also helps Fay make use of Kracauer's postwar film theory in her reading of actualities from early expeditions to Antarctica in the book's final chapter. Here, as she notes, Kracauer made a turn following the war to "redeem experience...(and) rescue some form of subjectivity after the disastrous historical events of totalitarianism and author-

itarian rule" (Fay 2018, 178). In short, rather than imagining ourselves as the products of myth and tradition, cinema provides an opportunity to see how we are "inheritors of a contingent and fragmented reality that film reflects back to us" (179). The distinct alienness of Antarctica as described in these films nevertheless provides for Fay a conceptual tool for thinking through the sensual and humanistic response to an increasingly inhospitable world, much in the same way her early chapters combine material and representational readings of early cinema. But this notion of a somewhat paradoxically humanist and materialist answer to the problem of an inhospitable world seems at odds with her earlier periodization that finds itself in the nineteenth century. Because Fay moves from Buster Keaton to Jia Zhangke, from documentary to *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955), one might want to ask what it is about the Anthropocene that connects these later twentieth century moments to her claim about early cinema in the book's first chapter. What kind of worlding, either cinematic or epistemological, would emerge with a different periodization of the Anthropocene? Does cinema lose its link to this project if the Anthropocene is thought of outside the Industrial Revolution, before or after? This is not to suggest Fay provides no answer to these questions. But by decoupling cinema's mode of collapsing the artificial and real world from that of the Anthropocene itself, the very material questions of what cinema is, and what it can do, return again to the forefront. Can we locate in the cinematic the storm Keaton actually produced on set that day, or is it only in the frame of the image? What will happen, she asks, if materi-

al remnants of our film culture outlive us, and are left to be perceived by some post-human ocean dwelling octopus deep in the future? I'm not sure we can even conceivably think about the "image" at that point.

Ultimately, these provocative questions opened up by Fay's text are the book's most productive contribution to the field. Readers looking for a text on "eco-cinema" or environmental films might be taken aback by Fay's conceptual through line, but those deeply interested in the stakes of what cinema can offer for a changing planet—an epistemological problem not unlike that of climate change itself—will find much of value in its pages.

Notes

1. For the former, see Nadia Bozak, *The Cinematic Footprint: Lights Camera, Natural Resource* (2012), and Thomas Pringle, "Photographed by the Earth: War and media in light of nuclear events" (2014), both of which draw attention to the natural resources required to produce the cinematic image as well as other related "imaging" technologies such as nuclear fallout. Relatedly, Stephen Rust, Salma Nonani, and Sean Cubitt's 2013 "Ecocinema Theory and Practice" reader outlines what they call the field of "eco-film criticism," and adds to a materialist approach a concern with aesthetics.

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Antoine Damiens, *LGBTQ Film Festivals: Curating Queerness*

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Like any developing field, festival studies' methodological and theoretical tendencies often seem to justify its validity and necessity, both within film studies and the humanities more broadly. Typologies that delineate various types of festivals consistently appear in festival scholarship, as well as analyses of major international festivals. These studies point to the industrial significance of international festivals for the funding, circulation, and exhibition of films by both emerging filmmakers and established auteurs. Alternatively, some scholars have addressed smaller festivals and even festivals that ended long ago, especially in early festival-focused articles like Melinda M. Barlow's analysis of the vibrant 1970s New York Women's Video Festival that lasted just eight years and Elena Gorfinkel's study of erotic film festivals from the same decade. But the field tends to separate international festivals as an object of inquiry from discussions of other types of festivals, reifying industrial distinctions that neglect the potential yield of studying smaller events.

In *LGBTQ Film Festivals: Curating Queerness*, Antoine Damiens clarifies the assumptions that seem to structure festival studies, like this emphasis on major festivals, and aims to reconsider the frameworks that have thus

far guided a rich field of academic inquiry. While the book focuses on LGBTQ film festivals, it seeks to critique and expand the theoretical concepts and methods that continually appear in festival studies as a whole, instead of limiting the contribution to LGBTQ festivals specifically. Throughout the book's thoughtful examination of the field, Damiens resists criticizing particular scholars and their projects. Instead, the book remains centrally concerned with knowledge production more broadly and how institutional pressures have generated scholarly preoccupations. Two main concepts structure the project's intervention: "critical festival studies" and "festivals as a method." "Critical festival studies" examines the methodological and political results of festival studies' goal of academic legitimacy, while the idea of "festivals as a method" considers festivals' role in producing knowledge, by creating particular conditions of spectatorship and canon formation. Each chapter highlights a specific theoretical problem within these larger conceptual interests, with Damiens' extensive archival research offering examples from the history of LGBTQ film festivals throughout.

In the first chapter, Damiens contends with a core problem of festival studies' formation as a field: the ten-

dencies that make certain festivals “matter,” while neglecting countless others. This chapter suggests that academic disciplines and festivals’ archival practices collectively created an intellectual approach that ignores festivals that failed, or no longer exist. Damiens grants due attention to the ephemeral nature of festivals, with the goal of reimagining festival studies’ dedication to longevity and industrial relevance in selecting festivals to analyze. He accounts for the archival traces of LGBTQ festivals that do not fit conventional definitions within the field, referencing numerous festivals, often seemingly one-off events, that were produced by varied organizations like adult theaters or universities, instead of independent festival organizations. Festival histories usually disregard such events, despite their contribution to the burgeoning field of LGBTQ festivals that Damiens uncovers. This chapter foregrounds the methodological challenges of this analysis, a concern that reappears throughout the book in its analysis of an ephemeral format.

Chapter two nuances the use of Bourdieu’s concepts of taste-making and cultural production in festival studies, as well as its reliance on circuits as a theoretical framework. The analysis takes identity and cinophilia as the dual regimes of cultural value at play in queer cinema’s development and contemporary distribution. Damiens rightly acknowledges the institutions that operate alongside and in collaboration with festivals, particularly distributors, in the circulation and valuation of queer films, and he also identifies the significance of video festivals as a key part of queer cinematic

culture. While the book largely resists the field’s tendency to rely on extended case studies to demonstrate theoretical concepts and historical phenomena, Damiens incorporates valuable examples that indicate the breadth of his research, with films like *Laurence Anyways* (Xavier Dolan, 2012), *Tomboy* (Céline Sciamma, 2011), and *Weekend* (Andrew Haigh, 2011) demonstrating distribution strategies that draw on both queer and general cultural fields. Through these films and others, Damiens examines the complex dynamics of LGBTQ film circulation, as filmmakers and distribution companies might highlight queer associations, broader arthouse connections, or both depending on the context and their goals. For instance, *Tomboy* typically screened at general festivals rather than LGBTQ festivals in most of Europe, and reviews interpreted the film as a story about the crisis of puberty, not a trans narrative. But in the United Kingdom and the United States, the film’s acquisition by LGBTQ distribution companies and its LGBTQ festival screenings led to reception of the film as a trans story. Like the book as a whole, this chapter both encourages a more reflective avenue for festival studies and contributes to queer film history through its analysis of cultural discourses in distribution practices.

In chapter three, Damiens traces the origin of the concept “gay and lesbian cinema” through three of film culture’s seemingly distinct areas that contain a long history of crossover: criticism, festival organizing, and scholarship. This chapter questions the clear distinctions between roles like critics, scholars, organizers, or festival-goers that appear in scholar-

ship on festival stakeholders, instead highlighting the various roles that one individual might occupy in different situations or time periods. Damiens focuses especially on the critic/scholar binary through examples like Vito Russo and Robin Wood, unpacking the blended theoretical and political dimensions of their writing on cinema in the 1970s. Like the first chapter's discussion of ephemeral festivals, this analysis extensively references long-forgotten events with potential historical influence, from conferences to protests to festivals. Ultimately, the third chapter allows Damiens to reconsider the emergence of LGBTQ festivals and film studies through early writers and interpersonal relationships that facilitated the development of the "gay and lesbian cinema" concept.

The fourth and fifth chapters turn to festivals as a method, identifying ways in which festivals are valuable sites to consider key questions for film studies. Chapter four considers festivals as archives, attending to the affective experience gay spectators have with the images produced by and for LGBTQ festivals, from marketing materials to documentaries about festival histories. In another insightful move for festival analysis, the chapter turns to the visual elements, or "visual architecture," that populate festivals for attendees and how they create an affective experience, drawing on queer references and suggesting a communal relationship between queer history and festival attendees. These images range from marketing materials, like trailers and posters, to the physical space of the festival, including décor in screening rooms and other areas. Damiens references numerous creative

examples, like Frameline's *Wizard of Oz*-inspired 2015 trailer or its four telenovela parody trailers from 2010. The *Wizard of Oz* trailer exemplifies how the visual architecture of LGBTQ festivals references queer readings of general film culture, and the telenovela trailers demonstrate attempts to create a distinct festival environment across screenings, inviting audiences to construct a narrative from the four separate trailers. Damiens argues that trailers attest to festivals' unique relationship to temporality. Trailers both build anticipation for festivals, as ephemeral events, and structure the experience by preceding individual screenings. The analysis of various LGBTQ festival trailers reveals their historiographic impulse, often involving a collage of clips, and the films produced by festivals about their own histories offer an additional set of case studies for how temporality and gay spectatorship converge in LGBTQ festivals. In approaching festivals as a method in this chapter, Damiens demonstrates how festivals create particular affective experiences through their visual architecture.

The final chapter turns to the experience of globalization at festivals. Through an analysis of the Montreal festival Image+Nation's programs, Damiens unpacks the geopolitical dynamics evident in festival programming practices. This discussion extends beyond the clear categories of local, national, and international that are present at many festivals, including many LGBTQ festivals, to consider the linguistically specific ways of addressing sexuality that appear in festival programs. The bilingual presentation of festivals like Image+Nation, with

film descriptions in both English and French, reveals the strategic use of language that positions films differently for festival-goers reading only one of the two languages. Damiens also identifies the ways in which Western festivals simplify non-Western queer films and queerness, often exoticizing the subjects at the center of these stories or adopting a tourist gaze. Through the analysis of globalization and queerness in film descriptions, this chapter rightly points to the dissimilar experiences that festival-goers might have watching the same film at different festivals.

Each of the book's chapters effectively merges substantial archival research on LGBTQ festivals and larger theoretical concerns for festival studies, but Damiens also makes an important contribution to the field through the consistent references to his positionality. He repeatedly mentions his affective experiences and his positionality as a gay man writing in the lineage of gay critics, scholars, and/or programmers from the 1970s. For example, one early memorable reference to the affective dimension of research involves his reaction to the love letters in Vito Russo's collection at the New York Public Library, and multiple anecdotes about festival experiences appear throughout the book. Festival studies often involve a scholar's history and interests, merging the professional and personal in ways that become convoluted and complicated, so it's refreshing for a festival scholar to confront and center this fact as both an object of inquiry and a condition of the book's creation.

By its nature, this expansive study of the emergence and theoretical significance of LGBTQ film festivals mentions some examples that beg further consideration, with the discussion of the Image+Nation catalogs demonstrating the value of extended analysis. Since the book refrains from a conventional case study structure, it often mentions fascinating examples that could become entire chapters themselves, although many exist only as minimal traces within archival collections. At the same time, the book's structure allows a far greater number of references to worthy events that would not even be acknowledged in a project traditionally structured around case studies.

In this book, Damiens both contends with the emerging boundaries and preoccupations of festival studies and makes a significant contribution to queer film history. The central concepts of "critical festival studies" and "festivals as a method" offer substantial reflection on the field and its current directions, and they lead this study to larger yields about knowledge production within both film studies and film festivals. By resisting the tendency to quantify and map festivals to justify their significance, the book recognizes LGBTQ festivals' broader connections to developments in film culture and the historical significance of these events -- many of which no longer exist and may not even fit traditional academic definitions of a festival. *LGBTQ Film Festivals'* organization around key theoretical questions stands as an ambitious and thought-provoking development in festival studies.

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Marc Steinberg, *The Platform Economy: How Japan Transformed the Consumer Internet*

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We cannot deny the rise and impact of digital platforms in our media ecosystem today. They are ubiquitous new components of contactless physical interaction on the internet from Alibaba to Amazon and these digital platforms act as facilitators of exchange between users/consumers and the companies that bring services and products into what Benjamin H. Bratton calls “temporary higher-order aggregations” (2015, 41). Like an ethereal architecture suspended weightlessly above us in the sky—markedly different from the hardware of satellites and their own “cultures in orbit” (Parks 2005)—digital platforms are still reliant on this very technology as well as Cloud, fibre-optic cables and 4G and 5G telecommunications. But, it must be said, that digital platforms also manage vast arrays of content rather than simply transmit such content to users; satellites act as their own hardware platforms high up in the atmosphere vital to global communication. Platforms thus rely on deliverability by sending data through homepages and various Apps through our mobile phones, all of which allow *real* goods to materialize on our doorsteps or bring us packets of data and virtual content.

But are digital platforms marked by their media industries’ own national stripes? What of their histories in a

particular domestic market? Do they serve those publics alone? Sometimes. Yet, sometimes they are more interdependently stitched into our media globalization matrix than previously thought. Sometimes, even, the importance of certain industries have been overlooked in English-language scholarship by media studies scholars. Marc Steinberg’s *The Platform Economy: How Japan Transformed the Consumer Internet* (2019) answers many of these questions and makes bold new claims about the emergent forms of production and monetization of content through digital platforms in Japan since the 1990s. Platforms, scrupulously defined in this new book as their own free-standing system and “walled gardens” follows a percipient argument that these digital enclosures should be interpreted as objects and organizational forms. He argues for this at both a granular and telegraphic level, in order to show how this media’s presence is felt and consumed. Zooming back out and away from East Asia, Steinberg also shows that Japanese platforms have been included in a worldwide “media process geographies” (Lamarre 2015, 13), including the hegemonic United States and its F.A.A.N.G. (Facebook, Apple, Amazon, Netflix and Google) oligopoly, where programmable deliverable services and creative content-produc-

tion is contingent on the global prevention of the “free flow of digital files” under neoliberal globalization. To its credit, the book sees platforms not as isolated forms of capitalist production but increasingly part of a single world system. Platforms “enrol users through a participatory economic culture and mobilise code and data analytics to compose immanent infrastructures” (Langley and Leyshon 2016, 1). Indeed, platforms are imbued with their own highly localized elements as much as their rollout parallels other regional changes to internet practices and services. In other words, global platformization is thought-through Japan and related to domestic, East Asian and international usages of how content and services are conceived at various scales.

Steinberg analyzes the use of platforms as they became a means to transform the Japanese economy, a sector of continued growth in the shadow of the country’s “Lost Decade” (1991–2001) and its recessionary slumps in 2008 and 2014. His syncretic methodology is remarkably balanced, examining platforms “from historical, geographical, cultural, institutional, and corporate perspectives,” a move which provides “an account of [their] discursive development and practical uses” (2). The latter discipline of management theory, rarely brought into dialogue in media and cultural studies scholarship is refreshing, with the research here distilled from McKinsey & Company reports to corporate memos and primary sourced conversations transcribed from talks and press conferences held by industry innovators and CEOs, all of which show the business side of thinking about software

and value chains.

The book also continues what could be called “new configurations of media institutions,” postulated earlier by Steinberg in his *Media Theory in Japan* with claims that Japanese media needs its own history and theory tool kit, which the anthology rigorously outlines, but also elegantly responds to in terms of challenging the “fixation on the United States alone as the site of platform production and platform politics.” (2019, 214) Such an intervention takes shape in Chapter 1, dubbed a prelude to platforms and takes aim at content discourse in Japan, linked, too infrequently, to marketing strategies. Here the contention is framed by content, and that it “rides on existing media and discursive formations, even as it transforms them.” (52) *Kontentsu*, explained by Steinberg as the Japanese derivation of media, presupposes that the term becomes a catch-all in that it designates “anime, manga, light novels, games, and other forms of Japanese subcultural media” (51). Such linguistic differentiation is vital to understand how platforms’ transformative effects have made parts of the internet highly profitable in Japan, particularly online shopping via mobile phones.

Simultaneously, as the book builds its elegant argument a more dominant pulse emerges: a case study of Docomo’s i-mode. The key case study is given forensic detail in Chapter 4. As a “king of content,” Docomo’s i-mode was one of the first platforms in Japan during the 1990s and early 2000s to almost single-handedly create an ecosystem for online shopping on mobile phones and was a “precursor to Apple’s App Store and Google’s Google Play” (147). This bold and original insight

about Docomo's i-mode's precursor status is flawlessly explicated, the argument is marshalled through earlier "stacked" conceptual and theoretical chapters regarding platformization as a process and connection where transactions are facilitated between people, capital and commodities. Platforms and the companies which create them also obfuscate the deadening nature of the work involved in sustaining this industry: coding, online/virtual assistance, to logistical planning in real time. The severity of overwork, burn-out, and suicide mark various sacrificial actions by cognitariats, victims to progress and growth, something that needs urgent critical reflection to determine how the Fourth Industrial Revolution is exploitative to workers in both the internet and telecommunication industries. In order to hold the conservative government in Japan accountable, the abuse of high-tech labour must form part of a complete "corporate narrative" if we are to understand the huge amount of cognitive toil exerted to maintain the operational capacity and financial profitability of these industries. And they are immensely profitable these days. But Steinberg sidesteps Japanese neoliberalism's commodification of content and workers to instead put a benign spin on platform capitalism, dislodging it from the forces of labour needed to make platformization a thing, a new capitalization of digital economic circulation. The collusion of free market principles and the hardware and software that allow this new phase of capitalism to flourish could have been acknowledged in a footnote, all to explicate the dehumanizing effects that administrative level maintenance is

having on ordinary professionals and how media continues to fit into the infrastructural coordinates of neoliberal globalization.

Admittedly, in Steinberg's defence, there is exhaustion with neoliberal capitalism as concept and real economic policy, even if all of its varied forms have yet to be theorized. Academia is now transfixed with digital platforms and platform capitalism. And Steinberg's many points are still salient despite the slippage in charting this transition or refinement of late neoliberalism to what I might call platform neoliberalism. That Docomo's i-mode came to "create a new mode of mediation between multiple partners, pioneering the emergence of the mobile internet as a fee-driven platform," (159) helps to develop the overall indispensable and crucial view of media globalization's new shift. But this is not merely an apologia for a less critical media studies approach deployed by Steinberg either, my own labour studies views aside; rather this book shows, brilliantly, how Japan and its platform economy turned mobile phones into emporiums of goods, linking up new technologies as conditional to the country's internet development. While few have interrogated this booming market's precarization of key workers, its programmers and software engineers and their centrality to smooth-running internet services in Japan, a much-needed Marxian viewpoint can be left to others, as Steinberg's keen understanding of the convergence among markets, internet companies and the finance industry is brilliant in its unpeeling of these layers. But Marxist analysis isn't completely absent here either, as we get

autonomist theory à la Lazzarato to illuminate another component in the cultural logic of mobile phones: that is, that this fetish object outperforms its initial value or function as a communicative tool. Mobile phones are now indispensable interfaces to all sorts of economic opportunities through digital platforms.

To rewind to Chapter 2, “Platform Typology,” Steinberg further explicates the platform as a rejection of hardware-centric uses, drawn from Gillespie’s (2010) focus on YouTube and its corporate positioning as a content hub and not a media conglomerate. Expansion of Negoro Tatsuyuki and Ajiro Satoshi’s three-pronged typology was also smartly cited and elucidated. Steinberg unpacks how “product-technology platforms,” “contents platforms,” and “transactional or mediation platforms” define the practices of platformization writ large. Such a distinction is illuminating, shedding light on objective and technological uses of platforms drawn from primary and secondary sources in both Japanese and English.

The book also teaches us that cultural regionalization in Asia has its place in the process of platformization, with impressive considerations of South Korea’s KakaoTalk and China’s WeChat in his concluding chapter, a balancing of Japan and earlier discussions of globalizing platforms with confidence and fresh insights. Priming these two digital platforms moves us out of the heady theory work Steinberg provides and gives readers more graspable examples of social media that would not be possible without Japan’s innovative development of platform technology. As rival nations,

Korea and China are determined to wrestle away inter-Asia supremacy from Japan, a task they have already accomplished, yet also an onerous pathway as corporate profit continues to shape our global media system. But if profit is to be had, one must rely on knowing one’s history and knowing the history of internet services in Asia, specifically as it applies to Japan. If Japan can claim to be a pioneer in this area—they are and continue to be—and even if attention has been diverted from their current platform culture, Steinberg reminds us that revisiting this history is necessary and until this study, often only known to those who live in Japan or who have read the literature in Japanese.

The Platform Economy, undoubtedly, will become essential reading as the discourses that pertain to platform capitalism grow and area-specific studies are needed to bolster and concretize platformization as process, and platform as digital object. It connotes a parallel history to the late-twentieth century’s hype over globalization, where platforms connect to telecommunication interconnectivity, yet to Steinberg, platforms are also distinct as a meta-concept and real e-commerce domain, conceived as technical objects and business practices. Given our current “platform turn” found in media studies, this book’s rich case studies of platforms from a local-to-regional-to-global perspective reveals not only the ethereality of the term itself but also a detailed cultural history and genesis of the concept emerging out of Japan. One finds the theory to be exciting and erudite and pursued with glorious results. Steinberg not only expands the history of the platform

economy, he envisages its multidimensionality under surveillance capitalism or late neoliberalism, but he does so with charm, intellectual acuity, and purpose. Most strikingly, perhaps, is Steinberg's contention that Japan continues to recentre media globalization, where content's global transformation of the way we shop online points to Japan and its Docomo's i-mode offshoots globally. Transposed from Japan, Docomo's i-mode became the dominant business model, one platform operators such as Google and Netflix and Deliveroo followed and what consumers' see as high-tech infrastructure turning us into a platform society.

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Vanessa R. Schwartz, *Jet Age Aesthetic: The Glamour of Media in Motion*

New Haven: Yale University Press

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During the COVID-19 pandemic, two-hundred travel-hungry Taiwanese went on the “pretend to go abroad” tour through Taipei’s newly renovated Songshan airport. For a day, they could “check in and never leave”: relive the experience of flying, including customs, security, and boarding, and during a looped flight around the island and over the Philippines, eat Michelin star airplane food, and shop duty-free.² The idea that anyone, much less two hundred people, would willingly endure the stress, anxiety, discomfort, and tedium of airplane travel without ever reaching a destination sparked derision in the media.³ Now, air travel is more often associated with quotidian business trips, air sickness, terrorism, and environmental threat (Budd 2014). Yet, those two-hundred wannabe-globe-trotters would find good company in the millions of tourists that flocked to Orly Airport when it first opened, more than fifty years ago, excited to experience—even vicariously—the thrill of international jet plane travel. Vanessa Schwartz’s *Jet Age Aesthetic: The Glamour of Media in Motion* (2020) traces the excitement around and response to early jet travel’s “sensory regime” of “fluid motion and communication on a planetary scale,” and how that has become the contemporary, mundane, globalized “condition of the digital age” (14).⁴

Jet Age Aesthetic is an interdisciplinary study of the visual experience of the early years of global jet air travel through transportation and architectural design, communication media, and photography. Evidenced by its title, Schwartz’s analysis is concerned less with the political, commercial, or technological history of jet travel, but rather with the “deprivation of experience” (6) during flying (see Schivelbusch 1986, also Colomina 2007, 1994). Flying—high above the clouds and weather, insulated from the feeling of moving at all, time and space collapsed—was much like contemporary globalized virtual flows of information and capital “which dematerialized experience into a system of circulating spaces, people, and images” (14), Schwartz argues. In other words, transportation and media infrastructure “served the same end in one network by facilitating circulation” and were in fact “virtually identical” (11). Schwartz traces this development toward a jet-propelled network of people, information, and media through four case studies. The first two—airport architecture and Disneyland—focus on design that emphasized buildings and spaces as conduits for moving between airports or between themed areas. The next two chapters—the third on the “jet set”

and photojournalism, and the fourth on Ernst Haas's photography—move further away from transportation and human movement, and instead examine international travel's influence on artistic expression and cultural norms. In her pivot away from actual air travel air travel, she argues that photography, especially news and magazine photography, "are the linchpin in discussions of modern experiences of motion, of experiences of speeding up time and collapsing physical space" (13). Her analysis is fascinating, very readable, and interdisciplinary—encompassing design, art, and cultural studies. It expands beyond depictions and images of jet travel to examine interconnected epistemologies of visibility and lived experience, much like her earlier work did (Schwartz 1998).

The first chapter explores the development and design of sprawling suburban airports built in the 1960s to accommodate the size and increased use of jet planes, namely Los Angeles International Airport, Kennedy Airport's TWA Terminal, Dulles Airport in Chantilly, Virginia, and Orly Airport in Paris. The architects of these airports, which were far outside city centres, designed them to be built for their own obsolescence. Unlike previous transportation hubs, they were "antimonumental," or "in a constant state of becoming" (46), modifiable for changing technologies of travel. The airports emphasized "the people flying rather than the machines flying" (22), the spectacle of the airplane sidelined. Architects valued the circulation of passengers—escalators, new elevators, and people movers that glided from one floor to the next—that would expand "the experience of flight" (19-

20), "deadening passenger sensation in favor of circulation" (23). In the seamless transition between highway, train, airport, airplane, and back to highway, travel was not so much through space as through time—more of a displacement than a voyage (27). Yet, in discussing the expansion of airports, Schwartz overlooks the politics of moving them farther outside the city centre, which had as much to do with jet planes and architectural philosophy as it did with contracts, capital, and regional development subsidies (see Adey 2006, 76, also Graham and Marvin 2001). The streamlined network moved data, people, and packages smoothly through space, as if between rides at an amusement park.

Instead of transporting people by airplane, the second chapter—on Disneyland, the Ford Pavilion, and the "it's a small world" attraction at the 1964 World's Fair—examines Disney's and Ford's corporate imaginary of future transportation of people. Most scholarship on Disney concerns the ideology, corporate history, or the culture of nostalgia creation Disney capitalizes on through detailed "theming" of various environments. Schwartz looks instead at the interstices between the themed environments at the park and the World's Fair attractions, examining holistically how attendees circulated through the park via monorail, sidewalk, roller coasters, and rides (60–1). Attendees coursing through Disneyland animated the spectacle and narrative of an interconnected, technological world defined by smooth, invisible transportation (97). For Schwartz, Disneyland's novelty was not in reimagining a nonexistent past, but in depicting a society and cul-

ture organized by global movement.

Chapter three traces the cultural consequences of global air travel through media portrayal of the “jet set”—the postwar nomadic elite⁵—whose movements, lifestyle, and appearance were recorded and followed by photo magazines like *Life*. These “jet setters” privileged mobility over colonial land ownership (112), yet retrenched colonialism through travel along routes “where certain infrastructural preconditions existed” (113). While Schwartz references the colonial and postcolonial nature of air travel, aggravated by western photographers seeking more and more “exotic” and obscure places, her European and American focus causes her to ignore the unequal and highly unsmooth nature of global travel (see Budd 2014), which has exacerbated unequal flows of humans and migration (see Adey, Budd and Hubbard 2007). The second part of the chapter situates photojournalism within its exploitation of and reliance on transportation infrastructure. Air mail was critical to getting photos to magazines for publication at faster speeds (Schwartz 2020, 124), and “hot news” was reliant on the same transportation and communication infrastructure that allowed for the “jet set.” Photography was evidence of fast communication, and magazines worked closely with airlines to transport both journalists and materials to distant locations and quickly back again (124), because photographs “testified to embodied experience elsewhere” (137)—particularly colour photographs, which “became the visual language for translating experience of motion” (137).

The fourth chapter moves farther

away from Schwartz’s central argument, focusing entirely on the work of photojournalist Ernst Haas during the 1960s and 1970s. His experiments in colour photography “conveyed the... experience of fluid motion that characterized the world remade by the jet” (141). Colour, unlike black and white photography, had been relegated largely to journalism for its “realism” and due to the bulky and slow cameras needed (148). Haas’s photography demonstrated artistic value and paved its entrance into museums, due to his use of motion and colour, which expressed “motion through color” (140). His blurred photographs expressed a “subjective vision” that, Schwartz argues, went beyond Futurist experiments with the aesthetics of motion (169). While it is a fascinating chapter on the history of colour photography, especially considering Haas’s influential role in establishing the art form, her central thesis on the changing experience of movement and aesthetics of space feels inordinately stretched to encompass the topic, and the chapter speaks more to her earlier histories of journalistic media than to transportation.

The book’s direction and final subject of focus is not jet travel at all, but photography and visual culture. In part, this is intentional, as Schwartz traces the sidelining of actual airplanes in culture. Near the end of the introduction, she describes a late 1940s advertisement *Time* displayed in an airport, which replaced the image of the “Man of the Year” on a blown-up *Time* magazine cover with a curved mirror. That “air age” ad transformed the airport crowds into the subject of world news, and thereby “collapsed

transport and magazines and passengers into one system of circulation” (16). Yet, that loop, much like the book, conspicuously misses the actual airplane and the larger historical context of air travel, and by doing so exaggerates the radical change that jet engines produced. Globalism and smooth travel were “anticipated before the advent of jet travel what the jet would later accomplish,” she writes, admitting the cultural, technological, and social changes that were already taking place, but without elaborating on their influence (16). Smooth travel was touted as revolutionary when airplanes first developed pressurized cabins and could fly above the weather—a decade before the jet (Solberg 1979; also see Davies 2011; Heppenheimer 1995; Budd 2011). So, while jets definitely made airline travel more commonplace, smoother, easier, more affordable, and invisible, they were not alone responsible for the shift, and were ushered in by the decades of “air age.” Moreover, in the postwar period car tourism expanded radically (Sheller 2005; Urry 2013), and travel itself became easier on many fronts, not just through air. Schwartz touches on this when talking about airports and transportation infrastructure and mentions how automobiles reflected the sleek aerodynamic aesthetics of airplanes, with their rear fins, or “wings.” The jet age imagined air travel as a form of mass transportation, rather than personal transportation, which thanks to the 1956 Highway Act, was fulfilled by ever-larger, comfortable automobiles. Changing imaginaries of air travel were closely linked to the simultaneous popularization of automobiles, evidenced in Ford’s World Fair pa-

vilion (Schwartz 2020, 87), a link that feels underbaked. By dodging the technological and corporate historical context of commercial airlines and airplanes, and overlooking the “air age,” she grants the jet age’s visual and experiential revolution more of a mystique than it actually had.

While the changes in the late 1950s and 1960s might not have been as sudden and exceptional as Schwartz claims, widely available global jet travel has certainly reshaped geopolitics.⁶ She claims that the jet travellers’ view of earth was too obscured by clouds to see the ground. Yet, while perhaps specific geography might become minute thirty thousand feet high, the view of the earth’s curve from airplanes also encourages a different perspective, that of a “world cleansed” (Govil 2005, 247), muffled to political delineations and the complexities of sovereign power, in addition to the discomfort of motion. By focusing on the experience of a commercial jet passenger (particularly a well-heeled one), and not on the larger context of the transportation/technological/geopolitical history of the jet, Schwartz sidesteps the jet’s military past, and the problematics of air mobility, both of which cast a shadow over the strength of her argument.

The political, and ideological experience of aviation remains underdeveloped through the book. Her approach and theoretical framework are fascinating, and the work is certainly a valuable contribution to visual arts scholarship, expanding on theories of the formation of mediated space. Yet, she shies away from the harsher geopolitics behind the aesthetic formation of space and movement. While Schwartz examines the imaginary

of smooth movement, depicted in blurred photographs and experienced on Disneyland's monorail, her analysis slips away from examining what is blurred, what is smoothed, and what still remains rough and difficult to access.

Notes

1. Reuters 2020.
2. See Wescott 2020; Sugiura et al. 2020; NewsRound 2020; Pallini 2020.
3. Sagal and Kurtis 2020.
4. And, to be fair, even now. While reading about the Songshan airport, I discovered a genre of YouTube videos of people giving tours of airports. It's crazy. I obviously don't travel enough.
5. Wealthy expatriates, actors, and dancers, who supplanted the old elites that had been the subject of society gossip columns in magazines and newspapers. Rather than obeying the strict rules and customs of the wealthy, lampooned by authors like Edith Wharton in *The Age of Innocence*, whose status was demonstrated in how far downtown they lived in Manhattan, the jet set moved continually, temporarily settling in exotic and "obscure" locations around the world, a "modern tribe" (110) identified by their "cultivated idiosyncrasy" (113).
6. Jets "changed the praxis of political economy and national security" writes Aaltola (Aaltola 2005, 262). Lucy Budd and Andrew R. Goetz's edited collection examined the lack of integration into "the global space of air traffic flows" (2014, 9), as have many geographers in the field of mobility (Adey 2006; Adey

2009; Cresswell 2006; Divall 2014; Sheller 2001; Urry 2000). Airports became crucial hubs in a globalized economy, and necessary for a nation's development and participation. Geographers have examined the hub-and-spoke shape of transportation networks that entrench center-periphery geopolitics (see O'Kelly 1998; Zook and Brunn 2006) and shape the "boundaries of the American led empire" (Aaltola 2005, 262), claimed by a militant, all-seeing aerial eye (see Merriman et. al 2017; Cosgrove 1994). Much of previous media scholarship on aviation has focused on that violent perspective "from above," shaped by military surveillance, (Virilio 1989; Cosgrove 1994; Amoore 2007; Packer and Reeves 2013; Parks 2013; Parks 2016; Der Derian 2009; Kaplan et. al 2013), which Schwartz speedily circumvents.

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Salomé Aguilera Skvirsky, *The Process Genre: Cinema and the Aesthetic of Labor*

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The status of film genre—as a manner of categorizing cinema—has been debated by film scholars and theorists since the mid-twentieth century. While some scholars doubt that the idea of film genre captures qualities that characterize well-defined categories of films, others continue to develop film genre theory and deepen our understanding of how film genres develop and evolve. Salomé Aguilera Skvirsky's *The Process Genre: Cinema and the Aesthetic of Labor* (2020) focuses on a neglected transmedial genre: the process genre. While this genre has played a part in many different forms of media throughout history, Skvirsky argues, it often remains nameless or understood as absorbed by other genres (mainly the industrial film and education film). In this ambitious text, Skvirsky not only calls attention to this overlooked genre, but also demonstrates its aesthetic, political, and transnational cultural significance.

Skvirsky begins *The Process Genre* with a rigorous introduction that establishes her research questions and the fundamental syntax and conventions of the genre. In this chapter, Skvirsky first sketches out the sequence of the process in six very different types of films (from nontheatrical films to commercial endeavors) spanning a century (from 1906 to 2011).

These quick outlines familiarize the reader with the look and feel of the process genre. Skvirsky follows these vignettes with an examination of the qualities that these very different sequences and films share. She asserts that these sequences share four central characteristics: formal commonality (using a distinctive representational syntax), extent to which they absorb the spectator, depiction of labor (the encounter between human body, instruments, and materials), and their capacity to “provide knowledge about the world” (Skvirsky 2020, 15). These characteristics, while hallmarks of the process genre, are not depicted as “hard-and-fast criteria” (15). Skvirsky asserts that the definitive feature of the process genre is “processual representation” (16). Processual representation, Skvirsky asserts, is the formal manner in which a process is shown/displayed in chronological order. She supplements this definition by demarcating what can be considered a process. A process is a “continuous series of steps or actions that have a particular result and contain definite order of steps” (16). A process always has a beginning, a middle, and an end. Yet, it is significant to note, not all representations of processes can be understood as processual representation. Processual representation operates as a “formal

achievement” that conveys *how* a process is done, rather than simply show what is done (16). Skvirsky offers an example to help illustrate processual representation: she invites the reader to imagine how they would represent the act of toothbrushing (a process) on film. One could “show a five-second shot of a child unscrewing the cap on a tube of toothpaste and, in the next three-second shot, show her leaving the bathroom” (16). While this scene would be a filmic representation of toothbrushing, it would not be considered a processual representation of the toothbrushing process. Such a scene would suggest the process of toothbrushing but would give “no sense of toothbrushing as being composed of a series of steps [and] no sense of *how* to brush one’s teeth” (17, author’s emphasis). Therefore, Skvirsky asserts that while representations of processes constitute processual representation, “not all representations of processes are processual” (17).

Subsequently, after clarifying this defining feature of the genre, Skvirsky then establishes the formal conventions that characterize the process genre. First, she discusses editing and fast motion: techniques which allow a film to elide time and curate which moments of process to show and which to erase. Second, she examines slow motion and animation which can extend a process and give it a longer duration (remembering duration is fundamental to the process). Skvirsky’s third formal characteristic is framing, and she focuses on how framing makes action visible as a process (22). Lastly, Skvirsky considers performance (of actors, machines), and the importance of fluidity and avoidance of digression

or interruption. The process film, relying on these shared conventions, “can be profitably understood as a ciné-genre” which are primarily composed of “medium specific formal features and their concomitant visceral effects on spectators,” instead of shared narrative elements “that easily translate to other media” (47). Therefore, while other media can produce processual representation, the process genre has a particular relationship to the film medium.

Chapter One, “The Process Film in Context,” reflects upon two histories affecting the context of the process genre: (i) the history of processual representation in associated film genres (industrial film, educational film) and (ii) the history of processual representation in pre-cinematic works. In this chapter, Skvirsky attempts to answer her research questions regarding the process genre’s longevity and its relation to medium. Tracking the genre’s formal stability, she traces its history back to fifteenth-century Europe. As a “genre of modernity,” its earliest forms came into being due to changing structures of production (52). Skvirsky notes that shifts in combat, craft, and machine technologies during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries necessitated new ways in which to train citizens. Pictorial instructions, an early form of processual representation, helped codify and standardize effective practices. In these early examples, the method of production represented more than just the literal process; it also acted as “an index of a mode of production—and by extension, of the status and character of a people or civilization” (52). In this chapter, Skvirsky traces the process genre within indus-

trial, educational, and ethnographic films. She asserts that the process genre, prominently represented in such cinema, can characterize such diverse types of film because processual syntax predates cinema. Before cinema, live demonstrations of crafts and machines and pictorial instructions relied on processual representation. With this historical context, we can understand that by the time cinema attempted the process genre, its syntax was already “a well-developed, ready-to-hand, versatile formula” with a proven record of entertaining diverse audiences (76).

“On Being Absorbed in Work” follows Skvirsky’s first chapter with a contemplation of the process genre’s appeal and strange capacity for spectatorial absorption. Skvirsky suggests that this mesmerizing absorption emanates from the genre’s predominant narrative structures. While process genre films generally tend to eschew psychological identification, they create a narrative structure through “the generic, protocol character” and the significance of a strong impression of closure (81). Process narration produces curiosity and surprise through an interplay between the familiar and the unknown. The viewer, who may know and understand the generic object produced through the process, does not grasp the object’s genesis. This ignorance of the process mirrors our relation to “the dazzling commodities of our modern consumer society” (95). Modern customers generally do not know the conditions of a product’s creation, where the product was produced, or who made it. This “alienation from the production of goods” in relation to the familiarity of the actual

object or action being enacted creates an intensely mesmerizing effect, eliciting narrative structures of curiosity, excitement, suspense, and surprise (Elizabeth Cain cited in Skvirsky 2020, 95).

While Chapter Two focuses on the genre’s narrative structures, Chapter Three contemplates the aestheticizing of labor through the process genre. Processual representation articulates process as a demonstration of technique and skill. Rather than emphasize the toil of work, the genre aestheticizes the labor represented and depicts it as “approaching the magic standard of zero labor” (116). Here, Skvirsky considers how the process genre film, through the representation of demystification, produces an air of magic. Processual representation reveals the steps involved in the creation of a product—demystifying the creation process. Yet, by only showing the perfected process (enacted smoothly by skilled laborers), the process genre elides the portrayal of the toil and drudgery of labor. Skvirsky contends that the magic of a process comes from its ability to approach “ideal technology, the magic standard of zero labor” (118). While the process genre’s emphasis on skill results in the aestheticization of the labor represented, Skvirsky argues that this does not mean the genre is inherently Taylorist, solely interested in the management of productivity and efficiency, or politically regressive. Processual representation can be mobilized, she asserts, for both progressive and reactionary politics. Yet, while the genre does not commit to any one politics, it is committed to a particular metaphysics of labor. This metaphysics maintains the view that a

successful or thriving human life centres around labor. Premised on this logic, the genre offers both the right and the left “a future-oriented vision of the good life in which humans could be freed from necessity and the toil of labor, in which our condition would be governed as if by magic” (144).

After considering the metaphysics of labor and its role in the political uptake of the process genre, Skvirsky traces the manner in which filmmakers mobilize the genre for racial and national politics. She returns to industrial, educational, and ethnographic film to examine their historical investments in concepts such as civilization, development, and nation. These types of films, and the artifacts and processes they represent, contain a symbolic capacity: “[t]hey speak of and for the nation or state or community or society that produced them” (147). This symbolic function within the genre generally uplifts ideas of national superiority and the need to locate different cultures’ developmental paths. Skvirsky focuses on New Latin American Cinema films from Chile and Brazil where processual syntax is central to the films’ aims and their powerful capacity to represent “the significance of the practical living intelligence of the mixed, folk subject” (165). The leftist filmmakers producing these process genre films valorized “a new national-popular, non-White subject”—one capable of altering an unjust, hierarchical society through a transformative, romantic, anticapitalist approach (184).

Skvirsky’s penultimate chapter demonstrates the limits of the process genre. Here, Skvirsky focuses on affective labor in the film *Parque vía* (En-

rique Rivero 2008). This film centres on a domestic servant and the affective, and immaterial, labor of his position. *Parque vía* studies affective labor through an intertextual dialogue with Chantal Akerman’s *Jeanne Dielman, 23, quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975)—a film used in Skvirsky’s introductory sketches of the process genre. Skvirsky asserts that while *Parque vía* stages kinetic labor (labor involving the movement of the body), it is not a process film; in fact, she labels it “an anti-process film” (194). While *Parque vía* invokes and explores the complexity of affective and kinetic work, it rejects the practices of the process genre in order to explore the opaque and dense subject of twenty-first century affective labor.

Skvirsky’s concluding chapter considers spoofs and parodies of the process genre. She considers the process genre’s surge in popularity in twenty-first century televisual and new media outlets. She suggests that this uptake of the genre may mark a particular anxiety and uncertainty regarding “the conditions of human life in the face of significant changes to the way production is organized and managed” (220). Processual representation works to separate, classify, and re-form labor, allowing “human beings to appropriate the world for themselves” (236). The utopian idealism of the process genre can work to console a society that has become “too complex to be masterable” (220).

The Process Genre: Cinema and the Aesthetic of Labor traverses space and time in its excavation of transmedial history. Skvirsky, working through the process genre’s complexities and limitations, gives the reader a new lan-

guage in which to think through representations of labor. The meticulous research that makes up Skvirsky's text becomes only more impressive when one considers the immense and vast historical ground she covers. While Skvirsky's remarkable research asserts many rules, conventions, and stabilities of the process genre, she also leaves her readers with an open ending. Her conclusion invites the question of whether the process genre will

continue its career or wither away. Can the process genre, having survived centuries of employment and experimentation, continue to thrive as labor evolves indefinitely?

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ZOË ANNE LAKS

With proclamations of a nonhuman turn appearing with increasing frequency over the past two decades, James Leo Cahill's 2019 book *Zoological Surrealism: The Nonhuman Cinema of Jean Painlevé* joins the flurry of new scholarship focused around a critical practice of de-anthropocentrism. This so-called turn, perhaps most clearly exemplified in Richard Grusin's 2015 anthology *The Nonhuman Turn*, which consolidates various streams of scholarly discourse under the umbrella term of the nonhuman, coheres through a central aim to reposition the human as nonexceptional. Another branch of such discourse, what is now often termed "critical posthumanism" (invoking *post-* in the retrospective rather than teleological sense), has sought to re-evaluate humanism since the early 1990s, and with it the assumption that the human subject should necessarily occupy the centre of philosophical thinking.

It is in this spirit that *Zoological Surrealism* takes up a reconsideration of the films of Jean Painlevé, a mid-century French filmmaker oft neglected in academic and popular discourse alike. Despite having created close to two hundred films across his career, there remains a dearth of sustained investigation into Painlevé's works—a

lack of critical attention which Cahill's new book seeks to remedy.

In a vein similar to Drew Ayers's *Vernacular Posthumanism*, also published in 2019, *Zoological Surrealism* draws out cinema's inherently revolutionary potential as a function of its inhuman (mechanical) and transhistorical (Cahill 2019b, 23) properties, in order to reorient our ways of viewing both the nonhuman and the human world. The central tenet of this book is that Painlevé's works draw on cinema's so-called Copernican vocation, "an ordinary job of the cinema" (314) to shift the human from the centre to the periphery, as Copernicus's scientific discoveries accomplished in the realm of astronomy half a millennium prior. This same destabilizing and defamiliarizing characteristic of Painlevé's work has been remarked upon in earlier scholarship. Ralph Rugoff, for one, claims that Painlevé's filmmaking is often uncanny in its "intellectual uncertainty"; as he points out, these films often render the human alien and strange within the wider landscape of "nature's bizarre marvels" (2000, 49, 50).

Cahill builds on and extends these few prior studies on Painlevé's life and filmography in a rigorous overview of the first half of Painlevé's career (1924–

1949) by investigating his and his films' relationships to contemporaneous ideological, scientific, artistic, and political movements. *Zoological Surrealism* charts Painlevé's films alongside historical and scientific developments in film, culture, and technology in the 1920s through to the 1940s, including the rise and popularity of comparative anatomy and new physics; Surrealism and early film theory; breakthroughs in film sound and underwater filmmaking; and sociopolitical movements like the "battle of the sexes," critical humanism, and imperialist rhetoric in interwar and wartime France. Relying on archival research alongside close readings of films, essays, and photographs by Painlevé and others, Cahill draws out the connections between his chosen case studies and their historical settings in order to destabilize traditionally humanist ways of understanding historical material.

The book pairs this historical materialist-based methodology with a theoretical charge, developing specific theories in each chapter that spring out of Painlevé's films. Cahill's writing style is playful and associational, and can occasionally become emotionally demanding, as his analyses directly address the suffering and violence against animals depicted in Painlevé's films in sometimes graphic terms.

The thread uniting Cahill's analyses—cinema's Copernican vocation—is a concept that builds on previous works by Cahill, in which he has extrapolated the theoretical potential of both *unheimlich* cinema (2013) as well as natural history's "estranged gaze," which each perform a similar role in rendering nature and the natural

strange through historical displacement (2019a, 153, 155).

The book's chapters are ordered both chronologically and according to common themes and rhetoric linking each set of films together. Chapter 1, "Neozoological Dramas: Comparative Anatomy by Other Means," explicates three practices that Cahill identifies in Painlevé's works which decontextualize on-screen subjects and offer new theoretically productive relationships between humans and animals. Cahill links the practice of a zoological form of Surrealism (or 'neozoology' in Painlevé's terms) with comparative anatomy, which involves a strategy of taxonomic grouping based in the logic of analogy, and with the play of scales, for instance between the microscopic and the gigantic, a practice which Cahill argues stages a provocative relationship between part and whole.

This chapter mainly discusses these concepts vis-à-vis three short films by Painlevé from 1928: *The Octopus*, *The Daphnia*, and *The Sea Urchins*, each of which reflexively draws attention to their own filmic apparatus and modes of production, a strategy which Cahill argues instills a sense of defamiliarization we might carry forward into our "habituated scales of perception" (85). Cahill offers the close-up as a formal strategy that enacts these practices in depicting "*a part apart*" (77, original emphasis), a technique which introduces internal difference within apparently self-identical animal subjects. In a way recalling Jakob von Uexküll's *Umwelt* or "soap bubbles"—which delineate animals' environments as distinct worlds containing individual scales and temporalities (2010, 69–70)—Ca-

hill argues that this aesthetic strategy offers an entry into new worlds, where magnification might reveal the potential for new ecologies and landscapes the further down you go (2019b, 82).

Chapter 2, “Metamorphoses: Crustaceans, the Coming of Sound, and Plasmatic Anthropomorphism,” delves into Cahill’s concept of plasmatic anthropomorphism, which enacts metamorphoses of human and animal through analogical thinking. The chapter aims to recuperate as theoretically productive the anthropomorphic tendencies in Painlevé’s early films, a rhetorical strategy that was especially pronounced through their sound and commentary tracks (96). This discussion follows the lead of other contemporary scholars attempting to reclaim the critical potential within the maligned concept of anthropomorphism. This trend has been on the rise in academic discourse since Daston and Mitman’s 2005 anthology *Thinking with Animals: Perspectives on Anthropomorphism*.

Cahill’s approach toward anthropomorphism focuses on its potential for anti-essentialism and transformation as a formal and theoretical praxis (137); in so doing, he builds on Sergei Eisenstein’s concept of the plasmatic, which was rooted in the fluid and mutable form of animation (96–97). The chapter chiefly applies this concept to Painlevé’s *The Hermit Crab* (1929) and *Hyas and Stenorhynchus, Marine Crustaceans* (1929) by articulating how these films challenge the boundary between animal and human, rendering the human being decentred and relative through the logic of analogy. In this way, Painlevé’s anthropomorphic analogies between animal and human

emphasize our and their “protean capacity to become otherwise” (135).

Chapter 3, “*Amour Flou: The Seahorse and the Blur of Sex*,” concerns itself with a concept Cahill terms *amour flou* (blurred love), which is based on the Surrealist idea of *amour fou* (mad love). The chapter anchors this discussion in the sexual politics of Surrealism, where love offers “a blurring of corporeal and conceptual boundaries” (160), and Cahill applies this reading to Painlevé’s *The Seahorse* (1934). The chapter argues that the film reveals the non-essential and relative nature of human gender and sex (159) by positioning humans within “a broader spectrum of behaviors” (160).

Cahill’s analysis implicitly invokes John Berger’s work on looking at animals, in which the animal always functions as the observed rather than the observer—in Berger’s words, “The fact that they can observe us has lost all significance” (1980, 16). However, Cahill offers an alternative possibility, where the ideal of *amour flou*, which can be conjured through techniques like superimpositions, allows us to stage an encounter with animals “on more commensurate terms” (2019b, 177). As Cahill details, superimpositions in *The Seahorse*, as a manifestation of *amour flou*, create points of contact between human and animal images, which “implicat[e] the spectators in the film’s on-screen erotic economy” (181), and in so doing blur human with nonhuman animal attraction.

Chapter 4, “Substitutes, Vectors, and the Circulatory Systems of Modernity: *Dr. Normet’s Serum: Experimental Treatment of a Hemorrhage in a Dog and The Vampire*,” discusses documentary surrealism by way of two films direc-

ted by Painlevé which are centrally concerned with blood: *Dr Normet's Serum* (1929) and *The Vampire* (1945). Cahill positions these films within the sociopolitical context of interwar and wartime-era colonialism and imperialism in France, where fears of contagion and doctrines of hygiene were commonplace (219, 233).

He posits that the technique of grafting extratextual footage into these films functions to introduce internal difference according to “logics of contagion” (234) and he frames vampirism as a challenge to humanity’s exceptionalism through its ability to place humans back into the food chain, rendering us the objects of animal ends and thereby “implicat[ing] humans in animality” (259). This analysis brings Painlevé’s practice of animal exploitation closer to home, as this chapter focuses on animal films with mammals (dog and bat) as opposed to crustaceans—and indeed Cahill’s key claim here is that these films depict animals as proxies or analogies for human beings according to an imperialist rhetoric.

Chapter 5, “Carnivorous Cinema: *Freshwater Assassins* and *Blood of the Beasts*,” the final chapter of *Zoological Surrealism*, theorizes a so-called carnivorous cinema, as a bodily reflection on acts of killing. Cahill admits that it may be difficult for modern viewers to appreciate the critical potential in these films, which depict the explicit deaths of their animal subjects, but throughout this discussion he strives to draw out their recuperative potential nonetheless.

Focusing on *Freshwater Assassins* (1947) and *Blood of the Beasts* (1949) (a film directed by Georges Franju,

though Painlevé wrote the commentary), Cahill positions these films within the context of postwar French colonialism and the Holocaust. In so doing, Cahill is careful to acknowledge the cost of reading these films’ animal subjects as analogues for human beings, admitting that “these readings often risk disavowing the slaughter of animals on-screen, as if the turn to historical allegory [make] the bare facts of carnivorous cultures more bearable and spectators less accountable” (290). This chapter explores these films’ temporal dimensions in a manner recalling others’ work on animal imagery, such as Paul Sheehan’s analysis of the animal image. Where Sheehan describes images of animals as fundamentally “anti-cinema,” being both contingent and existing without history (2008, 122), Cahill argues that *Freshwater Assassins* “suggests the terror of a perpetual present tense,” where violence and death coalesce into a generalized, universal image (2019b, 272).

Each chapter in *Zoological Surrealism* aims to offer a different path toward the critical reclamation of Painlevé’s oeuvre, by striving toward a holistic process of “*unthinking anthropocentrism*” (25, original emphasis). Cahill’s project in this respect is convincing in articulating how these films disrupt ideologies of human primacy, while walking a careful line between confronting these films’ part in animal exploitation and their critical potential, a problem familiar to many scholarly works on animal studies. In the book’s conclusion, Cahill frames this problem as a tension between on the one hand instrumental history, as that which belongs to the generalized and abstract, and on the other “the in-

assimilable particularity of individual experience—the history that hurts—beyond the grasp of any redemptive project” (307–08).

The core contribution this book offers lies in its historiographical perspective, as it serves to contextualize not only the teleological and anthropocentric way we typically think of history but also the historical contingency of our beliefs about the boundaries and relationship between the human and nonhuman. This overarching historiographical approach is bolstered with sustained historical materialist analysis, which grounds each theory and critical reading of Painlevé’s films in meticulously detailed descriptions of the specific historical context of their productions. The resulting theories proposed are ensconced within their individual historical positionality and are formulated through a dialectical relationship between then and now. As a result, the book leaves open questions surrounding these de-anthropocentric paradigms’ relevance to contemporary contexts. Indeed, the study makes few efforts to explicitly link these critical readings to present-day concerns, except in broad terms, regarding the general relevance of such a project to today’s “era of accelerated ecological precariousness” (25) and the dialectical relationship between past and present. Instead, the project essentially works to “activate” history (310) through this dialectic, and thereby offers the potential to craft new methods of decentring the human historically, and thus to see film, the past, and the world at large in a changed way. As Cahill sums up elsewhere, “We must learn to see our own troubled present with the eyes of

natural historians, which is also to say, through a surrealist optic” (2019a, 156).

However, if we rescale the link between Painlevé’s films and the present day, from the macro- to the micro-level, in the case of the individual theories proposed throughout *Zoological Surrealism*, the strong roots of paradigms such as *amour flou* within their sociohistorical circumstances provoke questions as to their continued power and relevance to the contemporary intellectual and social landscape. Might we invoke the concept of *amour flou* as a model to describe environmental love or machinic love today, for instance? Superimposition as a device for depicting blur-as-love offers tantalizing possibilities for reading into the Copernican vocation of modern-day filmmaking, yet the concept of *amour flou* as Cahill theorizes it remains abstracted from contemporary social concerns. Cahill offers no easy answers, leaving us with the provocative question of how and why we might apply these theories beyond outside their original historical contexts. It is thus the intersection point between history and theory which *Zoological Surrealism* occupies that offers the most challenging and provocative ideas of this book, as the two approaches stand in productive tension throughout, reverberating with deep questions concerning the relationship between theory and history more broadly.

An emotionally challenging, theoretically stimulating, and historically rigorous read, this book ultimately offers timely new perspectives on an important historical figure and the legacy of his works, and it challenges us to develop new and creative approaches

to de-anthropocentric praxis, with the overarching urge for increased care and attention to nonhuman animal life.

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Justus Nieland, *Happiness by Design: Modernism and Media in the Eames Era*

Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020.

KYLA ROSE SMITH

“Mid-century modernism” is a rather capacious term to describe a design aesthetic applied to a wide range of household objects, graphic design arts, and architecture from the late 1940s through to the mid-1960s. The visual markers of this moment in design history continue to be delineated in interior design magazines, Pinterest boards, and eBay listings today. In its own time, the style was often rebuked as “de-fanged and banalized” modernism by its critics (Nieland 2020, 8). This middlebrow modernism was seen to infiltrate everyday life through the American discourse of “good design for everyday objects,” a push to improve public taste through consumption that was found in all manner of media including motion pictures, print advertising, and exhibitions at museums and fairs. The underlying message of this good design rhetoric held that consuming modern design would enable one to attain the happiness that modern capitalism affords. Thus, Justus Nieland explains, “[t]he mid-century has been often viewed as the moment of modernism’s institutionalization and the domestication of its utopian demands on the senses” (1). In his latest book, *Happiness by Design*, Nieland traces a different narrative of mid-century modernism, one which highlights a series of vital projects en-

trenched in a pedagogical impulse.

Extensively researched and richly illustrated, *Happiness by Design* is a fascinating and inventive approach to the transformations of modernism at mid-century. Rather than focus on the established role that discourses on good design played in the transformations of the American domestic sphere, Nieland turns attention on the creative and broadly interdisciplinary projects of designers. By the mid-twentieth century, design had become a profession imbued with new social and cultural prestige. In the United States, designers like the Eameses, Eero Saarinen, Morton and Millie Goldscholl, Buckminster Fuller, and others repositioned themselves as not only designers but as *managers* of a “epochal change” in an era marked not only by the birth of the Information Age but the growth, at large, of a managerial society. As such, Nieland situates his study at an intersection of modernism and media studies. The interdisciplinary of his approach results in a lively narrative woven through unlikely sites and understudied objects. These were sites, Nieland explains, of creative production blending art practice and technoscience as designers grappled with the demands of the Cold War world.¹ Nieland shows how designers refashioned themselves in this period

as cultural administrators of a sort, galvanized by the possibilities art and design held for the communication of ideas. Beset by a world of technological saturation, these designers sought to contend with the increased media and data flows of the early Information Age. Nieland surveys the varied sites at which designers experimented with modernism's "materialities of communication" including film, material arts, furniture design, and visual art conferences (Nieland 2020, 11).

Design powerhouse couple Ray and Charles Eames are the central figures in this period of exuberant design experimentation and collaboration, hence Nieland's use of the term "Eames-era"—the book is less a discussion of the Eameses' work in the period alone as it is more holistically a survey of media experimentation between the years 1950–1970, especially the use of film technologies as what he calls the "defining media" of postwar happiness (Nieland 2020, 2). The mid-twentieth century saw a kind of communications boom, in which the "scientifizing" of communication, a project begun by social scientists in the 1930s, reached a peak.² The idea of a happiness "by design," Nieland explains, asserts the idea that a subjective well-being was attainable within a careful system of "necessary limits or rational constraints" (31). This happiness, then, was one carefully engineered by planners and experts, evidence of the very technocratic ambitions at the core of this managerial project (31). It was within this paradigm of a technical and often technocratic agenda of postwar, liberal well-being, then, that designers invented new uses for film and moving image media. Future-oriented

in its scope and operation, this form of the American pursuit of happiness was both nebulous and practical: designers undertook to solve problems through design.

Modernism, by the 1950s, had become refined into so-called "high modernism," within the postwar demands for communicative efficiency, transparency, and human expression. Characterized by an unwavering belief in the function of technology to re-order society, for critics like Herbert Marcuse and Meyer Schapiro, this integration of a new modernism, mired in the happy face of the domestic everyday, resulted in an institutionalized modernism in what Nieland terms their "death-by-communication" thesis (11). Nieland offers up this view by way of staking his own claim. He argues that such a view "downplays the role of modernism in the midcentury administration of culture" which was taking place in many arenas including philanthropic institutions, universities, and at the governmental level (11). Thus he acknowledges modernism's entanglement with managerial projects in this period, but instead of condemning it suggests this is a useful way to consider modernism at this period through pedagogical impulses and the quest for "happiness" (a quintessentially American pursuit) rather than through a perhaps now stale genealogy of modern design aesthetics.

This focus elucidates Nieland's argument for the interdisciplinary of modernist design where the designer's "communicative zeal" makes clear a commitment to the idea of using mediatic design as a form of communication and problem solving (Nieland 2020, 6). The humanistic angle of this pursuit is,

Nieland explains, a desire on the part of designers to rectify a splintered field of specialized knowledges—an impediment to the ideal of free-flowing discussion and knowledge sharing in the pursuit of communication. Moreover, though, it sought to reposition the human agent as “a response to the scale and power of postwar technics” and the pressure those brought upon the human agent in the period (22). For the Eameses, and their contemporaries, communication was the vital stuff of social organization, and “happy-integration [joining] human society and nonhuman processes” (21). As such a central attribute of these projects is the “expansive liberal optimism” which runs throughout a multimedia pedagogy whose spaces extend from the domestic to the geopolitical (96).

Yet despite the grand ambitions and scalar breadth of these projects, the form of modernism Nieland attributes to the Eames-era is “human-sized”—this is user-friendly, humanistic modernism which bridged mid-century media ecology with evolving notions of lifestyle in the postwar era (7). To be sure, there was a pervasive humanist sentiment in mid-century thought, in part a reaction to the shadow of fascism and destruction of the Second World War. Yet Nieland’s assertion represents a departure from previous accounts that typically frame the high modernist period as one of broad-scope technocratic projects which did not necessarily attend to the messy realities of human existence. One might consider, for instance, the austere building projects exemplified by Bauhaus architecture and the discourse of houses as “machines for living.”³ These and other projects controlled by sys-

tems of central planning and geared toward human progress through scientific or technological innovation have been critiqued for their blanket-solution approach to problem-solving in the sociocultural arena.⁴

Yet, Nieland wants to approach the work of these Eames-era designers with a specific focus on their human-driven pursuit of happiness. Nieland sets out to counter an argument about the Eameses design projects as so-called “bad objects,” artefacts of a time in which the idea of happiness was tied to a project to normalize politically motivated discourses of the “Good Life” in the American century. This project, examined elsewhere by Castillo (2010), and Turner (2013) carries with it a cultural-imperialist dimension within what Castillo refers to as a “soft-power” paradigm (2010).⁵ Thus, Nieland explains, Cold War pedagogy enacted the age-old narrative of the pleasures of consumption and the promise of happiness which it promised (Nieland 2020, 14).⁶ Yet while acknowledging the accuracy of this explanation, Nieland suggests that “Eamesian happiness” is rather a model of production, a process of working with objects and images which is more rightly a form of “midcentury media pedagogy rather than the reified promise of any good” (15). Thus, rather than offering users the end product of good happy living, Nieland wants to suggest the Eamesian model instructed the constant process of making of that happiness, of solving problems which would impede that happiness, a constant pursuit rather than a static end-goal.

The first two chapters focus on Ray and Charles Eames’s projects

and experiments with film (especially their “furniture films”), their furniture designs for Herman Miller, and pedagogical collaborations. Nieland suggests the films used furniture to allegorize the conditions of the happy postwar life, “its new media environments and the forms of humane, technophilic production” that it seemed to call for (Nieland 2020, 39). The Eameses furniture, especially their chair designs, were touted on their release for their functional organic design. The designs featured moulded plywood, fiberglass, aluminium, and steel, highly engineered and traditionally *industrial* products now moulded for comfort of the human body.⁷ For Nieland, this is perhaps the most powerful allegory of a humanist modernism: modern techniques of manufacture are literally moulded to the human body for comfort, style, and aesthetic pleasure. In chapter two, “The Scale is the World,” Nieland explores how the Eameses used moving images into a “Cold War pedagogy of the senses,” guiding citizens in a new era of superabundant information (98). Opening up the cinematic medium to more flexible configurations, like multimedia display, Nieland’s narrative here aligns with recent focus on cinema’s usefulness in the classroom.⁸ The mid-century film pedagogical experiments were but one facet of the designer’s enthusiastic deployment of media practice for a “sensory utopianism” aimed at global communication (102).

The middle chapters broaden the scope, examining moving images and communication at international design conferences like the International Design Conferences in Aspen (IDCA)

and the Vision Conferences. This is Nieland’s most unique contribution in the book, and he argues that they constituted techniques of happiness in their own right (Nieland 2020, 28). International, interdisciplinary conferences were a form of communication media, Nieland argues, which themselves became the object of theoretical investigation, what he calls “mid-century conference theory” (28). The experts that congregated at them framed their participation in them as “a way of managing the pace and global scale of change” thereby reckoning with postwar happiness as “a volatile, unpredictable landscape of human needs and satisfactions” (29). Films made at the IDCA serve as examples of corporate *Bildung*, or becoming, *cinema verité* forms of utility cinema capturing the proceedings of the conferences. These factor into Nieland’s discussion of the IDCA and Vision conferences as components in a broader collection of knowledge, discourse, and material practices which emerged in this period to confront the challenges of the postwar world (151). For Nieland these were crucial spaces of knowledge production for designers and social commentators alike: the spaces in which techniques and technologies of management would be hashed out (152). Importantly, the range of *experts* present at the conferences enabled a cross-fertilization of knowledge. Rather than elitist and closed-off realms of high-minded academic debate, Nieland characterizes the conferences as humanist in focus, and while perhaps utopian in many respects, nevertheless an integral part of a bold midcentury “world-to-be-engineered”—a testament to the exuberant and forward-thinking spirit of the

period (161).

In the final chapters, Nieland discusses the idea of a “designer film theory,” a concept which emphasizes practice and process. Film and a nascent film theory were sussed out at the conferences, as Nieland suggests, as another form of knowledge work. Here he suggests that the beginnings of film theory in the nascent field of film studies coincided and productively overlapped with the media-crossing experiments of designers at mid-century. This suggestion is provocative, since the formation of film theory is in itself a quest for a medial purity—to delineate the specifics of the film medium as distinct from those of other media. The film-based experimentation of designers at this time were, Nieland explains, “fomented as overt challenges to specialization and fragmentation of knowledge regimes” (Nieland 2020, 247). Thus, echoing a range of revisionist film histories of recent years, Nieland sets out to seek a deeper history of cinema, attendant to its multiple genealogies and variations (248). In these final chapters, Nieland returns to the 1940s and an emphasis on pedagogy and “therapeutic media” as exemplified by Moholy-Nagy and the New Bauhaus.

The link between these case studies is their engagement with a humanist discourse in a world beset by technology saturation that needed management. Nieland calls to understand the designer in the midst of all these as an interdisciplinary artist, creative, and social commentator. Nieland shows how designers worked *across* disciplines at this period, forming collaborative partnerships with government, industry, higher educa-

tion, and the arts. *Happiness by Design* perhaps best evinces a certain mode of academic inquiry at the margins. Weaving techniques of classic film studies textual analysis with extensive primary research, archival documents, and perhaps the most unusual, analysis of conference proceedings, Nieland constructs a robust picture of an intellectual history long overshadowed by its tangible objects, what Lynn Spigel has called the “cheery products” of mid-century modern design.⁹

At a dense 348 pages, Nieland certainly succeeds in his goal to complicate and add nuance to scholarly understandings of mid-century modernism. The text sometimes suffers because of this density, as Nieland relies on such a broad range of texts that to follow up with each reference at times makes following through the argument difficult for the average reader. Much of this is a result of the sheer variety of sources examined here, including the Eameses’ own extensive back catalogue of short films, conference proceedings, and lecture series. It might be considered a highly specialized text, but is one that lays Nieland’s claim to this field of research.

Notes

1. Mary Ann Staniszewski provides an excellent history of the Museum of Modern Arts’s “Good Design” exhibition series, from which this discourse emerged. See also Pulos (1988) and Hayworth (1998).
2. See Turner (2013).
3. The failure of the Pruitt-Igoe house development, a project of urban renewal in the form of modernist

apartment blocks, has been widely cited as they key example of the failure of the modernist International Style of architecture to attend to the real-world beyond its designers' society-changing aspirations. See Jencks 1984.

4. See for instance Tanya Li, "Beyond the 'State' and Failed Schemes"; and James Scott, *Seeing like a State* (1998). See also Herbert Marcuse's contemporaneous critique *One Dimensional Man* (1964).
5. The period saw the fulmination of new sites and new techniques of media pedagogy, for instance on television—a medium whose final format as a commercial form hadn't yet been solidified in the mid-1950s. See, for instance, Anna McCarthy, *The Citizen Machine* (2010).
6. See Ahmed (2010).
7. Charles Eames developed techniques for the manufacture of moulded plywood and in 1942, began work for the United States Navy, producing form-fitting wooden splints for wounded servicemen.
8. Dana Polan, *Scenes of Instruction* (2007); Devin Orgeron and Marsha Orgeron, and Dan Streible, eds., *Learning with the Lights Off* (2012); Charles Acland and Haidee Wasson, eds., *Useful Cinema*; Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson, eds. *Inventing Film Studies* (2008).
9. From book cover.

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