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The Problem of Porn: An Ethical, Historical, and Aesthetic Investigation into the Essence of Pornography

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**THE PROBLEM OF PORN:
AN ETHICAL, HISTORICAL, AND AESTHETIC INVESTIGATION
INTO THE ESSENCE OF PORNOGRAPHY**

**A thesis submitted to
Regis College
The Honors Program
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for Graduation with Honors**

by

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APPROVAL PAGE

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PREFACE and ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Let me begin with a disclaimer: in my treatment of pornography, I have done my best to avoid any representation of pornographic material in this thesis. This is not an easy task, given the highly-contextual nature of pornography; something which might not have been pornography in its original context could easily become pornography if represented out of context. Thus, in all examples which I provide throughout the thesis, I have done my best to provide material which was neither pornography in its original context, nor pornography in the context of this thesis. Now, on to the preface.

My original list of thesis topics did not contain “pornography.” Instead, I had listed as possibilities justice and human rights, the relationship between God and evil throughout salvation history, or the implications of artificial intelligence for human nature. These topics, important though they are, were obviously too unruly for a mere 60-page honors senior thesis. It was partly for this reason that I began to strongly consider dropping out of the honors program in the summer of 2015; I had just gotten married in January to my high-school sweetheart and first love, Jessie, and we had shortly thereafter discovered we would be parents in late September/early October of that year. With the responsibilities of fatherhood imminent, I didn’t think I would have the time or mental resources to devote to solving problems which have plagued humanity since the dawn of philosophy.

It was thus with some degree of relief when I had the inspiration to investigate pornography, a more concrete and manageable topic. The inspiration came that summer, perhaps due to some extent to the churning of my new parental brain, with all its worries about my future children’s exploits. I began to realize how rampant the problem of pornography was and is, particularly in Western culture. And yet pornography is routinely downplayed as “no big

deal” especially in popular media, with increasingly graphic sex scenes and rampant jokes about pornography and masturbation as though they were simply natural things that all men (and some women) participated in. I had a good sense of the falsity of this mindset, but it wasn’t until I began my research that I came to realize just how varied and grave were the problems of pornography.

I began the thesis process intending to follow the feminist debate on pornography throughout the past 30-40 years. I had hoped to create a new, third position which would overcome the current stalemate and reinvigorate public debate on the issue. I came to realize two things, however, which changed my course: (1) that I could not fairly and fully represent both feminist perspectives, being that I did not identify fully with either, and (2) that there were many other perspectives outside of feminism which also had insight to offer on the topic of pornography. I thus planned to broaden my scope, and analyze the phenomenon of pornography through multiple ideologies and philosophies. Suddenly I faced the problem of a thesis project too large to accomplish in the given timeframe, a familiar problem for me. And so, with the extensive help of my thesis committee, I finally narrowed my topic to the one investigated in the present thesis.

It is impossible to construct an appropriate *response* to pornography (or anything, for that matter), until we *understand* it, and my research revealed the extent to which a good understanding of pornography was precisely what was lacking in almost all previous and ongoing debates. Thus, this thesis attempts to discover and define the essence of pornography; I hope that this work will act as a foundation on which to begin construction of an appropriately human response to the problem of pornography.

I would like to thank first and foremost my thesis committee, Drs. Rebecca Vartabedian and Jason Taylor, for their long hours of meetings, readings, advice, patience, and wisdom. This thesis would not be what it is today without their influence, and I am supremely grateful to them for all their tireless work and enthusiastic support. I would also like to thank Dr. Thomas Bowie; I am hugely honored, in more ways than one, to have known him and worked with him during my time in the honors program at Regis. I want to thank Drs. Mark Bruhn and Daryl Palmer, who along with Dr. Bowie taught my freshman honors seminar *The Idea of a University*, one of the most formative (though challenging and frightening) experiences of my life and especially of my college career. I want to thank Drs. Thomas Howe and Cathy Kleier, for taking over the honors program in Dr. Bowie's stead and guiding us all through this terrifying and powerful thesis process over the past year; thank you for keeping us on track, faithfully answering our questions and reading our drafts, and constantly supporting us and urging us on to the finish line. I have to thank my friends and family who have supported me and given me resources and ideas. I finally have to thank my wife, Jessie; without her, I would not have attended Regis nor would I have dreamed of applying to the honors program. Thank you, dear, for all your support, in the form of food, of late-night philosophical discussions, of reading and listening to my many drafts and half-formed thoughts. This thesis would not exist, nor would I be the same person, without your invaluable presence.

Chapter I

Introduction – The Problem of Porn Proposed

Often in today's Western culture, pornography is considered to be "no big deal." More and more people are routinely consuming more and more pornography, more varied and more extreme than ever before, all the while acclaiming pornography and defending it from censure. These responses are based on perceptions of the essence of pornography as an art form, a legitimate means to sexual exploration and self-expression. Unfortunately, attempts to truly engage the question of pornography's essence have been sadly lacking, both in popular culture and academia; most commentators focus their energies on expressing their initial reactions to pornography, while skimming over or ignoring completely the question of essence or definition. Yet an understanding of what it means to be "pornography" is a necessary precursor to constructing an appropriate human response to the reality of porn; as such, this thesis represents a direct investigation into the essence of pornography. Ultimately, I will demonstrate that pornography is not a subset of art but is in fact antithetical to art in terms of its actual effects in society and individuals, and that the essence of pornography lies in a deep disrespect for and misrepresentation of sexuality and human reality. As such, we ought not praise, consume, or even ignore pornography, but instead must recognize and fight against the tangible dangers it presents for society and humanity as a whole.

Contemporary American culture commonly views pornography as "no big deal," both a private habit and a normalized occasion for socialization. Thus we see in a survey conducted by the Barna Group, 79% of men ages 18-30 watch videographic pornography at least once a month, and 63% watch pornography several times a week. Pornography is not merely a quiet and

private fetish consumed only by raunchy teenage boys and disgruntled middle-aged men, however. A growing number of women consume pornography as well. According to the same survey, 76% of women in the same age range watch pornography at least once a month, while 26% of women watch pornography several times a week. Nadine Strossen, in *Defending Pornography*, notes, “Women, either singly or as part of a couple, constitute more than 40 percent of the adult videotape rental audience” (Strossen 144); more recent numbers of female pornography consumers, especially when including other forms of pornography such as text (think *Fifty Shades of Grey*), are undoubtedly higher.

Along with increasing female audiences, pornography is becoming increasingly more available to, and consequently more often consumed by, young people and children. In fact, of the diverse audience to porn, kids ages 12 through 17 are the *largest* consumers of pornography on the internet, with 42% of kids first viewing pornography before they turn 13 (Covenant Eyes Inc. 10). The reasons for this are easy to see. With the ever-increasing availability of technology and the internet, pornography via the internet becomes easier and easier to access. Many websites offer free pornography of every kind and intensity, thus removing the financial restrictions that might keep kids away from pornography. The anonymity of the internet also allows children greater ease of access; gone are the days when it was necessary to purchase pornographic magazines in-person. Now, the main deterrent for children on pornography sites is a simple box to click which supposedly verifies that the user is at least 18 years old; clearly, this box is no hindrance to children interested in pornography. Even if such a block were effective, many pornography sites simply don’t implement such protection, and so the problem of increased availability to young people remains, including increased early accidental exposure.

With its growing audience, so too are the number of responses to pornography growing more and more diverse. For some, pornography is a source of humor (Mulholland 99). Others find pornography to be a legitimate means of sexual expression and pleasure. Writer Sallie Tisdale claims, “Pornography tells me... that *none* of my thoughts are bad, that anything goes... The message of pornography... is that our sexual selves are real” (Strossen 161). Some claim that pornography is a critical source of sexual education (Strossen 166), while others think pornography actresses find empowerment in getting paid to be “admired” (Berger et al. 80). At the heart of these various responses is a belief that pornography is at worst merely a private, personal, dirty fetish, while at best one of the only ways female sexual pleasure can be explored, empowered, and facilitated.

The response of children to pornography is an interesting and important one, as well. Monique Mulholland’s revealing study on the place of pornography in the lives of middle- and high- school students, *Young People and Pornography*, discovered that humor is in fact the most common response for children to pornography (Mulholland 99). Further, Mulholland observes that, “When asked to discuss porn more specifically, young people were at strains to stress ‘it was no big deal’” (Mulholland 103). With the increasing accessibility, affordability, and anonymity of internet pornography comes the increase in pornography use and consumption by young children, young children who themselves create unique ways of coping with and responding to the reality of pornography in their lives.

With the rapid expansion of pornography, especially into the hands of the most vulnerable in society – children – one question becomes immediately pressing: is porn really “no big deal”? Is there a problem with porn? If so, what is it? If not, why is the subject of porn so

often a controversial subject, inspiring intense offense and/or intense pleasure in those who come across and discuss it? Mulholland notes:

As argued by McKee et al.: “Pornography not only stirs our bodies, it stirs our ethical and political selves... Whatever you think of pornography, whether you consume it or abhor it, or both, it is now a highly visible part of our world and one we all need to discuss and deal with.” (Mulholland 3)

Feminism has to a great extent been the main source for discussions on pornography in the last 40 years, with ethical and political arguments both for and against it. Pornography for some is one of the greatest sources of discrimination and degradation of women, using them to fulfill the every whim and pleasure of the viewer; for others, pornography represents one of the greatest sources of empowerment for women, a tool for educating the public about female sexual pleasure. One thing is clear, however: pornography is in fact a “big deal,” no matter whether you support it or fight against it.

Yet, while pornography may be a “big deal,” the more important question, whether or not there is a problem with pornography, is yet to be answered. Some argue that pornography is an art form which must be encouraged, giving expression to the sexual/physical/animalistic side of humanity which is ordinarily ignored or even suppressed in society. But others, myself included, find this equation of pornography and art to be deeply troubling. Properly understanding the relationship between pornography and art is necessary to understanding how we ought to live with respect to pornography in our lives, and will thus carry immense implications for both pornographic and artistic expression in our culture.

If we are to respond properly to pornography, we must understand what pornography *is*. This is also true if we are to understand the relationship between pornography and art. What even is porn, anyway? In contemporary discussions on pornography, however, the problem of definition is all-too-often ignored or poorly treated. Most sources either simply skip over the problem of defining their subject, while others take up a quick and consequently insufficient or inaccurate definition for the sake of moving on to outlining their own responses to it. Michael Rea, in recognizing this grievous oversight, directly tackles the issue of definition in his essay “What is Pornography?” Indeed, Rea’s essay, in my estimation, constitutes the best, most thorough, and most authoritative essay on pornography available in the literature today, precisely because it offers such a clear, concise, and well-argued definition of pornography. I will use Rea’s definition, then, as the foundation of the thesis that follows. I will present his definition in full detail, critically engaging with it in my own logical-ethical philosophy, concretely applying it in historical investigation, and ultimately modifying, revising, and (in my view) perfecting it in the context of the relationship between pornography and art.

With this new definition of pornography, the task of crafting a response to pornography will be much easier to consider. Ought pornography to be censored completely, as argued by prominent radical feminists such as Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin? This would seem to endanger certain forms of artistic expression, however; without a clear definition of pornography as it relates to art, censorship could mean that *all* sexual expression, whether pornography or not, could be suppressed. Ought pornography to be limited and regulated? This holds the same dangers as the previous question. Perhaps pornography ought to be celebrated and encouraged in society, as is art? But surely no one would argue that we ought to have museums dedicated to the display of pornography, nor that we ought to have government

funding of pornographic expression and production. Perhaps pornography simply ought to be left alone and enjoyed by all, as argued by prominent libertarian feminists such as Nadine Strossen? But if pornography is truly a danger to society as some think it to be, then we surely must do *something* about it, even if that something is simply learning more about it, as the present thesis is hoping to achieve.

By the end of this thesis, I hope to show not only that pornography is in fact a very big deal in today's Western culture as well as any other cultural context, but that it is dramatically different from art to the extent that any attempt to equate or reconcile the two would represent a drastic attack on the integrity of art. While I would not argue for the censorship of pornography, the nature of pornography must be clearly understood in order that the discussion on how to respond to pornography can proceed as accurately and trustworthily as possible. Pornography is not art, and should not be available to children. Pornography is not art, and does not in fact make any positive claims about women (or men, for that matter), or their sexuality or liberty. Pornography is a danger to society, and must be understood and dealt with as such. It is my hope that the following investigation will set the stage for discussing precisely how we ought to deal with the problem of porn.

Chapter II

The Ethical Perspective on Pornography

If we are to respond appropriately to pornography, we must first understand the essence of pornography; what does it mean for something to be “pornography?” The answer to this question, as is often the case when the task of definition is at hand, is notoriously difficult to pin down. This difficulty led Justice Potter Stewart, in a 1964 obscenity case, to lament, “I shall not today attempt further to define [obscenity]... But I know it when I see it” (Potter as quoted in Strossen 53). While this approach to definition may function well enough in personal or informal matters, it is far too subjective and relative in the search for an objective, stable, and permanent definition such as legal or philosophical ventures require.

Common Definitions of Pornography

One commonly accepted definition is that pornography must be both sexually explicit and intended to be sexually arousing, coming from *Webster's International Dictionary* (Strossen 18); it is this approximate definition which Nadine Strossen seems to accept in her book, *Defending Pornography*. Monique Mulholland, however, in her book *Young People and Pornography*, recognizes how quickly such a simple definition turns complex and convoluted: “[T]his ‘common sense’ definition is very contentious. How do we define sexually explicit? And arousal? And how does it differ from other kinds of sexualized expression, erotica, for example?” (Mulholland 41). I might add that sexualized art must itself be distinguishable from pornography, but this “common sense definition” can support no such distinction, for it is far too broad. Mulholland continues on: “[P]ornography is a category for which there is no universally

agreed definition or meaning” (McNair as cited in Mulholland 41). Clearly, the essence of pornography as an academic issue is just as contentious as the broader issue of how we ought to respond to pornography, as explored earlier.

Luckily, despite the lack of academic consensus on the question, we are not totally alone in the formidable task of definition. Michael Rea, in his thorough treatment of this question in his essay “What is Pornography?,” acknowledges, “[I]t is easy to see why it is often lamented that the definition of ‘pornography’ is as elusive and the referent is pervasive” (Rea 118). He thus recognizes the importance of pornography as increasingly “pervasive” (pornography is a “big deal”), but also recognizes the lack of an adequate preexisting definition which we can use to clarify, classify, and respond to concrete instances of pornography. He goes on to construct what is perhaps the best definition of pornography available today.

By way of prefacing his own definition, Michael Rea begins his discussion by identifying the existence of six main classifications for previous attempts at defining “pornography” which past commentators and thinkers have offered. Rea lists the following:

- (i) those that define ‘pornography’ as the sale of sex for profit,
- (ii) those that define it as a form of bad art,
- (iii) those that define it as portraying men or women as, as only, or only as sexual beings or sexual objects,
- (iv) those that define it as a form of obscenity,
- (v) those that define it as a form of (or contributor to) oppression, and
- (vi) those that define it as material that is intended to produce or has the effect of producing sexual arousal. (Rea 123)

Rea not only introduces each of these classifications here, but systematically engages with each class throughout the first half of his essay, exploring their major proponents, arguments, and

weaknesses. Rea thus recognizes and responds directly to the major voices in the debate over the definition of pornography, helping his readers understand both the definitions themselves as well as how they can fall short. I will present and critique Rea's specific analyses of these categories later in the paper as they become relevant and important; understanding his treatment of the first, second, fourth, and fifth categories will be particularly helpful. For now, it is sufficient to take note of Rea's categories, recognizing the extensive work he has done in leading up to his own definition. Ultimately, Rea claims that each one of these definitions, while each plagued by their own specific difficulties, are insufficient for one simple reason: "[T]here are or could be cases of pornography that do not have *any* of the characteristics picked out by these six kinds" (Rea 123). In other words, pornography exists either in reality or hypothetically which may fulfill any one, or *none*, of the above definitions.

Part of the reason for this inherent inadequacy in each of the definitions presented, according to Rea, is that each one attempts to define pornography as having a real, tangible, ontological basis within the objects of pornography. As Rea claims, "The property of *being pornography* isn't an intrinsic property of anything, and it does not supervene on the intrinsic properties of anything" (Rea 135). Rea here clarifies that "pornography" is simply a label used for classification of objects within certain contexts, such that the label may be applied to or removed from any object, depending on the context, without removing or adding anything necessary to the object's integrity or being. The classification "painting" relies on (or supervenes upon) certain *inherent* qualities in the object it designates (e.g., the use of paints in the object's creation), such that the painting must continue to *be* a painting in any context; the classification "pornography," however, is different. Neither is "pornography" itself an inherent quality in any object. The reason for these claims is that objects of pornography seem to rely more on their

immediate socio-cultural context rather than on any inherent ontological quality in order to merit the label “pornography.” Rea takes as his paradigmatic example a nude picture of Marilyn Monroe which appeared in *Life* magazine in 1996; he claims, “Most people will agree that had the same picture appeared in the pages of *Hustler*, it would have been pornographic” (Rea 118). According to Rea, then, context then is the necessary determinant of the essence of “pornography.”

Michael Rea’s Definition

Based on this fundamental assumption of the necessity of context, Rea moves on to his own definition of pornography, in two-part structure: the first part tackles what it means for something to be *treated as* pornography, and the second tackles what it means for something to *be* pornography. Rea’s definition is as follows:

Part 1: *x is used (or treated) as pornography* by a person S \equiv_{DF} (i) *x* is a token of some sort of communicative material (picture, paragraph, phone call, performance, etc.), (ii) S desires to be sexually aroused or gratified by the communicative content of *x*, (iii) if S believes that the communicative content of *x* is intended to foster intimacy between S and the subject(s) of *x*, that belief is not among S’s reasons for attending to *x*’s content, and (iv) if S’s desire to be sexually aroused or gratified by the communicative content of *x* were no longer among S’s reasons for attending to that content, S would have at most a weak desire to attend to *x*’s content.

Part 2: *x is pornography* \equiv_{DF} it is reasonable to believe that *x* will be used

(or treated) as pornography by most of the audience for which it was produced.

(Rea 120)

In terms which are easier to digest, Rea's definition claims that there are four main qualifications that must be met for something to be *used as* pornography: 1) the pornography object must communicate a message in some way, whether visually, linguistically, aurally, etc; 2) the user must seek sexual arousal or gratification from the content of the pornography object's communicated message; 3) the user must not seek any intimacy from another via the pornography object's communicated message; and 4) the only purpose of the pornography object's communicated message must be sexual arousal or gratification, such that the object either does not well achieve or does not even attempt to achieve any other purpose. The second part of Rea's definition takes the crucial step: that which will likely fulfill each of these four qualifications with the majority of its intended audience *is* pornography.

Rea's definition certainly seems appealing. He explicitly attempts to solve the contextual issue by "eliminat[ing] the property *being pornography* from our strict ontology" (Rea 140). He compellingly continues: "How could [something] be pornographic at one time but not at another? The answer is simple: at one time but not at the other it was reasonable to believe that most of the target audience would treat it as pornography" (Rea 141). The key here, then, is not whether the producer of the pornographic material *intended* for the objects to be pornography, as Strossen argued above. Rather, objects of pornography are classified as such if the intended users of the objects *actually use* them as pornography – in other words, the burden of pornography classification falls away from the producers and on to the consumers. However, despite the great care with which Rea crafts his definition, it still leaves much to be desired. Let us look at his definition step-by-step.

The first part of the definition begins with the first qualification of something's being used as pornography – pornography consists in *tokens of communicative materials*, and here Rea intends *tokens* to be understood in opposition to *types* of such materials. Rea understands the word “types” in this instance to designate different communicative mediums or kinds, such as photograph, video, text, audio recording, etc., while “tokens” designates contextually distinct manifestations of each type; there may be multiple tokens of any given type. Consider for example the Marilyn Monroe nude, which might itself be considered as a type of the communicative material *photograph*. Some *tokens*, or representations, of that photographic type appeared in one context, “in calendars in the late 1940's, [while] others appeared in *Life* in 1996” (Rea 135). By talking about tokens of communicative materials, Rea allows for different tokens of the *same type of object* to be different in their designation as pornography, depending upon the context in which they appear, whether that contextual difference be temporal, geographic, cultural, generic (as the difference between the genre “pin-up calendars” and the genre “news magazines”), etc. Thus, the Marilyn Monroe nude in this example is the type, while each specific representation of that nude in its various contexts are different tokens of that type. Each token is the same picture (the same type), but is a distinct token, which allows for the hypothetical *Hustler* token to be classified as pornography while the *Life* token is not.

The second qualification claims that pornography is indeed sexual, insofar as the user *desires* sexual stimulation from the pornography object. Further, it is important for Rea in this qualification that sexual stimulation come from the *communicative content* of the material, and not in some other way. In other words, a picture communicates meaning *visually*, and so a picture will be pornography only if the user desires *visual* sexual stimulation. Sexual stimulation originating in any other sense is not adequate – a picture which sexually stimulates a user in any

way other than visually is not thereby pornography because the sexual stimulation is not tied in any way with the picture as a picture. Whether a picture is pornography or not is irrelevant to whether a user might desire sexual stimulation via communicative content not inherent to the picture (Rea 136).

Rea's third qualification is that pornography has nothing to do with *intimacy*, but rather everything to do with *sex*. Rea claims as illustration the following hypothetical:

[S]omeone who sends a complete stranger a nude photo of himself or herself with the aim of initiating a purely sexual relationship (and with the reasonable belief that this aim will be recognized and will be among the reasons for viewing the photo) does *not* send a *pornographic* photo, even if the photo is in fact viewed primarily as a source of arousal by the target audience. (Rea 136)

This hypothetical requires a bit of disentangling. It is important to differentiate between the producer and the consumer in this relationship – the person *sending* the nude photo, for Rea, does not necessarily produce or send pornography, since the sender reasonably believes the photo will be used to initiate an intimate sexual relationship between the sender and the receiver. The person *receiving* the photo, in using the photo as a source of arousal, does not therefore cause the photo to become “pornography,” as long as the receiver also recognizes and responds to the photo's purpose as initiating a relationship. In any event, the salient feature is whether or not the photo is *actually* used with the aim of initiating a relationship; the photo does not become pornography until it is used without reference to such intimacy.

Rea runs into an interpretational mess with this hypothetical, however. He soon gives another hypothetical which seems to contradict the first's emphasis on a *purely* sexual

relationship conveyed via the image, though he does not acknowledge this contradiction. He imagines, “Intuitively, a narcissistic mirror dance doesn’t count as pornography for the same reason a stripper’s erotic dance for his or her spouse does not count as pornography: dancer and audience *love* one another and the dance is taking place at least in part as an expression of that *love*” (Rea 137, emphasis mine). Note Rea’s emphasis on love in this hypothetical, where the emphasis was on sex in the previous. In this hypothetical, the objects do not merit the term pornography, *not* because they are intended to foster intimacy, but because they are expressions of *love*.

These two hypotheticals seem to be amiss, then. In the first hypothetical, the nude photo was not pornography simply because both producer and consumer used the photo for the sake of a *purely physical sexual relationship*. In the second hypothetical, both producer and consumer used the dance not merely for sex, but as an expression of *love*. In the first hypothetical, the receiver would likely no longer consume, nor the producer any more produce, if the photo failed to initiate physical, sexual arousal and pleasure. Yet in the second hypothetical, it is likely that both producer and receiver would continue to engage in the transmission of the dance *even if sexual arousal and pleasure were no longer achieved*, since the dance conveys something deeper than mere sex. Does Rea consider *purely physical* sex to be constitutive of *love*, or has he made some mistake in these two hypotheticals? Purely physical sexual relationships are arguably only desired for sexual stimulation, whereas committed, loving sexual relations have some deeper purpose, expressing not just sexual stimulation but love.

Finally, the fourth qualification is tied deeply with the second; because sexual stimulation via the communicative content of pornography is the main motivation for using pornography, if that sexual stimulation was no longer achieved, the user would likely not use that specific

instance of pornography any more. Note that this is in large part why the third qualification is somewhat remiss – if sexual stimulation is the main motivation for the expression and/or consumption of pornography, then the hypothetical stranger sending a nude photo in hopes of achieving a purely physical sexual relationship is in fact sending pornography in order to achieve that sexual stimulation; so too is the consumer receiving the photo in order to achieve arousal and then further arousal and stimulation via a purely physical sexual relationship. The loving couple (or, in Rea’s hypothetical, the narcissistic mirror dancer) has a deeper motivation behind their sexual expression, such that if sexual stimulation was not achieved then the sexual expression would likely *still occur*.

For the sake of clarity, then, Qualification three constitutes the area in which the first half of Rea’s definition necessitates further consideration and modification. I would argue that the problem here lies in that first hypothetical: a sexual image sent with the sole intention of fostering a purely sexually intimate relationship would in fact qualify as pornography. Thus, the third qualification should be revised with this in mind: if S believes that the communicative content of *x* is intended to foster *any intimacy besides purely physical or sexual intimacy* between S and the subject(s) of *x*, that belief is not among S’s reasons for attending to *x*’s content. In other words, the user must not seek any intimacy *other than physical/sexual intimacy* from another via the pornography object’s communicated message.

These four qualifications as to what it means to be used as pornography are thus in large measure reasonable and acceptable, and they become totally acceptable with the addition of my modification to the third qualification. The second part of Rea’s definition, however, is less certain. Remember that the second part of Rea’s definition claimed simply that pornography is that which is it reasonable to assume will be used as pornography by the majority of its targeted

audience. Consider first Rea's emphasis on pornography's *target* audience, as opposed to its *actual* audience. This qualification can seem understandable at first; by placing the emphasis on the target or *intended* audience, the burden of pornography classification falls to pornography *production* rather than *consumption*, again an important distinction to make. In this way, would-be censors could scan materials as they are produced, looking for evidence that the producers intended to create pornography, and remove pornography from the market *before* it ever reaches the hands of potential consumers and users.

The implications of this emphasis simply aren't feasible when considering Rea's ultimate goal, however, which isn't to censor pornography but rather to simply explain how something can be pornography in one context and not pornography in another context. Consider another of Rea's hypotheticals, "*The Shoe-Fetishists*" (Rea 122). In this scenario, an isolated island of people is discovered, the inhabitants of which find magazines containing pictures of shoes to be as sexually stimulating as more traditionally pornographic magazines (like *Playboy* or *Penthouse*) are here in American Western culture. "Clearly," Rea observes, "the shoe magazines of this society are pornographic" (Rea 122). That is, shoe magazines which are produced on the island *for the island inhabitants* are clearly pornography. But what distinguishes the shoe magazines produced on the island for the islanders from those shoe magazines which are produced here in America for Americans? Would not the shoe magazine, while certainly not pornography in the context of American culture, still be pornography in the context of the Shoe-Fetishist Island? Not according to Rea, who goes on to argue, "The fact that most of something's actual audience treats it as pornography... is not sufficient to make it pornography since just about anything, no matter how innocently produced, *can* (by various accidents) be treated as pornography by most of its actual audience" (Rea 140). But this completely ignores the

contextual issue by claiming that something can be pornography regardless of how it is actually received and interpreted, or *regardless of its context*. That there must be something *inherent within the object of pornography* which classifies it as pornography is a consequence Rea is explicitly trying to avoid: as noted earlier, he recommends “that we eliminate the property *being pornography* from our strict ontology” (Rea 140). As I understand it, Rea is simply misapplying the token-type distinction as discussed above in the first qualification of part one of Rea’s definition. Remember the discussion of the Marilyn Monroe nude earlier – two *tokens* of the same *type* of picture could have different classifications regarding their status as “pornography” depending upon the context of the respective tokens. One token, appearing in the context of an early-mid 1900s pin-up calendar, might be rightly classified as pornography, while another token, appearing in a 2000s news magazine, might be rightly classified as not pornography. In the same way, the *very same magazine*, objectively, can subjectively become *two different tokens* of the same type of magazine when it is present in two different geographic/cultural contexts, even if the generic and temporal contexts are the same. In this way, one token of the magazine as it exists in the context of Shoe-Fetishist Island can actually be pornography, while another token of the magazine as it exists in the context of America can actually not be pornography.

There is yet another problem with Rea’s claim, located in his argument that “just about anything... *can*... be treated as pornography by most of its actual audience” (Rea 140). It is hard to justify this claim in its own right; while there are many varying sexual orientations and preferences, these orientations are *not* wide-spread enough to suggest that *anything* can be construed and treated as pornography by *most* of its audience. This is simply too grand a claim to be substantiated in any way. As of right now, as far as I know there is in reality no such thing as Shoe-Fetishist Island (there is no such thing as a group of people, sexually attracted to shoes,

large enough to constitute the majority of any shoe magazine's actual audience), and so things like shoe magazines simply aren't pornography, here or in any other real temporo-cultural context. Ultimately, the necessity of considering context in pornography classification requires that the burden of this classification fall to pornography *consumption* and *not production*, which is opposite to the construction Rea implies, as discussed earlier.

Because of this necessary emphasis on consumption rather than production, how something is actually received and used by the majority of its audience in one cultural context can be a good indication of its status as pornography or non-pornography, and Rea's definition must be modified as such: $x \text{ is pornography} =_{DF}$ it is reasonable to believe that x will be used (or treated) as pornography by most of *its actual* audience. In other words, our own cultural context places some restraints on what may or may not be considered pornography. While specific pornographic interests and preferences will inevitably vary from individual to individual, general pornographic interests will be generally uniform within one specific cultural context. Thus, the classification of pornography need not be as relativistic as Rea asserts; on the contrary, a good anthropological knowledge of any society or culture ought to be enough to discern a thing's status as pornography or not pornography. The question then becomes what can feasibly qualify as a "good enough" amount of knowledge to make such a judgment call, but I think this question is better left discerned and answered by the members of any given society when they begin the work of investigating pornography in their own culture.

Rea Revised

In sum, Rea's definition states that there are four qualifications that must be fulfilled in order to *use* an object *as* pornography: the object must communicate meaning, the communicated

meaning must be sexually stimulating, the object must not foster intimacy between producer and consumer, and sexual stimulation must be the prime or sole reason for consuming the object. If the use of an object by the majority of its intended audience fulfills these four qualifications, then the object can be rightly classified as pornography. Despite the acuity of this definition, applying more philosophical pressure reveals some weaknesses: it is not enough to say that the object in question must not foster *any* intimacy between producer and consumer. Should the object in fact foster purely physical sexual intimacy, this fact would not therefore disqualify the object from the label “pornography.” Also, the emphasis on tracking the patterns of use of an object’s *intended* audience over and against those of its *actual audience* unduly places the burden of pornography classification on the side of production rather than on the side of consumption, a consequence which ignores the very problem Rea tries to solve: the contextual problem. I thus propose an amended version of Rea’s definition:

Part 1: *x* is used (or treated) as pornography by a person S =_{DF} (i) *x* is a token of some sort of communicative material (picture, paragraph, phone call, performance, etc.), (ii) S desires to be sexually aroused or gratified by the communicative content of *x*, (iii) if S believes that the communicative content of *x* is intended to foster **any** intimacy **besides purely physical or sexual intimacy** between S and the subject(s) of *x*, that belief is not among S’s reasons for attending to *x*’s content, and (iv) if S’s desire to be sexually aroused or gratified by the communicative content of *x* were no longer among S’s reasons for attending to that content, S would have at most a weak desire to attend to *x*’s content.

Part 2: *x* is pornography =_{DF} it is reasonable to believe that *x* will be used (or treated) as pornography by most of **its actual** audience. (Rea 120, emendations are in bold)

This new definition doesn't change much of Rea's original definition; I have only altered two points, and have only sharpened or clarified the wording at that. And yet these changes significantly improve the definition's ability to accurately distinguish instances of pornography from instances of non-pornography.

Rea's definition is likely the best definition available in the literature on pornography today, and I am indebted to his thoughtful work on the subject which has radically impacted my own work; yet it is clear that his definition is not yet complete. Given the present understanding, evaluation, and emendation of Rea's work, let us turn now to some more concrete examples from history. Applying my modified version of Rea's definition to an historical investigation of pornography will shed light on other possible gaps and imperfections in the definition, allowing a more accurate understanding of the relationship between pornography and art. Let us discover what pornography is and what it has done in the past, especially in the context of the origins of the term "pornography" itself: eighteenth-century France, and the works of one Rétif de la Bretonne.

Chapter III

The Historical Perspective and the Origins of Pornography

A common argument in favor pornography is the claim that pornography is natural, giving expression to some central part of our common human nature. As Nadine Strossen argues, “The physical sensations involuntarily produced in the reader carry with them something that touches upon the reader’s whole experience of his humanity” (Strossen 50). In this way, Strossen believes pornography to be expressive of “humanity,” and moreover “whole” humanity. Yet if this were true, one would expect to find pornography littered throughout human history, in much the same way art is. By taking a historical perspective on pornography, I will show that the more common judgment of historians is that pornography as a classification in its own right only arose in late 1700s France. The relatively recent appearance of pornography in history calls Strossen’s claim into question – the expected implications of her claim do not match reality. Further, a closer investigation of the late 1700s as the period of the origin of the term “pornography” will help reveal an essential piece in understanding pornography: its relation to obscenity as a form of pushing against cultural boundaries, evidenced in part by its startlingly rapid expansion and intensification in recent times. This rapid expansion itself illustrates one of the dangers posed by pornography to society, as will be discussed in more depth later.

Ancient Pornography

It may seem easy to find examples of pornography from as far back in history as the ancient world. Consider the sexually explicit descriptions of sex and rape in Greek mythology,

especially Zeus' well-known exploits. Another possible example might be the famous *Kama Sutra*, coming from ancient Hindu writings as a work on achieving sexual pleasure in life. Were these works pornography in their time? Another impressive candidate for early pornography is described in Monique Mulholland's *Young People and Pornography*. She recounts the uncovering of the ancient buried city of Pompeii near the Italian city of Naples, and the ways in which the archaeologists dealt with what they found. She relates,

The explicit frescoes of Pompeii...troubled cataloguers of artifacts, worried about the material getting into the wrong hands. These were consequently labeled 'pornographic' and locked away in the Secret Museum in Naples. At the same time these museum cataloguers were carving out and grappling with this new term, the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* was describing 'pornographic' for the first time. Indeed, the crossovers are clearly evident, wherein the 1864 definition of 'pornography' was the 'licentious painting employed to decorate the walls of Pompeii.' (Mulholland 54)

Note the connection that these Pompeian pornographic works have with the earliest definitions of "pornography" in the OED; this fact would make them an appealing candidate for an example of early pornography, suggesting that pornography is indeed central to human nature.

Yet these and other examples from history up until the 1700s cannot be considered as early examples of pornography for at least two reasons. The first is that, while some of these instances may in fact be pornographic *in the context of contemporary Western culture*, historical anthropology may reveal that they were not actually pornography in an *immanently historical* way; in other words, the explicit frescoes of Pompeii may have been pornography from the context of 1864 as evidenced by the OED, but perhaps they were not actually considered to be anything like pornography *in the context of their own time and culture*. We must maintain the

token-type distinction as discussed in the previous chapter in order to prevent ourselves falling into classification which is not historically accurate. If we consider Pompeiian frescoes to be a certain *type* of communicative material, then we can easily claim that one *token* of these frescoes as they appeared in 1864 is in fact pornography, while another *token* of the frescoes as they appeared in ancient Italy is in fact *not* pornography.

The second reason these early historical examples ought not be considered pornographic has to do with understanding Rea's fourth qualification of what it means to be used as pornography: that sexual stimulation has to be an object's primary or only purpose for that object to be considered pornography. Monique Mulholland quotes Hunt's *The Invention of Pornography* saying, "If we take pornography to be the explicit depiction of sexual organs and sexual practices with the aim of arousing sexual feelings, then pornography was almost always *an adjunct to something else* until the middle or end of the eighteenth century" (Mulholland 51, emphasis mine). As Mulholland continues, "Moreover, although there was no shortage of obscene literature in Old Regime France, the category known as pornography, along with the word itself, did not exist before the early nineteenth century" (Wyngaard 15). Usually, such depictions were utilized in satiric materials, meant to criticize religious or political authorities.

With this in mind, the common position of historians is to place pornography's origins in the 1700-1800s. Amy Wyngaard, in her historical essay "Defining Obscenity, Inventing Pornography," observes, "[P]ornography derives its name from a work that is not pornographic: Nicolas-Edme Rétif de la Bretonne's 1769 treatise on prostitution, *Le pornographe*" (Wyngaard 15).¹ As Rétif worked in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century France, we must ask: what

¹ The etymology of the word "pornography" makes much sense with this in mind. As Mulholland elaborates, "Coming from the Greek word *graphos* (writing, description) and *pornei* (prostitutes), the word literally describes the writing and description of the life and work of prostitutes" (Mulholland 41). This deep connection with

was the atmosphere at this time and place which created the concept of pornography, and thus the necessity of coining the word? Wyngaard recognizes, “Most critical accounts of the history of pornography note that the term is traceable to Rétif’s *Pornographe*, which they dismiss in the same breath because of its non-pornographic status” (Wyngaard 19). Despite this apparently non-pornographic work, Wyngaard nonetheless centers on Rétif’s other works, specifically *Le paysan perversi*, as the foundation of the modern concept of pornography.

Rétif – The Father of Pornography

Rétif’s *Le paysan perversi* was not unlike more contemporary romance novels. It was written in “sentimental” and “libertine” styles, and followed the exploits of a peasant Edmond, who eventually “falls under the influence of the libertine Gaudet, who leads him into corruption” (Wyngaard 20). Some of Edmond’s more shocking exploits include his act of incest with his

prostitution is especially interesting when considering Rea’s rejection of the definition of pornography “as the sale of sex for profit” (Rea 123).

Recall Rea’s six classifications of pre-existing definitions of pornography as introduced in the previous chapter; the first classification included definitions relating to profit. Rea’s first argument against this definition, “that a lot of pornography is distributed for free... on the internet from private non-profit sites” (Rea 124), is not convincing. Such supposedly “free” pornography sites most often include advertisements, and it is the fact of these ads which disproves the existence of “free” porn (while television or radio programs may undoubtedly be consumed for “free,” they are not produced without consideration for profit, as the presence of advertisements in these contexts equally proves). Rea moves on to qualify this argument: “though a lot of pornography isn’t distributed for free, clearly it could be” *without jeopardizing its classification as pornography* (Rea 124). The question is then whether or not pornography would cease being pornography if monetary profit were no longer involved. At this argument, I must admit that monetary profit for the producers of pornography is neither necessary nor sufficient for classifying pornography as pornography, but then I would argue neither is such monetary profit necessary for classifying prostitution as prostitution; the service of sex could be rendered for any number of other reasons, and would not thereby be any less understood as prostitution.

Thus, despite Rea’s arguments as reviewed here, a connection between pornography and prostitution does exist. Beyond this connection’s relation to Rea, I unfortunately do not have adequate space within this footnote to fully perform this investigation myself, nor can I devote space to this investigation in the body of my paper. The digression would represent too great a departure from my current argumentative objective and path. As such, the relationship between pornography and prostitution represents one area which necessitates further research, as I will discuss in my conclusion. For my purposes, it is currently sufficient to credit Rétif de la Bretonne with creating the term as well as the genre which it designates.

cousin, the attempted rape of his friend and “mother figure,” sex with a prostitute, the attempted poisoning of his wife, and the murder of his sister Ursule. Ultimately, Edmond dies in a carriage accident after marrying the woman he earlier nearly raped. Wyngaard further extrapolates on the content of the book: “The novel features many sentimental commonplaces of the time: family strife, rural virtue, urban vice. It also contains racy scenes and philosophical passages that Rétif was determined to print as provocatively as possible” (Wyngaard 20). Clearly, Rétif’s *Le paysan perversi* contains pornographic themes, and he more importantly desired to relate those themes as pornographically as possible.

The importance of this work and its place in society at the time lies in the way it reveals the interplay between intentional pornography and cultural standards of propriety. Wyngaard writes

Rétif played an important role in circumscribing the moral and legal limits of sexual representation in the eighteenth century and beyond. He did so not by producing blatantly obscene texts but by pushing the boundaries of decency and propriety while inviting censors and the public to hone their understanding of these concepts. (Wyngaard 19)

Rétif published three editions of *Le paysan perversi*, including an illustrated edition, between 1775 and 1787, “steadily extending the limits of the censors and the police to produce the most provocative, and the most financially rewarding, works possible” (Wyngaard 18, emphasis mine). Rétif’s work represented a conscious effort to test the limits of censorship in that time, as is evidenced by the fact that his work was subjected to censorship several times throughout his career. Wyngaard continues, “The multiple versions of *Le paysan perversi*... by documenting changing censorial standards over the course of more than a decade, reveal the limits of the publishable at various moments in late eighteenth-century France” (Wyngaard 45). To put this in

terms more relatable to Rea, each version of *Le paysan perversi* might represent different tokens of the book as it inhabited various temporal contexts; tokens of later editions of the work might have been censored as pornography in earlier years, while tokens of the earlier editions would no longer be considered pornography by censorial standards in later years.

Above, I have explained the ways in which pornography is determined according to its cultural context, but the present discussion on Rétif implies a more complex relationship between pornography and context. Wyngaard pushes the idea so far as to say that Rétif's works "posed a threat to morality and the social order that characterized pornography as it was first defined in 1806" (Wyngaard 47-8). In other words, while pornography was defined within a certain cultural context – here eighteenth century France – it nonetheless threatened that very cultural context, and the "social order" inherent within it. By constantly pushing the limits of censorship, Rétif *forced a re-evaluation of those same limits*. Wyngaard importantly states that Rétif "appeared at the cutting edge of a morality *he helped dictate*. Rétif worked both with and against the censors to chip away at moral standards and turn material once considered indecent into something acceptably racy" (Wyngaard 48, emphasis mine). The effect of Rétif's inaugural pornography was to widen the cultural ideas surrounding what was acceptable and what wasn't.

Rétif's work challenged (and to a certain extent changed) the moral climate of France. It is important to note that, as the moral standards fluctuated and expanded to accommodate Rétif's pornography, Rétif expanded the pornographic nature of his work right along with it, and it is this fact that forced the cultural moral standards to change so much. If he had written one edition of his work, and left it to the whims of the censors, not much would have changed, if anything. He would have been simply another writer who may or may not have gained the approval of the censors. But because he continually edited and changed his work, he finally gained a certain

amount of control over the censors. That his last edition was illustrated ought to be evidence enough that censorship standards had widened to make room for his radical yet popular publications.

Pornography as Obscenity

Thus, a central aspect of pornography, given to it by its inventor and coiner, seems to be its relation to cultural ideas of acceptability. Pornography, in order for it to remain pornographic, must put pressure on cultural norms, and the boundaries surrounding propriety. As pornography, it does this in a sexual way; the more explicit the sexual material, the more it subverts the social structure, and the more “pornographic” it becomes. In other words, pornography seems necessarily to be “obscene,” a definition which Michael Rea explicitly argued against in the first part of his essay. Going back to Rea’s six classifications of pornography definitions, the fourth included those definitions which “define [pornography] as a form of obscenity” (Rea 123).

Why does Rea reject such definitions to the extent that obscenity makes no appearance into his own definition? He acknowledges that obscenity by itself is not enough to declare something to be pornography; he gives the example of raising one’s middle finger, a gesture which is obscene in our American cultural context but certainly not pornographic (Rea 127). Most existing obscenity definitions, then, include the qualification that pornography is *sexually explicit* obscene material (Rea 128). It is this necessary added detail which Rea finds devastating for obscenity definitions: “pornography need not be sexually explicit... As I have already indicated, pornography cannot be just *anything* that is obscene. But if we are deprived of the sexual explicitness qualification, what other one can we use? I can see none that will do the job”

(Rea 128). The problem with Rea's argument here is simply that he gives up too readily before finding another qualification that might work, a qualification which he in fact does add to his own definition of pornography. While pornography need not be sexually explicit, using something as pornography does entail that sexual stimulation be the chief reason for using that object. In other words, clearly sexual themes or ideas are an inherent part of pornography, and pornography conveys these sexual themes in a way which is "obscene." Thus, while pre-existing obscenity definitions may be insufficient on their own terms, I feel an addition to Rea's definition is necessary – namely adding the idea that pornography must be obscene.

Rea has one more argument which might frustrate this suggested modification, however. He argues, "there are two ways of taking obscenity definitions. We can take them as normative... or we can take them as descriptive... Both are problematic" (Rea 128). Normative definitions are those which claim something to be obscene if a person "*should* be offended by [it], whether she is in fact offended by it or not"; descriptive definitions are those which claim something to be obscene if a person "considered 'average' or 'decent'" is "*in fact*" offended by it (Rea 128, emphasis mine). According to Rea, if obscenity definitions are understood in the normative sense, they are problematic insofar as they are "uninformative" (Rea 128). We can't know what *should* offend us if we have no definition for such materials other than the mere claim that they should offend us. This argument certainly devastates the circularity of normative definitions, but what of descriptive obscenity definitions? The problem with understanding obscenity definitions in the descriptive sense, for Rea, is that supposedly "there is no reason to expect that such a [definition] would reliably separate pornography from non-pornography" (Rea 129). Rea goes on, "[I]f people stopped being offended by magazines like *Penthouse* and *Hustler*, those magazines would not necessarily cease to be pornographic" (Rea 129). At first,

Rea's statement here might seem false given our previous discussion on the importance of context for pornography – if, in some future cultural context, people no longer took offense at these magazines, then we ought to conclude that what we are discussing are new tokens of these magazines in the new cultural context, and thus these new tokens may not be pornography in this future context although they were pornography in earlier contexts. Yet I must admit that I intuitively agree with Rea's statement; somehow, these instances of pornography would retain their pornographic status even if they were no longer considered “offensive” by the society at large (though I suspect this intuition has mostly to do with the fact that I currently reside in a cultural context in which they are in fact offensive).

I propose that the problem with Rea's evaluation of descriptive obscenity definitions in this sense is his reliance on the concept of “offense,” and in place of that term I suggest a new one: “respect.” What is respectful of sexual morality will differ from context to context – in our contemporary American context, breasts are highly sexualized, and the display of breasts is usually considered inappropriate (and usually therefore offensive) because such a public display is disrespectful towards sexuality. In the hypothetical Island of Shoe-Fetishists discussed in the last chapter, shoe magazines might be considered pornography in part because the display of shoes in such a manner was in fact disrespectful towards sex and sexuality as it is expressed and understood in that cultural context. Thus, adding an obscenity qualification to Rea's definition wouldn't revolve around offense, but rather cultural ideas of *respect* (though, again, offense is a very likely reaction to disrespectful depictions such that disrespect and offense often go hand-in-hand; thus Rea's mistake here is certainly understandable). Insofar as *Penthouse* and *Hustler* are *inherently disrespectful* of sexuality, they will remain pornographic. But should they in some

cultural context no longer be actually disrespectful by the standards of the cultural majority, their classification as pornography would be weakened if not altogether destroyed.

Rea Revised

Rea's definition, when examined and applied from the historical perspective, remains elegant and exceedingly helpful, but is missing a crucial piece. Pornography cannot be pornography without some element of obscenity, of pushing against socio-cultural boundaries around the appropriate and the acceptable in dealing with sexuality, of disrespect for cultural standards of sexuality. Thus, the second part of Rea's definition, which has to do with the quality of *being pornography*, merits the following modification: pornography is that which it is reasonable to believe will be used (or treated) as pornography by most of its actual audience, **and that which it is reasonable to believe is obscenely disrespectful towards sexuality by most members of its socio-cultural context.**

Why is it so important to include obscenity in an accurate definition of pornography? Remember that pornography isn't merely obscene in the sense that it is disrespectful of sexuality in any given context, but it goes farther in that it *challenges* those notions of respect and the boundaries by which those notions are defined. Mulholland wonders at pornography, saying, "I still retain a sense of marvel at the ability of pornography to produce anxiety and challenge borders" (Mulholland 3). Pornography necessarily pushes against and subverts cultural norms surrounding what is acceptable and appropriate, and what is illicit and unacceptable. As a result, those norms and boundaries are stretched out to accommodate the pressure. But pornography, in order to remain pornography, simply grows more radical and extreme in order to continue pushing against boundaries and to ensure its existence in the form of cultural subversion.

Eventually, the boundaries will have been stretched so far as to allow the existence of the extreme pornography we see today, which exhibits sexual violence, necrophilia, bestiality, and even pedophilia.

This expansion of boundaries can be seen and analogized in the development of film and television, and the way in which such programs have handled sex through the years. Television couples, even those who were married, from popular shows such as *I Love Lucy* from the '50s and *Leave it to Beaver* from the '60s, would sleep in separate twin beds so as to avoid any suggestion of indecency. Today, however, standards are clearly different; sex scenes and partial-to-full nudity of all sorts go unhindered, and are in fact encouraged by critics – the popular HBO television series *Game of Thrones*, with its explicit depictions of sex, would never have existed 50 years ago. This is not to say that pornography is the cause of increased sexual indecency and promiscuity in the mainstream media, but rather that clearly an expansion of boundaries around propriety and impropriety as it relates to sexuality has taken place. At any rate, leaving televised sexuality behind, pornography itself is clearly on the rise, and Mulholland notes this trend specifically in young people (Mulholland 9).

Pornography, from its roots in the work of Rétif down to today, is detrimental to the established social order. While it could be argued that this cultural subversion is a good thing, providing needed refreshment to a stale social order with old and tired views on sexuality, it also must be asked where the effects of porn will stop. Now we see extreme pornography growing ever more extreme; Susan Hawthorne, in her essay “Ancient Hatred and Its Contemporary Manifestation: The Torture of Lesbians,” writes of this extreme pornography, which has begun to include violent depictions of rape, sadomasochism, and torture. She claims, “Pornography is a

way of making money out of torture” (Hawthorne 43). She states the problem of porn’s radical nature thusly:

[If] acts identical to torture – humiliation, violent penetration with objects, cutting off of clothes, bondage – are acceptable in a BDSM scene, and are deemed philosophically acceptable, where does the slide down the slippery slope begin and end?... The effect of the acceptance of torturing acts is a de-moralizing of the culture. (Hawthorne 44)

If pornography continues to grow more extreme, eventually social boundaries won’t be able to exist in any sensible meaning in relation to sexuality and sex. The “boundary bubble” must eventually reach a breaking point and “pop,” leaving the ruined chaos of an amoral society in its wake. At that point, pornography under the qualification of obscenity will cease to exist, because there will be no more cultural boundaries to situate itself in relation to. Are these worries too extreme? Perhaps for our current cultural context, but the point ought to be clear anyway, illustrating the very real and very possible meltdown of social values in the future if pornography remains unchecked. Boundaries serve a true function and purpose in society and should not be overturned for the mere sake of overturning boundaries, undiscerningly and haphazardly in the way that pornography does.

With our growing understanding of the essence of pornography, we are now at a better position from which to examine its relationship to art and aesthetics. With Rea’s ethical definition slightly expanded and modified from further philosophical and historical argument and thought, I now turn to aesthetic and artistic perspectives. Can art be porn? Can porn be art? We must begin by examining borderline cases which profess to blur the distinction between art and pornography.

Chapter IV

The Aesthetic Perspective and the Similarities Between Art and Pornography

Art has consistently held a place of honor throughout human history, in all its various mediums and forms. Art's sublime beauty captures its consumers in throes of transcendent rapture. On the other hand, Art's brutal honesty can subvert cultural perspectives and constructs, creating an atmosphere of uncomfortable tension as its consumers struggle to come to terms with their newfound open-mindedness. Art can serve as a powerful means of self-expression, working with humanity's innate creativity to discover, define, and express identity on both an individual and cultural level.

While my readers will likely accept the foregoing considerations of art as widely-understood if not self-evident, I wonder how readily acceptable they will find the argument that pornography, too, potentially fills these functions. Pornography, too, supplies deep pleasure to its consumers, uncomfortably and sometimes repulsively subverts cultural standards, and works as one of the only avenues for sexual exploration, encouragement, and expression. Many pro-pornography thinkers put forth just this argument. Nadine Strossen claims, "Sexual expression is an integral aspect of human freedom" (Strossen 218); insofar as pornography gives air to this "freedom," Strossen further argues: therefore "[p]ornography also has literary value" (Strossen 144). Strossen's pornography has such "value" not only in spite of but *because* of pornography's ability to offend: "[I]ts subversive quality challenges the entire status quo, including social structures that inhibit women's freedom" (Strossen 176). Note that this argument is precisely the argument considered at the end of the previous chapter – that the obscenity of pornography in upsetting cultural boundaries may actually be beneficial by overturning old, stale customs in

favor of newer, fresher, more holistic cultural views. Adair Rounthwaite takes the argument for art-porn even further, arguing for videographic pornography as “a form of performance documentation that is designed to create a new performance – of a sexual sensation, and often of masturbation, accompanied by orgasm – in the viewer” (Rounthwaite 63). In this way, pornography by Rounthwaite’s estimation is not only an art form of sexual self-expression; it is actually a uniquely higher art form in the way it transcends mere self-expression by directly encouraging similar sexual self-exploration and -expression in its viewers.

To consider pornography as an art form may be possible, but I can hardly consider such a correlation to be desirable. Could it possibly be right to claim that pornography ought to be as highly-esteemed as art – ought there to be museums of pornography and public funding of pornography? Insofar as art probes the deepest truths of what it means to be human, is the story of humanity as told by pornography acceptable, desirable, *true*? There is, for me, a deep-seated repulsion to this equation of art and pornography; while this affective response is not in itself adequate to deny an equation between pornography and art, this repulsion nonetheless requires thorough and honest investigation. For example – if pornography in Strossen’s estimation “challenges the *entire* status quo, including social structures that inhibit women’s freedom,” wouldn’t it also challenge social structures which *promote* women’s freedom? While this may be true of pornography, surely it cannot be true of art!(?)

This repulsion may merely be the result of social anti-pornography programming, or perhaps it is indicative of some deeper truth concerning the mutually-exclusive natures of art and pornography. Resolving the implications of this repulsion will constitute my objective for the remainder of this thesis. In this chapter, I will examine certain borderline cases of what I shall term “artistic pornography” and “pornographic art.,” cases which complicate the distinction

between art and pornography. In so doing, I will review the arguments which call for equating pornography and art. The next chapter will then make the final argument to distinguish art and porn as unequitable and in fact mutually exclusive classifications – what is art cannot also be pornography, and what is pornography cannot also be art. But let us take each step in turn.

Is Porn Art?

To begin exploring the border between art and pornography, and the cases which dismantle this border, let us begin again with Michael Rea. What is his estimation of the relation between art and pornography? The second in Rea's list of six pre-existing pornography definitions is here immanently relevant: "[those which] define [pornography] as a form of bad art" (Rea 123). The reason these definitions fail is that the qualification "bad art" is neither sufficient nor necessary to create pornography. On the side of sufficiency, Rea claims that botched or anatomically incorrect naked pictures which appear in textbooks will have little-to-no artistic value, but neither will such pictures have pornographic value (Rea 125). As a second example, Rea claims that a man with little artistic ability who poorly paints a picture of himself having sex with his wife will of course produce "bad art," but will not necessarily produce "pornography." I feel these examples are a bit messy in their focus on sexual themes in order to advance Rea's argument – a sufficient and clearer example would have been the perusal of any 101 art class final: it is clear many examples of bad art will be present, but it is equally clear that none would *therefore* be pornography.

The more important argument for my present purposes comes from his argument on the side of necessity. Rea asserts, "[A] lot of what actually counts as pornography is not at all

obviously art, much less *bad* art” (Rea 125). Rea’s makes an interesting move here: he both separates and joins the categories of art and pornography. Some pornography is “not at all obviously art,” and therefore pornography is not necessarily a sub-set of art, but is in fact distinguishable from it. However, some pornography is “not... *bad* art,” but could in Rea’s view be counted as *good* art, and therefore pornography and art are not mutually-exclusive categories either. He goes on to say, “[T]he most ubiquitous examples of pornography – pictures of the sort found in *Playboy* and *Penthouse* – seem clearly to count as art... As Jon Huer notes... many of the photographs in such magazines are technically quite good; and some of the poses are not unreasonably construed as artistically inspired” (Rea 125). Insofar as art entails highly-skilled and often “inspired” construction towards some *telos*, much pornography is undoubtedly skillfully crafted towards its end of arousal and could thus qualify as art.

Artistic Pornography

With Rea’s position in mind, some concrete examples will be helpful. Some feminist commentators and thinkers don’t stop at mere technical prowess, but claim that some pornography can be art in a deeper and more meaningful way. In arguing for pornography as an art form, feminists will often cite the work of Karen Finley, whose “art... involves exhibition of her own body, smearing food on herself, and inserting objects into herself” (Strossen 104). Strossen interprets Finley’s work as “angry protests against sexual abuse, violence, and discrimination against women” (Strossen 104). The most prominently cited example of artistic pornography, however, is that produced by Annie Sprinkle, a porn-star turned artist, feminist, and sexual-educator. Monique Mullholland observes,

As a self-proclaimed post-porn modern artist, Annie Sprinkle's art includes allowing the audience to come onstage and view her cervix, bringing herself to orgasm as part of the performance art, and selling pubic hair and soiled underwear... As argued by Straayer (1993) and Williams (2004), her work is deconstructive, challenges distinctions between art and porn, and significantly disrupts hegemonic ideas of sexual difference.

(Mullholland 46)

Sprinkle's work in particular seems clearly to be pornography, so much so that *Deep Inside Annie Sprinkle*, the first film she both starred in and directed, "became the second-largest-grossing porn film of 1981" (Rounthwaite 67). But is it art? In Rounthwaite's estimation, the most important scene in *Deep Inside* is a masturbation scene, which she analyzes as emphasizing "women's self-pleasure" (Rounthwaite 67), and the reality of a female orgasm, a "realness... positioned as a challenge to masculinist porn production practices that negate women's pleasure" (Rounthwaite 68). In other words, while Sprinkle's and Finley's works can be classified as pornography, they can also be classified as art insofar as they (perhaps uncomfortably or offensively) perform the function of commenting on and challenging social norms.

Pornographic Art

There are also many examples which blur the distinction between art and pornography from the other side of the divide, i.e., works which are commonly understood to be works of art, but seem also to be pornography. For example, consider Sandro Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* (Fig. 1). This famous piece of art comes from the Italian Renaissance, and features prominently the figure of Venus in the foreground, nude. It may be granted that Venus, while nude, is covering

herself with her hair and hands, yet still her bare left breast is visible. Interestingly, the male figure of Zephyrus is partially clothed to hide his nudity, while the female nymph Chloris whom he carries reveals her left breast as Venus does. While this piece of art clearly displays great technical skill and is an example of a production from one of the greatest periods of art history, it nonetheless could be construed as pornography in its depictions of the naked female body, especially considering the idealized figure of Venus, who is unrealistically without blemish or imperfection, just as the figures portrayed in modern pornography.

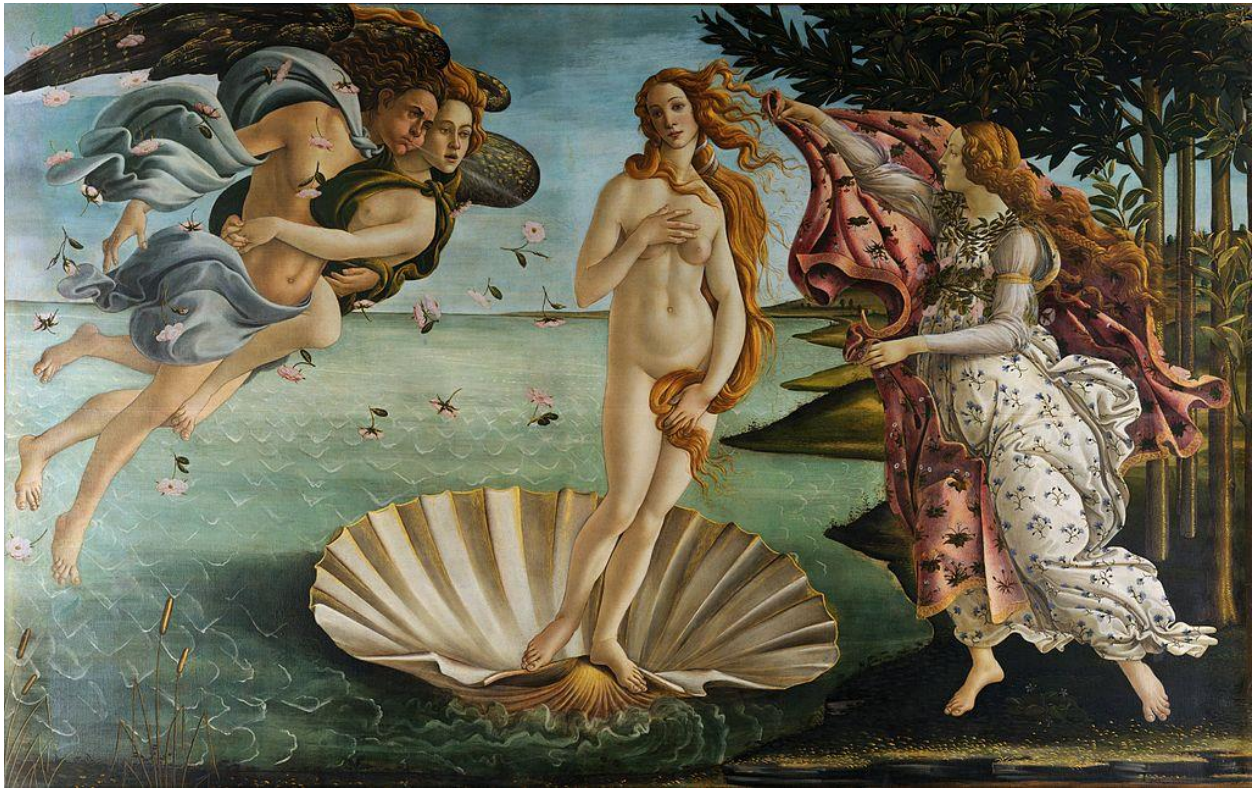


Fig. 1 – Botticelli, Sandro. *Birth of Venus*. c. 1484-86. Uffizi Gallery. *ItalianRenaissance.org*. Web. 11 Nov 2015.

Pornographic art also extends to literature. In his essay “Teaching ‘Dirty’ Books in College,” Robert Boyle explains, “Certain works of Graham Greene and James Joyce, for example, have by some teachers and critics been judged to be pornographic and unfit for the eyes and minds of students” (Boyle). While Boyle is not of this mind himself, he attempts to relate the reasoning of such censor-minded teachers with regard to Joyce’s *Ulysses*, saying that “much of his vision is disgusting” in its dealing “directly with sin and particularly with sexual sin” (Boyle). Boyle claims that such “disgust” “can be expected when the sinful human heart is being revealed” (Boyle). *Ulysses* is undoubtedly one of the most influential and profound of Joyce’s works, and arguably also one of the most influential of the 20th century in general. *Ulysses* must be art, but as Boyle’s censor-minded teachers illustrate, it could also be received as pornography. I must give one more example to press the point.

On Chesil Beach

I will take as my paradigmatic example of pornographic literature not Joyce’s *Ulysses*, but rather Ian McEwan’s *On Chesil Beach*. What follows is a linguistic analysis of the work in an attempt to firmly establish it as a brilliant work of art. The analysis of this work will not only reveal much about pornographic literature as a classification itself, but will also contribute significantly to our understanding and exploration of the repulsion to the concept of “porn-art” that I discovered at the beginning of this chapter.

The very beginning of *On Chesil Beach* sets the scene for the graphic depictions of sex and sexuality to come later in the novel. It begins with the words, “They were young, educated, and both virgins on this, their wedding night, and they lived in a time when a conversation about

sexual difficulties was plainly impossible. But it is never easy” (McEwan 3). Throughout the book, we learn of the couple Florence and Edward, their relationship, and their own unique struggles with their sexuality and the act of sex shared on their wedding night. Ultimately, the couple fails to consummate their marriage, and each eventually goes his/her own separate way; Florence lives a better life making beautiful music in a string quartet with her friends, while Edward seems to age rather ungracefully, alone and merely listening to jazz or rock and roll records.

To understand how *On Chesil Beach* can function as art, consider McEwan’s extreme dexterity with words as given in the opening paragraph of the book. Having just sat down to dinner in their honeymoon suite, “Edward did not mention that he had never stayed in a hotel before, whereas Florence, after many trips as a child with her father, was an old hand” (McEwan 3). Consider what McEwan is suggesting here, that somehow Edward is *less experienced* than is Florence when it comes to “hotel rooms,” a hotel room which they have for the purposes of sexual consummation that night. Yet are they not both virgins, as the first lines of the book (quoted earlier) claim? Why share this detail of hotel rooms – what is McEwan hinting at?

Through the story, we gradually accumulate details which suggest – but importantly never explicitly reveal – what this crucial difference is between the two lovers. Let us spend some time with McEwan’s words on Edward’s and Florence’s separate misgivings about their wedding night, misgivings “which they could not describe to each other” (McEwan 7). Edward’s concern was very focused:

His specific worry, based on one unfortunate experience, was of overexcitement, of what he had heard someone describe as “arriving too soon.” The matter was rarely out of his

thoughts, but though his fear of failure was great, his eagerness – for rapture, for resolution – was far greater. (McEwan 8)

While Edward's worry is indeed specific, he does not possess of himself the words to understand his situation; he instead relies on someone else to name his fear: that of "arriving too soon." He hasn't fully understood his condition, not to the extent that he is comfortable voicing it to Florence, at least. And yet his fear is overshadowed by his excitement. He is excited for "rapture" and "resolution," not for love or sharing, and thus his desires seem firmly planted in himself; he needs rapturous pleasure (arguably of the sort offered by pornography), and also "resolution" of some problem which he believes will be answered by sex. Perhaps his thought process of using sex for personal pleasure and the resolution of some personal problems are akin to how pornography is often used in society, viz., as a source of personal pleasure and the resolution to the paradox of animalistic sexuality in rational human civilization. Also take note of the source of his worry, which is "based on one unfortunate experience." Perhaps Edward isn't as inexperienced as was implied before, and thus the reliability of our introductory narrator is thrown into question. If Edward is likely not actually a virgin, or at least not as inexperienced as was implied, then what of Florence?

Florence's worries on consummation are much vaguer than those of Edward, and also much direr and more sinister. We learn, "Florence's anxieties were more serious, and there were moments during the journey from Oxford when she thought she was about to draw on all her courage to speak her mind. But what troubled her was unutterable, and she could barely frame it for herself" (McEwan 8). Already, Florence's situation is tangibly more serious than that of Edward; Edward, while he cannot bring himself to discuss his problems with Florence, nevertheless at least possesses words to understand his situation for himself. Florence's problem,

however, while also “unutterable” to others, is not even understandable on a personal level; she can “barely frame it for herself,” and indeed fails to do so throughout the book. She lacks any language whatsoever for understanding or expressing, to herself or to others, her innermost difficulty, whatever it may be. Just as we must understand the essence of pornography before we can appropriately respond to it, she has no understanding of the essence of her problem, and so cannot respond appropriately, or even at all. And what is her problem? We read,

Where he merely suffered conventional first-night nerves, she experienced a visceral dread, a helpless disgust as palpable as seasickness... Certainly, the thought of Edward’s testicles, pendulous below his *engorged* penis – another horrifying term – had the potency to make her upper lip curl, and the idea of herself being touched “down there” by someone else, even someone she loved, was as repulsive as, say, a surgical procedure on her eye. (McEwan 8-10)

Clearly, the term “misgiving” when applied to Florence’s perspective is grossly inadequate. She “dreads” sexual encounters, even with Edward, her new husband; she is filled with “disgust,” “horror,” and even “helplessness.” Most interestingly for the present analysis, Florence finds sexual encounters “*repulsive*,” just as I found the equation of art and pornography to be repulsive. McEwan has given us the opportunity to understand better our own experience through Florence’s experience – what is the character of Florence’s repulsion, and where does it come from?

Interestingly, it is not simply the idea of “being touched ‘down there’” by *Edward* which so violently disturbs and repulses her in the passage above. Rather, she can’t bear the thought of being touched “*by someone else, even someone she loved*” (emphasis mine). Why does she regress into such a general “someone” here, when Edward was the only person likely to be

“touching her down there?” And why should McEwan use the *passive* voice when relating this information, and not the active voice? The answer to these questions, I argue, is that Florence’s fear, rather her deep personal rejection, of sex stems not from her sexual inexperience as implied by the word “virgin” applied to her in the opening. Rather, her repulsion comes from a disturbing *abundance* of sexual experiences surrounding her mysterious familiarity with “hotel rooms” during trips with her father as a child, experiences which happened to a *passive* Florence and were not initiated by an *active* Florence.

What is going on with Florence and her father? McEwan never explicitly answers this question. He does, however, provide adequate evidence to discern the answer for ourselves. For Florence,

[H]er father aroused in her conflicting emotions. There were times when she found him physically repellent and she could hardly bear the sight of him... She hated hearing his enthusiastic reports about the boat, the ridiculously named *Sugar Plum*, which he kept down in Poole harbor. It grated on her, his accounts of a new kind of sail, a ship-to-shore radio, a special yacht varnish. He used to take her out with him, and several times, when she was twelve and thirteen, they crossed all the way to Carteret, near Cherbourg.

(McEwan 61-62)

Notice how she again is “physically repulsed” by her father, in *just the same manner* that the prospect of sex with Edward seems to physically repulse her. This repulsion is “aroused” in her, no less, a word with obvious sexual connotations. What, then, happened on all those yacht trips? Again, McEwan doesn’t reveal his secrets: “They never talked about those trips. He had never asked her again, and she was glad” (McEwan 62). While a father taking yacht trips with his daughter in itself is innocent enough, sinister details begin to add up which are impossible to

ignore. While they would go out on the boat throughout her childhood, they only took the particularly long trip “to Carteret” when she was a pubescent “twelve and thirteen” year old girl. And clearly the trips were a bad experience for her: if she had enjoyed them, she would be glad to hear of her father’s boat and his new sails and varnish, as these would stir up many happy memories for her. If she had simply found them boring or tiresome, then at worst her father’s varnish reports would be a minor annoyance. But such reports actually “grate” on her, and she hates hearing about the boat. Clearly, the trips were neither enjoyable nor even neutrally boring, but were in fact traumatic events for her, so much so that she has apparently blocked the memories of those trips, hiding it by not giving it language for expression. After all, “Such a language had yet to be invented” (McEwan 171). This same language gap that prevents Florence from expressing her sexual difficulties to either Edward or to herself is also preventing her from acknowledging the source of her sexual difficulties: her father had molested her as a child. Remembering the evidence hinting at this earlier – Florence’s experience with hotels – we learn later that her father had taken her for “special treats, the one-night business trips to European cities where she and [her father] always stayed *in the grandest hotels*” (McEwan 67, emphasis mine). The conclusion is unavoidable at this point.

Clearly, neither Florence nor Edward were truly “virgins” on their wedding night, then, or at least both were more experienced than such an appellation led the reader to believe. Do we thus claim that McEwan’s book fails to give an accurate representation of reality? On the contrary, consider again the opening lines in which Florence and Edward are called “virgins”: “They were young, educated, and both virgins on this, their wedding night, and they lived in a time when a conversation about sexual difficulties was plainly impossible. But it is never easy” (McEwan 3). I want to argue that this passage is highly complex in its use of point of view,

moving subtly between two important and vastly different perspectives. The passage begins in the perspective of *both* Edward and Florence who, despite their past experiences, *believe themselves* to be virgins. While the third-person pronoun obscures this interpretation on a first reading, the presence of the deictic “this” actually necessitates this interpretation. The statement could only be uttered, or thought, or believed *within the context of the wedding night*, even if the narrator represents the belief verbally to the reader (thus accounting for the third-person pronoun). Therefore, the belief *must* belong to Edward or Florence (or rather both), the only two present on that wedding night, and thus the only two who could possibly see it as “this” their wedding night. It is not the narrator who is unreliable, *per se*, but rather Edward and Florence are themselves complex characters who don’t really understand their own situations. We are thus invited as readers to try and understand their stories as we read, understanding ourselves better in the process. McEwan’s own narratorial voice doesn’t appear until the next sentence: “But it is never easy.” Here we are suddenly and dexterously brought out of the context of the wedding night, and a general statement about humanity regardless of temporal context is made with the absolute “never.” Sexual difficulties such as those presented in the book are the same difficulties which each person must confront in their own implicitly sexual humanity, and thus this book serves as a way to help dismantle the perpetual difficulty of talking about sexual matters, of making ourselves so raw and vulnerable in love. The novel doesn’t overly emphasize sexuality and sex, but rather situates sexuality within a representation of a broader, more holistic, and more realistic human nature, exploring and emphasizing the complexities of experience rather than attempting to ignore or simplify reality.

In addition, the novel provides its readers with the “language” which Edward and Florence so tragically lacked, giving us the opportunity to critically and explicitly deal with our

own sexual and emotional problems, hopefully helping us to avoid their tragic end of separation and lost love. Moreover, this novel provides us with unique resources to investigate the physical, affective, repulsion we originally felt in equating art and pornography. We can't simply dismiss Florence's repulsion because it originated in sexual abuse, and neither can we dismiss our repulsion as merely the product of social programming. Both deserve deeper investigation and analysis, as I hope I have shown by the foregoing analysis.

Ian McEwan's *On Chesil Beach* is clearly art, probing the depths of human nature and experience. Given the intricate, implicit beauty which the preceding analysis should have made manifest, classifying *On Chesil Beach* as pornography is disquieting at best, and downright unacceptable at worst. This is despite its sexually explicit, and perhaps even "pornographic," passages and descriptions. Its subject matter necessitates such language and work, and McEwan navigates his topic with beauty and admirable elegance.

Can Porn Be Art?

It should by now be easy to see the difficulties presented when attempting to distinguish art and pornography. While Rea maintains a distinction between them, he does not allow them to be mutually-exclusive categories, and in fact seems to think that some examples of pornography are actually examples of good art as well. Some think that the work of Finley and Sprinkle must surely be examples of "modern art" and "performance art documentation," and others think that the work of Joyce and McEwan must surely be examples of pornography akin to the modern phenomenon *Fifty Shades of Grey*.

It appears we are at an impasse, at which pornographic art and artistic pornography have met and cannot cross. How are we to resolve this issue? In the next chapter, I will take up the task of differentiating between pornography and art. Beginning with an examination of the terms “pornographic” and “artistic” (as opposed to “pornography” and “art”), I will show how it is possible to have “pornographic art” and “artistic pornography” while nonetheless maintaining that “pornography” and “art” cannot be applied to the one object (or one *token* of an object) in a single context.

Chapter V

The Aesthetic Perspective Continued: The Fundamental Differences Between Art and Pornography

In the last chapter, I introduced the common arguments which attempt to link pornography and art, and proceeded to explore several examples which professedly blur the lines between pornography and art. It should now be easy to understand how and why some might argue for such a link. After all, both art and pornography seem to tend toward similar effects, namely the subversion of cultural norms and the exploration of human traits. And if pornography really is (or can be) associated with art, any arguments against pornography will become moot. Establishing a link between pornography and art is the perfect tactic for porn proponents, for if porn is art, then porn cannot rightly be contained, censored, or fought. Pornography production and consumption would become rights as fundamental to the human person as the creation and contemplation of works of art, and the place of pornography in society would become solidified and fortified beyond reproach.

It is not my belief, however, that such a link between porn and art exists; in fact, such a correlation would represent a grievous assault on the integrity of art. I will end my thesis now with an attempt to demonstrate the ways in which pornography and art are actually antithetical to one another as mutually exclusive categories of classification. First, I will investigate and clarify the terms “pornographic” and “artistic” in relation to their noun counterparts “pornography” and “art”; this will reveal how “pornographic art” and “artistic pornography” can exist while “art-porn” must remain an impossible oxymoron. I will continue with an investigation into the differences in the cognitive reception of pornography and art in the human brain. I will

ultimately conclude this aesthetic investigation (and this thesis) by reviewing Rea's definition one last time in order to best understand the fundamental differences between art and porn.

Adjectives vs. Nouns

Where contradiction feels immanent in crossing the terms "art" and "pornography," I feel no such contradiction in crossing the terms "artistic" and "pornographic." Of particular interest, then, is the relationship between the *nouns* "pornography" and "art," and the *adjectives* "pornographic" and "artistic." How could it be that we can correctly describe a certain work as "pornographic," while incorrectly classify it as "pornography?" Similarly, how can we truly call a work "artistic," while nonetheless falsely classify it as "art?" The answer comes from understanding the difference between these adjectives and nouns. Stephanie Patridge describes this distinction well:

[W]e use the adjectival forms of terms for purposes other than indicating what something's ontological category is... we might legitimately say of a painting that it is *photographic* while consistently denying that it is *photography*... This leaves open the possibility that we might rightly call an image *pornographic* without thereby committing ourselves to the claim that it is thereby *pornography*. (Patridge 26)

Given this distinction, we have the freedom to label some pornography as *artistic*, as it seems necessary to do, without thereby necessitating the position that the work is *art*, which seems incorrect. Recall Rea's opinions on the artistry of some more prevalent pornography, such as that produced by *Playboy* or *Penthouse* (Rea 125), discussed in the previous chapter. Likewise, we have the freedom to label some art as *pornographic* as it seems right to do, without thereby

necessitating that it be *pornography*, which seems incorrect. Ian McEwan's *On Chesil Beach* certainly must not be pornography, though some of the more graphic depictions of sex might be "pornographic" for some. In more general terms, adjectives do not necessarily equal or imply their noun-counterparts.

To better understand this crucial distinction, let us ask the following: what might these adjectives entail when used correctly? Let us begin with "artistic." First, artistic material is detailed, with higher degrees of intricacy of detail entailing higher degrees of artistry. This might also imply a temporal commitment to achieve such detail, but may not be necessary. Second, technical skill seems a part of "artistic" as well; not just anyone can create something artistic, but such work rather requires either talent or training to achieve. Third, a major factor of artistic material is teleological design for some end or purpose; a work possesses higher or lesser degrees of artistry to the extent that it more or less successfully achieves its purpose.

It should be clear, upon consideration, that pornography can fulfill each of these qualities; the previous chapter provides many examples. Pornography may be detailed, as indeed some pornography must be: the slightest defect or imperfection in the bodies represented could possibly ruin their affect. Time commitment may also come into play here, as some pornographic photo shoots require hours of make-up preparation, and subsequent hours of photography sessions while driving after the perfect shot. Pornography may require great skill: on the part of pornography models, skill is manifest in terms of talent or natural endowment, and also in terms of long hours of training, preparation, and practice; on the part of pornography producers, editors, directors, etc., skill is manifest in terms of technical ability as well as training and practice to learn how to make the most effective pornography. Pornography also is clearly teleologically designed towards an end, viz., sexual stimulation; as Rounthwaite acknowledges,

“Porn needs a certain kind of affect: without the ability to generate erotic pleasure, it is fundamentally unsuccessful” (Rounthwaite 64). This is precisely what Rea drives at in his definition when he recognizes that sexual stimulation must be the main reason for consuming pornography, in the fourth qualification of part one of his definition. Thus, we can clearly label some pornography (though undoubtedly not *all* pornography) as “artistic.”

What of the term “pornographic?” First, we might suggest that pornographic material is sexually arousing, or at least is construed as such by the individual consuming the material. Second, Pornographic material could be subversive, functioning to challenge norms in society, especially norms surrounding sexuality and sex. On a related note, pornographic material can be considered offensive or obscene, sometimes because of its subversive nature. Most importantly, pornographic material is usually, if not always, sexually explicit. Indeed, it is this sexual explicitness which often gives rise to the previous qualities.

Again, in every case, it is easy to see how art can possibly fit these descriptions, and the previous chapter again supplies many examples. It could be argued that art is not properly sexually arousing. Cynthia Freeland develops Kantian aesthetic theory as claiming “our response has to be disinterested... If a viewer responds to Botticelli’s *Venus* with an erotic desire, as if she is a pinup, he is actually not appreciating her for her beauty” (Freeland 14). While this may be true, it does not erase the possibility that some viewers can (and likely do) respond to Botticelli’s *Venus* and other “pornographic art” with sexual arousal, and that by so doing they in no way impede the work’s classification essentially as “art.” Art also can be subversive, and indeed it often is. Similarly, art can and often does offend – just think of the perspectives against James Joyce’s *Ulysses* which Robert Boyle presented in the previous chapter. Finally, and most obviously, art can indeed be sexually explicit, as a review of my analysis of *On Chesil Beach*

will quickly reveal. Thus, it is clear that art can earn the appellation “pornographic,” importantly without jeopardizing its essence as “art.”

Given that pornography can be artistic, and art can be pornographic, is it then possible to say that porn can be art, or that art can be porn? As mentioned earlier, the two intuitively seem to relate to one another such that one is the contradiction of the other: art cannot at the same time be porn, nor can porn at the same time be art. Rather, any given work (or any token of any given work, referring again back to Rea) must necessarily be limited to one or the other category.² Why is this so? Let us consider our intuitions of art and those of pornography in juxtaposition with one another. In this consideration, a few striking distinctions crystalize, revealing just how opposed porn and art really are: porn is explicit where art is implicit; porn emphasizes the body where art emphasizes holistic humanity (body *and* spirit); porn emphasizes fantasy where art (including fantasy art) always describes some reality of the human condition; porn is full of lies concerning human sexuality and human nature where art conveys deep truth by confronting the full complexity of human sexuality, human nature, and human experience. These distinctions obviously require more discussion, which follows.

Implicit vs. Explicit

One hallmark of great art is its ability to control many aspects of the work, manipulating form and detail in order to direct a certain interpretation. The more such aspects the artist

² Since I have spent so much time refining the definition of pornography, a process which has been recognizably difficult, one might then think that a definition of art would constitute the next step. However, art theory is likewise a hotly debated topic as critics and philosophers attempt to describe in concrete terms what it means to be art; Cynthia Freeland notes the “difficulty of coming up with suitable theories” (Freeland xvii) to explain the phenomenon of art. As such, attempting to craft a better and more refined definition of art seems too far out of my reach at the present time; I would suggest that this is yet another area which requires further research.

controls and manipulates, the better art s/he achieves. This means that art is often subtle, conveying its message implicitly via the network of interconnecting aspects and details controlled to create its point. Pornography, however, is explicit and superficial. In pornography, analysis of implicit details is discouraged, due simply to Rounthwaite's observation that "Porn needs a certain kind of affect: without the ability to generate erotic pleasure, it is fundamentally unsuccessful" (Rounthwaite 64). Insofar as this affect must be visceral, physical, and instinctual (there is no pornography, so far as I am aware, which derives its sexual stimulation via intellectual analysis of its component parts), then pornography is necessarily limited to superficial details and cannot manipulate any deeper constructs. Nadine Strossen argues, "[W]hen we look at sexually explicit depictions... diverse interpretations are possible; *no* sexual imagery can be given one universal meaning" (Strossen 155). She argues that pornography exemplifies the "poststructuralist" and "deconstructionist" literary/artistic movements of modernity insofar as no porn "has any objective, fixed meaning, but rather has a different meaning for each member of its audience" (Strossen 145). While diverse interpretations may be possible, my point is that pornographers *encourage* no interpretation save that of sexual stimulation, and this is a fundamental departure from works of art. The very fact that multiple interpretations are possible is in fact argument against labeling pornography as art; while we can play linguistic semantic games with words and claim that all works of art or literature have diverse "possible" interpretations, such a claim is meaningless in terms of true artwork. No true artist is so sloppy as to leave their work open to *any* interpretation. In other words, it is clear that art indeed *intends* few interpretations, and interpretations must always be based on the evidence which the artist supplies through the work, evidence consciously constructed for the purposes of guiding that interpretation.

Besides all of this, if pornography attempted to employ the level of artistry exhibited in Botticelli's *Venus* or McEwan's *On Chesil Beach*, such intricacy of detail would necessarily be lost on its intended audience, which does not consume pornography with the expectation that such analysis will be used. Pornography is built on instant, physical gratification.³ This means that time-consuming intellectual pursuits like analysis are necessarily anti-pornographic. Porn is meant to be consumed few times (perhaps only once), only as long as sexual stimulation is achieved. Once that stimulation is lost, that specific instance of porn is discarded in search of other more radical pornography as necessary; note that this is one implication of Rea's fourth qualification, i.e., that porn must be sexually stimulating (Rea 120). Art, on the contrary, is meant to be consumed multiple times, over and over again over a lifetime; the reason for this is to allow the consumer to slowly, gradually, and intellectually discern all of the artist's work, continually uncovering meaning and refining interpretation.

Allow me to emphasize: this does not mean that pornography *cannot* utilize implication in its construction. This does mean, rather, that such artistic implication will necessarily be minor (juvenile, in a sense), or at least lost on the consumers of pornography, who are not interested in such intellectual and analytical work. Thus, pornography emphasizes the physical, instinctual, animal, visceral, explicit, and superficial, while art emphasizes the intellectual, rational, implicit, deep, human, and analytical.

³ The cognitive explanation for this is that pornography creates the same addictive neuro-chemical pathways in the brain as drugs like crack cocaine (Haney 49; Reed 249; Roller 53, 55). The phenomenon of "escalation" (Reed 251) is likewise well-documented, as Cyndi Roller in her essay "Sex Addiction and Women: A Nursing Issue" explains: "Just as the cocaine addict needs more drug to achieve the same high, the sex addict needs more sex to achieve the same sexual high" (Roller 56). Escalation is extremely important for understanding pornography, in part because it is essentially a neurobiological explanation of the cultural phenomenon I discussed in the chapter on the origins of porn, namely that of pushing cultural boundaries as pornography continually grows more and more extreme. On an individual level, the brain needs more and more extreme pornography over time to achieve the same level of sexual stimulation.

Form vs. Content

As suggested from my analysis of *On Chesil Beach*, art reveals some deep truth about reality and our human condition, such that pornography reveals no such truth. As Boyle argues, “Literature, as I take it, proceeds from skilled writers who have seen [a vision]... A *vision*, unlike a calculated manipulation of details, will *see* evil as it is” (Boyle). We might easily insert the word “art” where Boyle uses the word “literature” in order to better fit our more general discussion, since literature is in fact a subset of art. Likewise, we could easily describe pornography as “a calculated manipulation of details.” In other words, art sees reality, in all its details (including the sexual, bodily details), but does not pruriently emphasize the pleasure and attractiveness of sin in the way that pornography does.

Now, it might be argued that, where Boyle here attributes manipulation of details to pornography, I above attributed manipulation of details to art. Does not art manipulate details in order to drive the artist’s intended interpretation? Allow me to clarify – when I speak of the *artistic* manipulation of details, I mean the manipulation of those details relating most to *form*. In other words, art transcends mere content and is concerned with its form, the manner in which its content is displayed. As Boyle notes, “art sees reality, in *all* its details”; art conveys truth in its content, and reinforces that truthful content in its attention to form and representation.

Pornographic manipulation of details, however, has to do with the manipulation of details relating to *content*. As Ronald Berger, Patricia Searles, and Charles Cottle note in their book *Feminism and Pornography*, pornography offers a “fantasy world,” a “‘utopian kingdom’ of ever-ready women and ever-hard men” (Berger, Searles, and Cottle 76). These qualities of the men and women in pornography, as my readers will no doubt (hopefully) concede, are not at all

existent in the real world; the people of pornography have little in common with real people in these ways.

While I may not have yet convinced my readers that the fantasy of art and the fantasy of pornography are fundamentally different, consider more examples of pornography's claimed "utopianism." Pornography proponent Ann Snitow claimed that the "fantasy" of pornography "can... be wishful, eager, and utopian," offering "a private path to arousal" (Snitow as quoted in Strossen 175). While some might argue that fantasy is also an artistic genre, nonetheless the fantasy purported by pornography is crucially different to artistic fantasy in two major ways: in kind, and in cognitive reception.

Pornographic fantasy is different in kind than artistic fantasy; consider first artistic fantasy. Artistic fantasy establishes a mystical, unrealistic context or setting in which characters nonetheless *still participate in our shared human nature*; should the characters depart from human nature, this is usually done in order to investigate the *dystopic* effects incumbent upon such a distortion of human nature, as is seen in stories similar to Ursula Le Guin's *The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas* (this story deletes the reality of suffering as part of the human condition in the town of Omelas, with the consequence that all the town's suffering is laid on one innocent, tortured child; many cannot accept this state of affairs, and so "walk away from Omelas"). Yet the fantasy established in pornography, while it may be in the contextual setting as well, actually focuses on distorting human nature as such, in an attempt to create a "'utopian kingdom' of ever-ready women and ever-hard men" (Berger et al. 76), as discussed earlier. Thus, pornography fails to convey any true vision concerning what it means to be human or how we ought to live, and in fact works to distort pre-existing true visions.

Art vs. Porn – Cognitive Reception

Pornographic fantasy also differs from artistic fantasy more importantly in its cognitive reception in the mind of the consumer. The Romantic poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge described our cognitive interaction with art to be a “willing suspension of disbelief” which “constitutes poetic faith” (Coleridge 314). This suspension of disbelief allows us to enter into the world of the works we read, no matter how fanciful or imaginative, and accept their unrealism. Consider our ability to accept Ian McEwan’s *On Chesil Beach* to such an extent that we respond emotionally to Florence and Edward’s break-up. We emotionally invest ourselves deeply in the narrative, despite McEwan’s disclaimer, “The characters in this novel are inventions and bear no resemblance to people living or dead. Edward and Florence’s hotel – just over a mile south of Abbotsbury, Dorset, occupying an elevated position in a field behind the beach parking lot – does not exist” (McEwan). Yet it is important to understand that, for art, the willing *suspension* of disbelief implies a *re-assertion* of disbelief and distance which allows for the analytical process to take place.

There are numerous modern-day cognitive theories which attempt to clarify and describe the same phenomenon. David Duff described this phenomenon as “a double shift of attention” (Duff 30) in his essay “Melodies of Mind: Poetic Forms as Cognitive Structures.” This double shift involves moving the reader on both an emotional/affective level and a rational/analytic level. The reader’s attention is “shifted” both

“from everyday thinking and feeling to the intensified emotional and ideational state produced by poetry, and from an ordinary perception of language... to an artistic perception of language, which involves conscious apprehension of its sounds and structures, including the formal architecture of verse. (Duff 30)

In other words, poetry recognizes the affective and emotional quality of human thought and feeling, and will speak directly to those affections, bringing the reader into a personal experience of the feeling and atmosphere which the poem describes. Emphasizing that poetic language is simply a conscious or intentional use of conventional, everyday language (Duff 30), Duff points out that poetry *simultaneously* speaks to rationality in human nature, as we are forced to notice and analyze the formal details which the poet has manipulated in his/her work. To put this theory into Coleridge's terminology, poetry directs us not only to *suspend our disbelief* that we might have an affective poetic experience of the work, but it also demands that we retain our rational wits, or *maintain our disbelief*, in order to take note of and analyze the formal linguistic devices and techniques utilized (Duff would likely approve of such a connection with Coleridge, whom Duff cites extensively in his essay). The main difference between Duff's position and Coleridge's is that Duff emphasizes the contemporaneous, and therefore paradoxically "impossible" (Duff 31), nature of this experience, as *both* suspending *and* asserting disbelief *at the same time*; Duff observes, "that impossible double attention is precisely what lyric poetry seeks" (Duff 31). On the other hand, Coleridge allows a more linear, temporal experience, as the reader first suspends disbelief in order to consume the art, and then subsequently reasserts disbelief in order to analyze the art. While Duff emphasizes the unique power of lyric poetry, especially the ode, in accomplishing this type of cognitive processing, I would argue that the concept can be more than appropriately applied to literature as a whole.⁴

⁴ Interestingly, Duff mentions the theory of "transportation" in understanding the cognitive reception not only of literature, but of other forms of media as well, including advertising (Duff 26). Though he claims the theory is "too crude" to understand the cognition of lyric poetry (and thus he supplies his theory of double attention as discussed in the main body of my text above), transportation theory itself might be useful as another way of understanding the cognition of pornography. Duff explains the phenomenon of transportation as that "whereby an individual transfers attention from his or her world to the simulated world of the story, an experience that alters their perceptions and can lead to a permanent change in their beliefs and attitudes" (Duff 26). Obviously, the implications of this theory as applied to pornography consumption gives great credence to the common argument of pornography critics that the

Theodore Bach gives us yet another way to describe this cognitive process in his essay “Pornography as Simulation.” According to Bach, we use “simulation” in our everyday lives as a way to “mind read”; we simulate another’s experiences in our own minds in order to discern how we might act or feel in that situation, and then ascribe the results of that simulation to the other as a way to better understand them (Bach 54). Essentially, this process is equal to mentally “walking a mile in another’s shoes.” While Bach argues that this simulation process is used when consuming pornography, I would argue it is also used in consuming art. When used in the consumption of art, the process of simulation allows the user to have a more compassionate and open mind, as they learn to view the world from multiple perspectives and understand multiple experiences. However, it is important to recognize that, just as the “willing suspension of disbelief” implies a re-assumption of that belief, so too does the simulation process imply exiting that process in order to ascribe the results to the other. “One clear difference between the uses of simulation during mind reading versus porn watching,” Bach stresses, “is that only the former employs the final projective step” (Bach 59). In other words, when consuming pornography, the user simulates in his/her own mind the experience of the porn actor/actress on screen in order to feel sexually stimulated; Bach predicts, “Quite plausibly, watching pornography produces activation patterns in [the] somatosensory cortex that are similar to patterns produced during actual sexual activity” (Bach 59). However, the user does *not* afterwards exit the simulation process in order to ascribe the results to the actor/actress. The simulation remains inside the user at all times; no expansion of worldview or compassion takes place.

consumption of pornography causes a subsequent change in men’s perception of women, creating a subconscious social structure which is inherently discriminatory against women.

Thus, the problem with classifying pornography as a type of art is that it actively works against the re-assumption of disbelief or ascription of the results of simulation, thus allowing the fantasy world it depicts (along with the degrading narrative it tells of women, viz., that it is acceptable to objectify women sexually and view them more generally as objects to sexual stimulation and arousal) to become the accepted worldview of its consumers over time. Whether understood as a suspension of disbelief, a double shift of attention, or a mental simulation of another's experience, pornography never exits the process to come back to (or remain in) reality.

The Individual and Social Effects of Porn

The lies told in pornography are taken up in the consumer's mind to become a part of their cognitive reality, powerfully reinforced by the newly created addictive neurochemical pathways (see footnote on page 54). Berger et al. cite radical feminist Kathleen Berry, who:

develops a radical feminist ontology of pornography and its relationship to sexual fantasy, arguing that pornography is intended for its effect – that is, to elicit sexual response in viewers... Although consumers of pornography have some choice over what to interpret as reality, what to attribute to fantasy or distortion, and what to act out, their choices are based on those experiences that have produced the greatest sexual stimulation and that therefore have received the most reinforcement... Consequently, personal fantasy, highly susceptible to pornography, may enter into sexual interaction with others... Furthermore, when pornographic fantasies are violent, sexual arousal becomes conditioned to violence and internal prohibitions against acting out such fantasies are reduced. (Berger et al. 38)

Berry here recognizes again the conceded possibility of multiple and diverse interpretations of pornography, but note that the reasonable or expected interpretations of pornography are in fact limited to those which receive the most cognitive reward via sexual stimulation and pleasure, and this effect is increased as pornography grows more extreme and violent. Notice also Berger et al.'s claim (qua Berry) that “sexual arousal *becomes conditioned* to violence” (Berger et al. 38, emphasis mine). As the user consumes more pornography, requiring more extreme forms to achieve the same sexual “high,” the user will become “conditioned” or addicted to these more extreme forms, finding them acceptable and stimulating where s/he might not have before.⁵ As Bach suggests, “I do not believe that the growing population of porn categories exists in response to people’s antecedent desires. Rather, these categories *create* desires, and these new desires may conflict with the standards of wellbeing and moral behavior” (Bach 62). As society consumes more pornography, socio-cultural standards of acceptability surrounding sexual behavior are pushed against and stretched, allowing more extreme pornography to exist, which in turn pushes even more against those boundaries and standards. This is precisely the argument discovered in the historical perspective;⁶ notice that another direct implication of this is that pornography is *not* “normal,” “natural,” or “expressive of our deepest humanity,” but is in fact *manufactured*, *unnatural*, and *a perversion of our humanity*.

With this in mind, the increasingly pervasive and extreme genre of violent pornography should come as no surprise, and should be exceedingly disturbing. Recall Susan Hawthorne’s words, from my chapter on the historical perspective, on the “de-moralizing effect” of pornography on the culture (Hawthorne 44). Hawthorne’s warning could be understood as the

⁵ This is simply another way of understanding the phenomenon of escalation; see note 3 above (page 54).

⁶ Recall this argument was reinforced on an individual, neurochemical level in note 3 as well.

fact that the consumers of violent pornography will inevitably fail to re-assume their disbelief, and thus the entire social atmosphere will become gradually and increasingly more hostile and objectifying towards women in general.

Michael Rea also contributes arguments in favor of pornography's fantasy; he does this when he argues against definitions of pornography as "a form of (or contributor to) oppression" (Rea 123) (the fifth of the six preexisting definitions he argues against). He claims:

[T]he producers of *Penthouse* might well argue that their pictures do not say anything about women generally. At most they say of *particular* women that they are mere objects. But even this is a stretch; for the photos in pornographic magazines are often accompanied by biographical information about the women depicted, thus communicating that they are more than mere sex objects. (Rea 131)

Rea is here arguing against the claim that all pornography is oppressive towards women in its objectification of women. He proposes that the presence of biographical information nullifies the possibility that the women depicted could be viewed as mere sex objects, and that there is thus really no reason to consider pornography to be oppressive either to the women depicted or to women in general. Yet I reply that pornography is in its nature very general, and this generalizability helps to establish as its referent the entire class of women rather than merely particular women. This is, granted, most especially true in the instance of pornography which does not include any such biographical information of the women depicted. However, I would ask to what extent such biographical information, when it is indeed present, is in fact a part of the experience of pornography – is such biographical information really relevant or important to the pornography produced? In reality, the same affect could be achieved in the absence of such specific information, as in fact it most often is.

I must again emphasize at this point that that sexual explicitness by itself, even such that is violent, is not at all times and contexts pornography (though it likely is always pornographic), but can in fact be art in the right context. Sexually explicit descriptions as found in *On Chesil Beach* are of a fundamentally different kind than those found in *Fifty Shades of Grey*, for example. Clare McGlynn and Ian Ward argue just this kind of contextual complexity in their joint essay “Pornography, Pragmatism, and Proscription.” Calling upon the thought of Martha Nussbaum and Richard Rorty, they note:

Objectification of the female body may well harm in certain contexts; in others it may not. In some instances it may need to be proscribed: most obviously in the case of child abuse images, or in principle at least, extreme violence. In others it may not. It is for this reason that we can accept depictions of female sexuality in texts such as Lawrence’s *Lady Chatterly’s Lover* or Henry James’s *The Golden Bowl*, whilst expressing rather greater doubt as we turn the pages of *Playboy* or peruse *rapedbitch.com*. While the former, as Nussbaum argues, can be defended in terms of a capacity to liberate an erotic female experience, to promote emotional growth perhaps, the latter, which seeks merely to degrade and to silence, cannot. (McGlynn and Ward 341).

Where true art and literature have the ability to depict sexuality in such a way as to honestly wrestle with the deepest complexities of humanity and describe the truth of human nature, pornography can never do so. Ian McEwan uses sexually explicit language and descriptions as a way of exploring the complex characters of Florence and Edward – Edward, who is full of lust but lacking in love, and Florence who is full of love, but deeply damaged by her father and unable to connect on a carnal level. Pornography, however, suggests that women are “ever-ready” and men “ever-hard.” Ian McEwan’s work, if read with maturity, will most certainly

foster emotional growth as we learn to take risks and embrace the vulnerability of our humanity for the sake of love; pornography is simply incapable of such profound and holistic insight. Art fantasy and porn fantasy are clearly different from one another.

While there may exist artistic porn, and pornographic art, the impossibility of the existence of “art-porn” or “porn-art” ought now to be clear. Pornography is false, fanciful, physical, animalistic, instinctual, explicit, superficial, impossible, deceptive, lustful, lazy, selfish, isolating, unhealthy, etc. Art, on the other hand, is true, real, holistic, human, intellectual, implicit, deep, possible, authentic, loving, mature, selfless, communicative, healthy, etc. While the two may perform similar functions at times, such as subverting cultural norms, they nonetheless accomplish this in fundamentally differing ways, ways which will ultimately carry with them different effects on cognitive-individual and socio-cultural levels. Pornography cannot be described as “non-artistic” or as “bad art,” but is in fact *non-art*, or *anti-art*.

Revisiting Rea and One Last Time

Flowing from this discussion comes the final review of Rea’s definition. First, allow me to restate Rea’s definition, in its currently modified form (personal additions are underlined, while personal excisions are struck through):

Part 1: *x* is used (or treated) as pornography by a person S =_{DF} (i) *x* is a token of some sort of communicative material (picture, paragraph, phone call, performance, etc.), (ii) S desires to be sexually aroused or gratified by the communicative content of *x*, (iii) if S believes that the communicative content of *x* is intended to foster any intimacy besides sexual or physical intimacy between S and the

subject(s) of x , that belief is not among S 's reasons for attending to x 's content, and (iv) if S 's desire to be sexually aroused or gratified by the communicative content of x were no longer among S 's reasons for attending to that content, S would have at most a weak desire to attend to x 's content.

Part 2: x is pornography \equiv_{DF} it is reasonable to believe that (i) x will be used (or treated) as pornography by most of its actual audience ~~for which it was produced~~, and (ii) x will be considered obscenely disrespectful towards sexuality and/or sex by most members of its socio-cultural context. (Rea 120)

I have made three major changes to Rea's definition, in order to craft the modified version here presented. Recall that Rea's original definition 1) prohibited "x" from fostering *any* form of intimacy in order to be considered pornography, 2) focused only on the reception of "x" in its *target* audience, and 3) did not include any obscenity qualification. In the course of investigating some of Rea's hypothetical thought experiments, I found that pornography could remain pornography even if it attempted to create, foster, or maintain an intimate relationship which was *purely physical or sexual*; anything which conveyed love or some meaning beyond mere sexual stimulation could by so doing avoid qualifying as pornography. With reference to the pornography's reception, I found that emphasizing the "target" audience ultimately ignored and so failed to solve the contextual problem, i.e., that the same object can somehow be pornography in one context and yet not pornography in another. Investigating the historical origins of pornography, I found that pornography inherently carried with it the consequence of pushing against social boundaries, disrespecting societal norms and understandings of sex and sexuality, and was thus necessarily *obscene* on a sexual level. While Rea did explicitly argue against obscenity definitions for pornography, I hope the cognitive arguments I've presented in this

chapter have further justified my decision to amend his definition to include the obscenity qualification.

Given these changes, does this new definition account for the true difference between art and pornography? After all, if sexual stimulation is the chief reason to consume pornography, such that a lack of sexual stimulation would result in no longer consuming pornography, we might think that art is that which is consumed for other reasons beyond sexual stimulation and so would still be consumed if that stimulation were not achieved. But is then Annie Sprinkle's "performance art documentation" of masturbation and sex scenes to be considered art, considering some commentators claim that the scenes hold other messages beyond sexual stimulation? Given Rea's definition, I would have to concede that some find in Annie Sprinkle's work merit beyond sexual stimulation, and therefore it is not pornography, at least not for those individuals. While I have not personally viewed *Deep Inside* and so cannot pronounce a judgment on the work myself, I must approach the work with some measure of significant doubt as to its artistic merit. The reason for this is that there is one final, personal qualification which I would add to Rea's definition: pornography is not only that which is obscenely disrespectful of cultural boundaries surrounding sex and sexuality, but is also *that which distorts the objective nature of sex itself*. This addition, however, were I to officially add it to Rea's definition, would require a deeper investigation into the nature of sex itself, an investigation which I clearly do not have the space to pursue in these last pages of my thesis. As such, I will leave my reader with this extra amendment merely as a personal suggestion, and instead simply state that I find it unlikely that *Deep Inside* could achieve the level of artistic expression attained in *On Chesil Beach*.

I do not believe any further modification to Rea's definition is desirable or possible, given both the foregoing investigation and what little time and space I have remaining for this thesis. Instead, I believe this definition, coupled with the intensive investigation of porn and art in this chapter, should provide an adequate foundation for understanding pornography itself. It should therefore also illustrate how we can distinguish between art and pornography. With these crucial distinctions made, it is now possible to move on to the next step: constructing an appropriate response to the problem of porn.

Chapter VI

Conclusion – The Problem of Porn Solved?

By now I hope I've made clear the fact that pornography and art are radically different from one another. They are different in their content. They are different in their worldview. They are different in their values. They are different in their cognitive effect and reception. They are different in their very essence. And so they ought to be different in our responses to them. Art is an elevated form of human expression, a place where human creativity allows a deep probing and exploration of human nature and experience, a place where the deepest truths of reality and humanity can be touched upon. Pornography is on the other hand a very base form of human expression, distorting and perverting human sexuality, human desires, human perspectives, and human nature itself. In other words, pornography *is* a problem, a grave problem that presents grave dangers to individuals, to societies, and ultimately to the human race as a whole.

With that claim duly noted and argued, I must reiterate the many areas which are in desperate need of further research and thought in order to fully understand pornography. There is unarguably a deep and disconcerting relationship between pornography and prostitution; the etymology of the word “pornography” (from the Greek *graphos* for “writing” and *pornei* for “prostitutes”; pornography thus literally means “the writing or description of prostitution and/or prostitutes”) is adequate evidence of this, as is the historical origins of the term in Rétif's treatise on prostitution *Le pornographe*. But the full extent and implications of this relationship have yet to be uncovered. What does it mean, both for our understanding of pornography and our understanding of prostitution, that these two categories are intimately and inextricably connected?

Another area that demands research as touched upon in my thesis is the nature of human sexuality and sex, and their proper uses and purposes. I believe sex is meant, whether from a scientific/evolutionary viewpoint or a philosophic/religious viewpoint, to be a means of powerful physical and emotional bonding between one man and one woman, as well as a means towards the procreation of new human persons. This belief, at least in the context of contemporary Western culture, is obviously highly-contested, however, to the great confusion and consternation of contemporary discussions surrounding sexuality, including the present discussion on pornography. As such, this represents a major area which necessitates further research and greater understanding in the future, and I earnestly suggest that this research be taken up as soon as possible.

One more area of further research which I have emphasized in the previous chapter is the psychological, cognitive, and neurobiological effects of pornography. While I utilized to some extent the existing scholarship on pornography from these disciplines in my treatment of the difference between pornography and art, I must also note that as of today the current studies on pornography are highly controversial. While psychologists and neuroscientists on a fairly regular basis discover more and more evidence for the negative psychological effects of pornography consumption, nevertheless much more research is required in order to help resolve the current controversy and confusion surrounding many of the results of these studies. Concrete psychological and neuroscientific studies investigating the long-term effects of pornography on an individual level, including the phenomenon of escalation, are necessary. So too are studies into the effects of pornography on entire societies, perhaps from the viewpoint of cognitive anthropology.

Until these areas of further research are achieved, however, I do hope my thesis has contributed to a better understanding of the essence of pornography. By way of constructing an appropriate response, I would suggest that greater education on sex and sexuality in general, and on pornography in particular, would be greatly beneficial, and so this thesis represents my own first step toward that greater education. Education especially designed for the youth is important, in order to help children develop the tools necessary for analyzing and sorting through the pornographic media they are inundated with in popular culture. In this way, we can hope to avoid more and more children innocently falling into pornography addiction. Only once we are armed with knowledge, a quality which is diametrically opposed to pornography's emphasis on pure physicality, can we fully participate in facing and answering the problem of porn.

Appendix

Dealing with Pornography Addiction, for Yourself or for Loved Ones

So now you're ready to give up your pornography or sex addiction. Or perhaps you're not ready, but you know you want to be free from your physical and emotional pornography chains. Whether you've just gotten hooked on pornography, or your addiction has escalated to sex affairs and prostitution, there is always hope for recovery. Use this appendix as a place to start, to get your bearings, and to find the resources and help you need in order to live a free and fulfilling life without dependence on sex.

As you begin your fight against pornography, it will be helpful for you to consider the realities of pornography – uncovering the lies told in pornography will help you maintain your motivation on the road to sobriety. Rory Reid and Dan Gray describe the truths of pornography concisely in their book *Confronting Your Spouse's Pornography Problem*: “Pornography teaches a fraudulent message about human intimacy. It portrays both men and women as objects with insatiable sexual appetites or with unrealistic physical capabilities” (Reid and Gray 16). As you view pornography, your brain releases the pleasure chemical dopamine and creates a neural pathway called iFosB (delta fos b) which tells your brain to come back to porn as a source of pleasure (“Porn Addiction Escalates”). Thus, watching pornography literally changes the physical make-up of your brain as you learn to desire and expect pornographic sex. As your brain becomes accustomed and addicted to these fraudulent pornographic messages, your sex life in reality will become less and less fulfilling as it continually fails to live up to the promises of porn.

Remember also that pornography purposefully hides the realistic consequences of the promiscuous activity which it depicts, since such consequences would destroy the “sexy” and “arousing” affect of pornography. Including such consequences is the mark of art, which sees the world as it really is. Pornography, for the sake of achieving arousal, ignores realities “such as sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies” (Reid and Gray 16). Reid and Gray use the psychological term “attention bias” when discussing this lie in pornography. They observe,

For example, you might perceive the content [of pornography] as exciting or pleasurable while ignoring the fraudulent messages about human sexuality associated with it. Women in real life seldom have insatiable sexual appetites and rarely act sexually promiscuous without drugs, financial compensation, or other problems in living. The behavior depicted as harmless fun would inevitably result in unwanted pregnancies or sexually transmitted diseases. Imagine how excited you’d feel sitting in a medical clinic waiting for results from an HIV test. Clients say it’s hell. These are the realities you ignore whenever you consume pornography. (Reid and Gray 113)

If you remember these realities, pornography will suddenly seem much less attractive, and it will be easier to fight your addiction. In this way, a powerful tool for combatting the lies of pornography addiction is to research and educate yourself on the truth of sexual promiscuity and the other arousing or exciting aspects of pornography.

One helpful strategy for fighting pornography addiction, then, is finding and maintaining motivation. Harness this motivation, and try to attach it to a *token*, a small, physical object which you can carry around with you to reinvigorate and remind you of your enthusiasm to fight. Something with some emotional power can work great as a motivational token, such as a picture of a loved one (significant other, child, parent or grandparent, friend) or a religious token such as

a rosary, prayer beads, a prayer book, etc. When you feel the addictive temptation to consume pornography again, recognize this critical moment as a moment of temptation, find your motivational token and physically hold it in your hands for strength and support. If you are religious or spiritual, the importance of prayer cannot be overstated, as you draw upon the strength and power of God when you are feeling weak and powerless. Fasting can be another great spiritual way to strengthen your resolve in practicing self-denial and discipline. If you are not religious or spiritual, reciting aloud an affirmation of your resolve to overcome pornography can be a useful strategy for boosting your motivation and giving you extra strength in moments of weakness.

Other external safeguards, such as internet filters and internet usage report services, can be powerful in your fight against pornography addiction. Ask someone else, a loved one or an accountability partner (see the following paragraph), to set up a filter on your computer, tablet, smartphone, and/or other internet-capable device(s). Ask them to create and set the password, and ask them to keep that password secret from you until you have been sober long enough to fight the temptation on your own. Internet usage report services, such as those provided by CovenantEyes (covenanteyes.com), can be a powerful motivation booster, and also a useful tool for parents who want to prevent their children from falling into a pornography problem. Especially at the beginning of your fight for sobriety, such safeguards as these can be invaluable aids to your strength and motivation.

In addition to motivation tokens and internet safeguards, an accountability partner is another invaluable tool for overcoming addiction. External support in the form of support groups, mentors, or spiritual directors is extremely helpful and important. In situations of addiction, it can be easy to talk yourself into relapse and giving in to your powerful desires and

temptations. Externalizing your responsibility to another person makes this sort of self-defeat much easier to avoid. As Reid and Gray suggest, “Learning to interact with and rely on others is the antithesis of the isolating and disconnecting influence habitual pornography use can have” (Reid and Gray 102). Remaining truthful about your pornography problem with others that support you can help you to overcome the lies, deceit, and isolation which feed and enable your addiction. There exist numerous pornography support groups, such as Sexaholics Anonymous (www.sa.org), Sex Addicts Anonymous (www.saa.org), and many more. Whether you find help in a therapist, a support group, or a spiritual director, community support is invaluable to the recovery of many pornography addicts.

The situation of loved ones in your addiction recovery process should be slightly different. Loved ones can be and should be an excellent source of help, support, and strength in your recovery, and as such they can be an excellent resource for externalizing your responsibility to help you stay on track. However, they will be less likely to understand fully the nature of your addiction in the way that a professional or support group would, and so would be less able to help your specific addiction problems. Also, you must keep in mind that your pornography addiction affects those around you, most especially your immediate family in your significant other or children. It is critical that you be honest and open with your family about your problem in order to overcome the lies which enable a pornography addiction; however, learning of your addiction can be emotionally traumatic for them as well (when disclosing a pornography addiction to children, great care should be taken not to tell them too many traumatic and/or graphic details; respect their innocence and vulnerability, remaining honest with them without endangering them in their youthful curiosity). Some family members may find the need to enter into counseling and therapy as well in order to work through their feelings of betrayal. Since they

will need their strength to work through any emotional repercussions they may experience, they will likely be less able to give you strength to work through your own repercussions, and thus a third-party support resource is your best option. I cannot emphasize enough the importance of honesty and openness with your loved ones, most especially your spouse or significant other, since deceit and lies to your loved ones are to a large extent what enabled your pornography problem to evolve into an addiction. But keep in mind that they may need as much support and emotional recovery as you do.

Above all, it is of paramount importance to keep hope and perseverance in mind always. According to Dr. G. Alan Marlatt in his research on relapse prevention, “understanding relapse as part of the process of change” (Reid and Gray 129) is an important skill. The longer you have built up your pornography and sex addiction, the longer it will take to overcome it. The road will be long and difficult, but it is not impossible. You may stumble, fall, and relapse into your addiction, but it is critical that you pick yourself back up and continue on. Pornography addiction only has power over you when you give up. As long as you have hope, you can and you *will* emerge from the struggle victorious.

If you are not personally struggling with pornography, but want to help someone who is, my best advice to you is to refer him/her to this appendix. Pornography addicts must help themselves before anyone else can help them. If addicts don’t have an accurate understanding of the problem and enough personal motivation to fight for themselves, they will not recover. Only once they have made the decision to change and overcome their addictive lifestyle can you then provide them necessary support in listening to their struggles and holding them accountable. If you are religious, spend time in prayer and fasting for them. Try to be understanding and supportive of their problems and struggles, recognizing that their addiction is a physical problem

which has developed in the neurochemistry of the brain. At the same time, recognize that they have the power to overcome this addiction, *only* they have that power, and you can help by holding them responsible for their actions. Above all, recognize that their addiction is NOT your fault. A pornography addiction has nothing to do with you or your inadequacies or imperfections, but instead has everything to do with the addict's inability to cope with stress and the challenges of life in healthy ways (Reid and Gray 136). There is always hope for the pornography addict, and you can provide invaluable support in that journey, but ultimately the problem belongs to the addict as does the recovery process, and is not yours to maintain ownership of and/or responsibility for.

The following is a list of a few websites which will be beneficial in your fight against pornography and sex addiction. Each website contains their own pages of resources you can utilize, from support groups to books to more websites to counseling and more. Make use of any or all of these resources as they fit into your particular situation, and remember that there is always hope.

www.covenanteyes.com – Internet accountability, tracking, and filtering, along with other resources

www.k9webprotection.com – A free, alternative web browser with enhanced filtering usable on any device

www.fightthenewdrug.org – Education, blogs, merchandise, and resources

www.integrityrestored.com – Catholic support, education, and resources for addicts and their loved ones

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