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Anti/pro/critical porn studies

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In this introductory article we explore contemporary debates about the 'critical' study of pornography in relation to 'anti-porn', 'pro-porn', 'sex-positive' and 'sex-critical' approaches, and the recent reframing of pornography and sex more generally in relation to postfeminism and neoliberalism. The article reviews emerging work in porn studies, discusses the importance of developing a critical examination of the porn industries, and introduces the contributions that comprise this first issue. We end with some thoughts on nomenclature.

Keywords: critical porn studies; *Porn Studies* journal

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Introduction

The internet's 'triple A' engine of accessible, affordable and anonymous (Cooper 1998) sexual possibilities has created bumper opportunities for news copy: from concerned accounts of youngsters in thrall to evil images, through accounts of sexual crimes facilitated by mobile technologies, to jolly assessments of women's take up of sexy narratives, the news media have fallen over themselves to comment on the sexual phenomena they characterize as 'everywhere'. Pornography has become a significant touchstone for political parties of all shades and across and within national boundaries. Reports and surveys have proliferated, as have calls for something to be done to protect children in particular from 'the possible impact of pornography on them and their relationships' (Berelowitz as quoted in Topping and Georgieva 2013). Academic research has also played a part in these discussions; commissioned by various government departments, academics have authored numerous policy documents used to back calls for various kinds of interventions (Itzin, Taket, and Kelly 2007; Papadopoulos 2010; Bailey 2011; Horvath et al. 2013).

However, the kinds of research informing public debate have been somewhat limited – in these, the academic voice is limited to that which seeks to explore harms and their impacts or possibilities for legislative interventions or prohibitions. The academic exploration of pornography as sets of texts or practices is rarely presented as important in this kind of research, and so the public image of porn studies, as featured in British news media at least, has tended to question and contest the legitimacy of attending to the significances of sexually explicit imagery except where academics might be seeking evidence of 'effects'. As we stated in our introduction in

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this issue, academic journals do not usually grab popular media attention but the summer of 2013 provided a copious harvest of headlines about *Porn Studies*. From Tim Dowling's (2013) comic take 'Porn Studies – From Plumbing to Narrative Theory?' for the *Guardian* to the *New York Daily News*' suggestion that the academy was 'going XXX' (Blinderman 2013), the news media took the press release for the journal global. The tone of these reports was intrigued but at the same time dismissive:

> Academics have by now turned their deathly prose style on pretty much everything, and porn is no exception … [*Porn Studies*] won't make the bestseller lists, but it marks an era when nothing is safe from educated women intent on making a career. Not even adult films. (Wolf 2013)

The announcement of the forthcoming journal was also met with some popular resistance in the form of an online petition set up by the anti-pornography campaign group, Stop Porn Culture. In May 2013 the petition called for the publisher, Taylor and Francis, to change the composition of the editorial board, or to change the journal's name and create another journal that could be called *Critical Porn Studies*. The petition fuelled newspaper stories which had only required the suggestion of a split amongst academics to really get going on rehearsing the usual stories about pro-pornography and anti-pornography feminist in-fighting. What was conspicuously left out of this reportage was what it might actually *mean* to research pornographies.

So in this article we ask how might we develop the critical study of pornography? What are the roles and responsibilities of academics in developing this and what contribution can academic work make to the broader public and political discussions around pornography? These questions go to the heart of why we wanted this journal to exist and will be returned to through a series of invited articles in the coming months and beyond. We begin here by describing some of the issues raised by the term 'critical porn studies' that we encountered in the run up to the launch of the journal as a way of starting that discussion.

Porn: 'NOT a neutral topic'

As is common with most petitions, many of the 800 or so signatories of the Stop Porn Culture petition did little more than add their name and, if they had a professional interest, their affiliation, but some appended comments. Their remarks focused on a number of issues that relate to the question of what it means to study pornography. We explore some of those commentaries here, not to dismiss them but to examine the kinds of questions or methods thought to be appropriate to researching pornography and the agendas and/or orthodoxies that might inform them. Signatories often suggested that porn is harmful and that – above all else – a recognition of this should inform the way it is studied and discussed. It was assumed that, because the academics associated with the journal do not take harm as their starting point, we must be producing propaganda, lobbying or cheerleading for the porn industry. The editorial board were described as 'Porn apologists dressing up personal convictions to look more objective by attaching the word "studies" to the title of their journal'. They were 'expressing their own opinions rather than producing research' and were likely to write 'fulsome articles […] declaring "porn is wonderful for men"'. Such an enterprise

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was equated with 'an academic journal promoting slavery!' or "Murder studies" from the viewpoint of murderers'. Their work was 'ill-considered post modernist and populist positioning, rather than critical analysis'.

The petition called for a change of name 'to reflect and make evident the bias of its editors (Pro-Porn Studies)' and some comments expanded on this, calling for the creation of 'another journal focused on the replication and reification of misogyny, child abuse, and sexual exploitation in mainstream pornography (for instance, Critical Porn Studies)'. From this perspective, the right way to study porn is seen to be through a focus on violence; one signatory noted that 'Porn as violence is adequately addressed in journals covering gender violence' and argued that the establishment of a porn studies journal would contribute to the 'normalisation' of porn.[1]

Being 'critical' was always associated here with being anti-porn in the sense of producing '*criticism of* pornography' (original emphasis), with fault-finding and condemnation being of primary importance. Occasionally it was about representing 'all perspectives' and 'all aspects of criticism'. The question of different perspectives was sometimes linked specifically to how academics relate to other groups of people – anti-porn activists, fans, people who work in the industry, people who identify as victims of pornography, and so on. The journal was seen as misrepresenting public opinion, 'which is deeply and critically divided on this issue', and as censoring 'the concerns of child protection advocates, parents, educators, relevant professionals, feminists and ordinary women'.

While a number of comments suggested particular approaches and perspectives because, as one signatory put it, porn is 'NOT a neutral topic', others focused on objectivity as the measure of a good academic approach, and on the need for 'science' and 'a scientifically objective journal' that would 'publish negative and positive results without bias' and prioritize particular areas of focus such as psychology, addiction and adolescent development. This was also associated with a form of 'balance' in which the journal could represent 'both sides' of the debate and address both 'negative' and 'positive' views. There were also claims amongst petitioners to other kinds of expertise; the personal knowledge and experience of abuse or violence. As one signatory wrote:

> I can say with absolute certainty that giving up porn has changed my life irreversibly for the better and am disgusted that you would spread 'academic' propaganda that fails to consider the very real experiences of me and many others like me.

As another concluded: 'No matter what the so-called experts say, porn is harmful, causes confusion, hurts loved ones & many relationships have been destroyed by it'.

These fragments of personal accounts are interesting and, were we able to engage in conversation with their writers, no doubt poignant and persuasive. It is not the case that we would want to fail to consider these experiences if these signatories were presenting them as their personal responses to pornography. But they are not; they are also presenting their experiences as *more than* personal and, on the back of them, imputing consequences for all those who engage with pornography, and beyond them, for the very fabric of society. Here, academic knowledge is measured and found wanting against other forms of emotional knowledge, truths that are found in testimony and that are 'silenced' by academic discussion. The question of testimony has been a difficult one for feminists and continues to be contentious across a wide

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range of issues, not just pornography. On the one hand there is the important feminist impulse to take women's speech seriously and yet, as Carol Smart has argued, we must also examine the function of such speech-forms because of the potential for the importation of morality under the guise of politics:

> It is as if we have come to assume that whenever a feminist speaks, what comes out is politics, not morals, no matter what she is saying. (1992, 187)

One of the ways this is achieved, writes Smart, is via the rhetorical deployment of personal testimony to back up claims of harm:

> This form of argument, which might otherwise be transparent, is protected when used in conjunction with the personal testimony. For by opposing it in this context one is effectively placed in the position of speaking not against a relatively powerful woman like MacKinnon, but against less well-resourced women who have given testimony of abuse. Thus one appears to be denying their experience, or suggesting that it is of no consequence … This is a particular dilemma for feminists. (1992, 190)

It is interesting, then, to reflect on what the petition's calls for a 'critical porn studies' might mean in terms of a 'voice'. The anti-porn feminism that underpins Stop Porn Culture has been extensively critiqued for its lack of theoretical rigour, shaky evidence base, and failure to distinguish its position from other highly conservative views of sexuality and gender (Vance 1984; Valverde 1985; Rubin 1993; Johnson 1997; Segal 1998), yet it has retained significant purchase in both academic and more 'populist' spheres as a position that must be attended to before exploring other research avenues. This is particularly ironic since contemporary anti-porn feminism is, as we have observed elsewhere, 'increasingly rejecting academic terrains of analysis and debate in favor of appeals to common sense and emotional intelligence precisely because this is the ground on which their arguments find most fertile purchase' (Smith and Attwood 2013, 47).

It is precisely this idea of 'emotional intelligence' that resonates here in the petition. These are particular narratives that frame, name and delineate the 'problem' of pornography and thus implicitly suggest the apparatus for researching that problem. One of the ways in which that framing occurs is to seize the idea of being 'silenced' by an opposition or more culturally powerful forces. Interestingly, we may all claim the position of the 'silenced' at different times in these debates, and it would be disingenuous to claim that anti-porn activism gets a wider hearing than any other voices in the pornography debate. There *are* media spaces for plural and divergent opinions on pornography but too often public debates revolve around whether or not pornography is good for us – a focus that renders invisible those arguments which derive from different kinds of research questions. How pornography is named and described is crucial – it can be incredibly difficult to move beyond the 'harms paradigm' when issues are framed in terms such as this headline: 'So, Minister, when were the civil liberties of porn users more important than those of children?' (Phillips 2012). The emotions to which this headline appeals are perhaps very clear, but there are others, such as worries about threats to 'healthy sexual development' posed by porn consumption or the inexorable calls of 'the extreme' and their attendant risks of 'addiction', which will need more nuanced exploration in order to understand their implicit fears and emotional appeals. Even

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though many anti-pornography critiques cite gender justice, protection of children and sexual equality as their goals, their operation through the harm frame and calls for increased government regulation can reinforce gender, class and sexual inequalities.

Of course, from an academic perspective being 'critical' is not necessarily or straightforwardly about 'scientific' research methods and discourses of objectivity. It does not rest on the idea of achieving balance by giving equal space to two opposing views or on the sense that the 'truth' about an issue lies somewhere between these. These are measures of truth associated with the sometimes competing terrains of the hard sciences, with public debating and perhaps most problematically with commonsense. They are also, as Meg Barker notes in this issue, the measures that are particularly associated with mainstream psychology porn research that privileges 'experiments' and 'effects'. As Barker goes on to note, the limitations of this kind of work often feature in research methods courses as examples of poorly designed research built on a view of identity as fixed and static and social context as unimportant, and on *a priori* assumptions about cause–effect relationships and the connections between attitude and behaviour, mind and body, thought and action.

A further problem with this kind of perspective is the lack of critical understanding of how to study the social and cultural significance of the media. Instead, media texts are seen simply as kinds of 'message' and their consumption is presented as forms of 'exposure'. For us, this approach has no real explanatory power, although it may well 'make sense' to those who wish to draw lines of connection between the literal description of particular media texts and the surface appearances of attitudes and behaviours. Such approaches make no use of theories of media representation, production or consumption, or of theories of how sexuality is constructed, or of the ways in which knowledge is socially and culturally wrought. Porn remains abstract, monolithic, with only the simplest and most obvious of meanings. The lack of an appropriate theoretical framework means that the findings that this kind of research produces cannot be sensibly interpreted.

Critical approaches to pornography, by contrast, are able to unpack what is at stake in the construction of particular views and practices. Crucially they draw on insights from disciplines that acknowledge the complexity of culture and are aware of the shifts and continuities in the ways that sex and media are constructed historically. They use methods in a way that shows understanding of what tools are needed to carry out different kinds of analysis and an awareness of how research is framed by asking particular kinds of questions and what advantages and problems arise from doing things in particular kinds of ways. They attempt to contextualize pornographies in relation to other media genres, forms and aesthetics, in relation to a variety of producer and consumer groups and communities, and in relation to the broader frameworks of cultural regulation and value.

'Sex critical': situating porn studies

One of the key ways in which public debates about pornography are framed is around pro/positive and anti/negative views, drawing on a general calculation of sex as a good or bad thing, as liberating or empowering, or as dangerous or oppressive. Both views can be found across very different religious and political approaches. At risk of simplifying the arguments (particularly those emerging from avowedly

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feminist politics), 'anti' views have tended to be underpinned by puritan ideas in which spiritual and moral values are associated with a suspicion of sensual pleasures and a view that these undermine the family and devotion to work (Bocock 1997, 70). They hinge on a conception of 'normal' (and therefore 'good') sexual practices and their opposites at the 'outer limits' of 'bad' and 'abnormal' sex. 'Good' sex is associated with heterosexuality, marriage, monogamy and procreation. It includes sexual encounters that take place within the same generation, involve couples, and are carried out in private. 'Bad' sex includes encounters that are cross-generational, casual, sadomasochistic, or homosexual, those that are forms of solo or group sex, and those that are carried out in public. The deployment of media, technology and commerce as adjuncts or enhancements are also markers of 'bad sex'. Pornography, sex work, and the use of manufactured objects such as sex toys are associated with sex at the 'outer limits' (Rubin 1984). Similarly, roles and identities that play or experiment with gender and sexuality – such as butch/femme, trans and SM practices – have also been associated with 'bad sex'.

But debates about sex have also been shaped by secular philosophies such as liberalism and humanism. Instead of focusing on the family or work, these have been more concerned with ideas about well-being, living a good life, the freedom of the individual, and equality. They have taken shape within movements concerned with sexual politics (Bocock 1997, 85); for example, humanist ideas that stress a particular type of dignity have influenced some criticisms of the depiction of women as sex 'objects', while Marxist ideas about the use of people as commodities underpin some types of concern about sex work.

The term 'sex critical' has been used as part of an argument for the need to subject all 'forms of sexuality and all sexual representations … to critical thinking' (Downing 2012). For example, writing about responses to *Fifty Shades of Grey* (James 2012), Lisa Downing noted how 'liberal or "sex-positive" feminists and activists criticized the book's gender stereotyping and the (in)accuracy of its portrayal of BDSM [bondage and discipline, sadism and masochism], but defended strongly its exploration of sexual practices and behaviours', while some radical feminists argued that 'there is no difference between BDSM and domestic abuse, both being versions of the heteronormative patriarchal archiplot'. Downing goes on to question the value of the 'sex-positive/anti-sex' dichotomy altogether but she also takes issue with the way that 'sex-positive' approaches may overlap with a belief in the liberating nature of sex *per se*, ignoring 'traumatic, abusive or simply indifferent' experiences of sex, and with 'the championing of forms of sex that look pretty identical to hetero-patriarchal ideals, rebranded as … "empowering"'.

This view draws on a view of sex as disciplinary, a means of fostering self-scrutiny and the monitoring of sexual behaviour and feelings: 'not a liberation but a myth, an ideology, the definition of a new mode of conformity' (Heath 1982, 3). From this point of view, the development of what appears on the surface to be a contemporary form of sexual citizenship is merely a 'partial, private, and primarily leisure and lifestyle membership' of society (Evans 1993, 64). This construction of sex as disciplinary has been repeatedly linked to neoliberalism – the 'theory of political economic practices that proposes that human wellbeing can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills' (Harvey 2005, 2) and to postfeminism (Gill 2007), which is also focused on individualism, consumerism and 'sexual subjectification'.

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Within this formulation, being pro-sex or less than antagonistic to sexual media is to rely too heavily on the potentials for 'being empowered'. Sex is understood instead as a form of work, an understanding that leaves out the possibilities of bodies and pleasure creating sites of 'resistance'. Neoliberal culture's co-optive powers are writ large with pornography as a key player; as Gilbert recently observed in an introduction to a *New Formations'* special issue, the pornography industry's:

> promotion of modes of sexuality … might be regarded as wholly consistent with neoliberal culture, treating sex itself as a consumptive rather than a relational act, and participating in the general commodification of sex which is one of the most striking characteristics of neoliberal culture today. (2013, 6)

This view of pornography frames itself as distanced from moral or radical feminist critiques – yet, while neoliberalism comes from a different place theoretically and politically, it still tends to return us to a rather one-dimensional view of sex and sexual representations which is also conceptualized entirely in terms of constraints. Here, pornography becomes intensely important for its apparent power to shape sexuality, create definitions of who women are and what they are for, and how sexual relations should be conducted between men and women. At the same time, it becomes intensely *unimportant* for its abilities to open up new vistas of sexual being, for its possibilities of imagining oneself and community, or its possibilities as fantasy and as pleasure. Indeed, to suggest that pornography might serve interests beyond insisting that its ideal viewing subject is focused on individualized pleasures, and is young, white, slim, and so on, is to become naively 'pro-porn'. The multiple dimensions of pleasure – viewing bodies experiencing pleasure, being a body experiencing pleasure – might well offer their own (and radical) political critique of class, gender or racial hierarchies, but, as Rand has observed:

> embracing pleasures – especially but not only bodily pleasures – that do not readily appear to advance a higher purpose is often considered suspect, both outside and within academic circles. It [pleasure] comes across as shallow, lazy, duped, dangerous, and/or merely insufficient. (2008, 555)

Even as we note the co-option of non-normative sexual interests and desires to a neoliberal agenda, it is important to recognize, as Weiss argues, that 'Late-capitalism works by inciting and capitalizing on these desires, yet it can never control the emotional effect of this excess' (2006, 128).

Thus for others, sex-positive is 'the cultural philosophy that understands sexuality as a *potentially* positive force in one's life', that 'celebrates sexual diversity, differing desires and relationships structures, and individual choices based on consent' (Queen and Comella 2008, 278). It is often associated with opposition to the regulation of sexual practices, the censorship of sexual representations and restrictions on sex education. The term 'sex radical', sometimes overlapping with the use of 'sex-positive', has also been used to describe 'those seeking and advocating more egalitarian, experimental and challenging forms of sex – whether as public activists or solely within their personal sexual practice' (Chapkis 1997 as quoted in Eadie 2004, 197). These approaches should not be understood as simply celebratory or uncritical.

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It is also important to recognize how our frameworks for discussing pornography may well re-inscribe the very inequalities we seek to critique. For instance, quoting Michelle Mitchell's observation that 'it remains crucial to consider how analytical frameworks can obscure as well as reveal' (as quoted in Nash 2008, 63), Jennifer Nash makes an important intervention in the debate about porn's 'always-racist' representations. Nash suggests that:

> In the context of pornography, scholarship inspired by the 'logic of the trial' permits asking certain questions ('is pornography racist?') and systematically avoids questions about the social, historical, and technological specificity of pornography's racialized meanings, the possibilities of black pornographic spectatorship, and the pleasures black bodies might take *in* pornographic representations that include them. (2008, 63)

This is decidedly not a 'pro-pornography' stance; instead it is an argument for research that does not leap to easy answers or simplify complex representations and their equally complex place in contemporary life.

So how might we move forward with a new journal focused on the critical study of pornography? We should be clear that we are not reinventing the wheel, and it is important to note that the past two decades have seen a range of critical work on pornography and on the new cultural landscape of sex media in terms of a 'pornosphere', a variety of 'porno-chic' texts and the broader emergence of forms of 'striptease culture' (McNair 2002; Paasonen, Nikunen, and Saarenmaa 2007; Attwood 2009). There has been an emerging focus on a more diverse set of porn texts and subgenres and a growing interest in the construction of gender, sexuality, race and class in pornography and across media more generally. A focus on porn as film genre and sex 'on screen' (Lehman 2006; Williams 2004, 2008; Hines and Kerr 2012; Mendik 2012; Hunter 2013) has remained important, while work has also emerged on the new 'screen' of online media (Lane 2001; Ray 2007). Collected works have explored a range of issues in the developing era of 'Porn 2.0' (Waskul 2004; Jacobs, Janssen, and Pasquinelli 2007; Attwood 2010). Work on the consumption of pornography remains scarce, although some has begun to focus on the meanings of porn for their consumers, and the ways these are integrated into everyday life (McKee 2005; McKee, Albury, and Lumby 2008; Smith, Barker, and Attwood forthcoming), while particular audience groups such as young people (Knudsen, Lofgren-Martenson, and Mansson 2007) and women (Smith 2007) have also become the focus of examination. These studies mark a shift from an earlier understanding of media texts as a kind of 'stimulus' to the study of the ways in which *actual* audiences understand and engage with various kinds of sex media. The researching and teaching of porn have also been the subject of academic work (Jenkins 2004; Attwood and Hunter 2009). Some recent books indicate a broadening out of porn studies; Susanna Paasonen (2011) focuses on how digital production, distribution and consumption has affected porn as a genre, with particular emphasis on understanding the sensations that pornography evokes. Katrien Jacobs (2012) explores experiences in China and how, despite a total ban on pornography, indigenous production flourishes, although always in the context of tightening censorship. Brian McNair (2013) has revisited debates about the 'pornification' of mainstream popular culture. Two new collections in the United States (Taormino et al. 2013; Comella and Tarrant forthcoming) explore developing feminist

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approaches to pornography and innovative modes of study. In Italy a number of books, focusing on distinct aspects of pornography such as gonzo and alternative pornographies (Biasin et al. 2011; Biasin, Maina, and Zecca forthcoming), are emerging from the organizers of the Porn Studies strand of the annual Gorizia Spring School. Recent journal articles have focused on user-generated porn (for example, Paasonen 2010; van Doorn 2010; Ward 2010), porn and performance art (Rounthwaite 2011), and pornography in specific countries such as Japan (for example, Yau and Wong 2009, 2010; Wong and Yau 2012).

Critical porn studies of this kind have dramatically revitalized and broadened the field of study. Yet there are still areas in which there is remarkably little work. In particular (and ironically given the frequent condemnation of the industry for its sheer size), the industry has received little detailed attention (Voss 2012).

Thinking critically about pornography as industry

Studies of pornography need to examine business practices, distribution, consumption spaces, legal institutions and more. Critics of pornography point to the profits and corporate practices that exploit porn actors and actresses, their poverty, lack of life choices, mental health issues and vulnerabilities (claiming, for example, that they are often the victims of child sexual abuse, rape and coercion). While there are most certainly abuses and risks for some in engaging in a career in pornography, other participants talk of the potential rewards. Some argue that pornographers seek ever more ingenious ways of exploiting women as performers and as a class. In classic political-economy style, but with little determined exploration of the actual practices of employment in porn, working conditions are understood as akin to those in sweatshops with the addition of 'lasting psychological and emotional effects' (Dines 2013). These claims are often so general and all-encompassing that they foreclose questions about the changing nature and conditions of the labour they seek to explore. Different kinds of labour within pornography and more widely in other forms of sex work are lumped together, making no real attempt to understand either trends or sites of labour, judging instead how capital is (as always) exploiting female labour. Detailed knowledge and informed critique are not promoted through such analysis.

If we are to take seriously the problems of working conditions within the pornography industry we need to know more about where professionals find their work and what kinds of work this is. What skills and capabilities are required by industry professionals and what skills do workers need to possess to negotiate a working environment that is changing in the face of free content and the rise of user-generated content? To answer these questions, researchers must speak to and listen to professionals of all levels and all kinds. Research into the individuals who make up pornographic workforces will require methods that do not immediately assume victimhood, false consciousness, stupidity or mendacity. The questions to be asked of performers, producers and behind-camera staff need to go beyond 'do you enjoy working in pornography?' (although that might be a good place to start, if we are prepared to listen to answers outside the frame of 'exploitation and degradation'). What is a good working environment, what pressures are felt and negotiated, what are the boundaries of creativity and what constitutes 'good work'? What drives the dynamics and volatilities of the industries and the markets, and how do workers

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adapt to the changing environments of porn production and media production more generally? What categories and strategies do porn workers use to navigate and negotiate the opportunities and risks of working in the porn industries?

Claims that porn workers have an incredibly short working life ignore the numerous employees who stay long term in the industry, the measures of, and reasons for, success, and the ways in which failures are felt and experienced. The advent of the internet is not simply a question of increasing access to content; it has also shifted relationships between and among professionals and amateurs. How has amateur production impacted the labour conditions of professionals? How might we rethink categories of labour and work and, crucially, ideas of creativity in the pornography industries? What are the changes in the pornosphere and how can we trace and map them over time? These are questions lost in the assertions that changes in pornographic production and performance are simply a means of satisfying increasingly jaded consumers.

Such research need not be opposed to the critique of pornography as a capitalist industry but it will challenge stances that assume the answers are already known. Thinking about the nature of porn business is vitally important but it is not enough to claim it is a massive money-spinning juggernaut, or to assume that companies such as Playboy or Vivid stand in for the range of businesses which comprise 'the industry': we need a detailed and nuanced understanding of how various businesses – from the multinational to the sole-trader – work. We also need to explore the particular national and regulatory frameworks in which those businesses operate, and how market competitiveness is structured in particular environments.

Moving on

In putting together this first issue of *Porn Studies*, we have been fortunate enough to receive a large number of excellent submissions. Articles in this first issue are focused on raising what we see as a number of key questions for developing a critical porn studies. Some contributors consider pornography studies as a field or in terms of particular disciplines such as psychology, sociology and cultural studies. Others focus on the place of pornography in relation to education and pedagogy, or on methodologies and trends in pornography. Some examine the importance of the researcher's positionality and the development of an appropriate, ethical stance. In line with our desire for the journal to become a space for debate and discussion about theories and methods, we have a mixture of longer articles and shorter position or think pieces.

In 'Porn *and* Sex Education, Porn *as* Sex Education', Kath Albury engages with concerns about what children might be learning from porn. These fears have been centre-stage for some time and intersect with other questions around young people's sexual practices, sexual self-representation and sexual knowledge. 'Porn literacies' are addressed here – Albury asks how it might be possible to reshape the broader curriculum of formal sex and relationships education, incorporating explicit critiques of misogynistic, homophobic or racist tropes within pornography while also opening up productive conversations about what counts as 'legitimate' (or 'illegitimate') knowledge for young people. Similar questions inform Bobby Noble's 'Porn's Pedagogies: Teaching Porn Studies in the Academic–Corporate Complex'. Noble uses his own experiences of teaching to explore the difficulties of navigating the

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contradictory and competing discourses that are the legacies of the so-called 'sex wars'. He suggests that effective pedagogies will require some 'forgetting' of those residues in order to open up the affective possibilities for 're-knowing' pornography.

Just as Noble focuses on the affective powers of pornography and its place within the academy, Susanna Paasonen's 'Between Meaning and Mattering: On Affect and Porn Studies' explores the 'turn to affect' and its claims to offer an alternative to the investigations of meaning, representation and identity that have dominated media studies. Paasonen's investigation suggests that the turn 'to' affect does not necessitate turning 'away from' issues of meaning, representation or social power in porn studies, but instead that its possibilities for 'surprise' enable understanding of its particular 'fleshy appeals' as well as the 'power of pornography'.

In two shorter pieces, different disciplinary approaches to researching and engaging with pornography are explored. Acknowledging some of the methodological considerations attendant on a psychologically based approach to the study of pornography, Meg Barker's 'Psychology and Pornography: Some Reflections' makes the case that critical and applied psychologies still have much to contribute to the analysis of pornographies, not least in offering 'a useful "signal jam" to polarised debates in this area'. Contrasting research methods are explored in 'Humanities and Social Scientific Research Methods in Porn Studies' by Alan McKee. The competing claims to reliability, validity and (crucially) objectivity are assessed in this essay. McKee finally suggests that porn studies could 'benefit from conversations about methodology across disciplines, and from more creative mixes of research methods with objects of study'.

As the spread of the internet has increased content, so it has also called for new kinds of research – Antoine Mazières and his colleagues employ a quantitative approach to analyze tags on pornographic websites. Their discussion in 'Deep Tags: Toward a Quantitative Analysis of Online Pornography' shows how seemingly discrete categories are related to each other and how practices, nationalities, places and techniques are staged in the pornographic landscape. The fuzzy logics of the network do not separate fantasies from each other, but permit flows from one fantasy to another, drawing thousands of paths corresponding to more and more precise desires.

Fantasies are also the focus of Martin Barker's article, employing data from more than 5000 respondents to an online questionnaire to begin to open up understandings of the relations between pornography and sexual imaginaries. In 'The "Problem" of Sexual Fantasies', Barker questions the standard accounts of fantasy and the underlying assumption that pornography is a form of compensation for needs not met elsewhere and the implicit threat that viewing porn carries with it the risk that consumers will lose the ability to distinguish between reality and fantasy. His account does not focus on the content of fantasy but 'on the *perceived nature, purpose and role* of sexual fantasies' (emphasis added) in respondents' everyday lives, laying out 10 dimensions or distinct orientations that challenge the prevailing accounts of fantasy as 'wild' or 'erroneous'.

Assertions about pornography's singularity, its content as always already known, are considered in Chauntelle Tibbals' 'Gonzo, Trannys, and Teens – Current Trends in US Adult Content Production, Distribution, and Consumption'. Her exploration of the diversities of adult content across platforms highlights the increasing

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importance of 'authenticity' and 'ethics' both as constituents of content and as production imperatives.

Surely one of the most vexed issues regarding pornography and its impact, is the idea of its contribution to what Robert Jensen (2011) has termed 'rape culture'. In 'Rethinking the Effects Paradigm in Porn Studies', Brian McNair surveys the claims and counterclaims of the impacts of 'pornographication', to propose a paradigm shift that moves towards an acceptance of the visibility of sexually explicit material in general, as 'a constituent element of a sex-political ecology'. Offering a brief review of the evidence for correlations between the accessibility of pornography across societies with different regulatory regimes, the incidence of sex crimes, and trends in sexual politics and attitudes, his argument is not a defence of pornography, nor is it a call for an unregulated 'pornosphere'. Instead it raises important questions about the connections between pornography and the politics of gender and sexuality.

These questions have underpinned much debate in the European and American scholarly networks that have dominated porn studies to date. In her article entitled 'Internationalizing Porn Studies', Katrien Jacobs describes porn research in Japan and China – readers will recognize the 'boys' love' phenomena but may be unfamiliar with the 'Grass Mud Horse' and its significances. Jacobs makes the case that the examination of non-western representations can uncover more than the nuances of aesthetics or consumer tastes in specific global/regional cultures; rather, analysis allows for broader considerations of technology, politics, rights and legislation as they pertain to sex, sexuality and sexual representations.

While Anglophone scholarship may still dominate the field, it has not always had an easy journey. Neil Kirkham's interview with Pamela Church Gibson, editor of *Dirty Looks* in two editions, points towards the specific contexts of the recent past in which academics turned their attention to pornography. Church Gibson describes the political climate in the United Kingdom that gave rise to the first edition of her influential collection, and reflects on the changes and continuities which underpinned the second. With characteristic good humour, she also details the discussions and negotiations with 'authority' which were necessary before hosting a conference – Annie Sprinkle was not allowed to speak *and* perform – and the issues attendant on including images in the collections. The potential pitfalls of researching pornography are also the subject of two short contributions by Heather Berg and Nathaniel Burke. These companion pieces examine the politics of porn research. Seeking 'to un-exceptionalize the porn industry as a site of labour in the academic and political imagination [and] drawing on critical labour studies', Berg outlines the political economies of researching work in production. Drawing on his own experiences of attempting to carve out a career within the academy, Burke suggests that 'academic morality' can mean 'there are some vectors of social life that have more worth than others and are therefore more deserving of study'.

We want to acknowledge the histories of porn studies, which is why we are pleased to include a contribution from Linda Williams; in 'Pornography, Porno, Porn' she explores what she terms the 'weedy field'. Mapping that field over the past decades and reflecting on the various limitations that have hampered it – the lack of significant and comprehensive archives, the seeming reluctance of 'discipline-building' scholars to get to grips with pornographic production, the consequent absence of book-length quality studies and, again, the sedimentation of arguments and approaches into pro and anti stances – Williams characterizes porn studies as

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'sporadic, always about to happen' rather than a 'truly thriving field'. Williams shares anti-porn feminism's critique of porn studies' supposed propensity for being too 'close to the industry'. How, then, might researchers engage with questions about the business? Lynn Comella suggests a 'porn studies-in-action', exhorting researchers to 'leave the confines of our offices, and spend time in the places where pornography is made, distributed and consumed, discussed and debated, taught and adjudicated'. Far from shying away from engagement with 'the industry', Comella mounts an enthusiastic argument for getting 'up-close' at trade fairs, talking to industry insiders and consumers, as a means 'to take stock of what we know about contemporary porn cultures, what areas remain unexamined, and what kinds of research approaches might lend themselves to deepening and expanding our porn studies archives'. Getting up-close is a theme of our first Forum, in which Giovanna Maina, Madison Young, Alessandra Mondin, Barbara DeGenevieve, Courtney Trouble, Stoya and Tristan Taormino (interviewed by Georgina Voss) elaborate on the presence and potentials of feminist porn.

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On naming what we do …

One final issue needs to be addressed. In her article in this issue, Williams raises the question of the nomenclature of this journal, asking how it is that we 'have lost the *graph* –the part of the word that indicates that [pornography] is a form of creation, representation, even, as the word itself means, a kind of writing'? Williams suggests that the short form, 'porn', indicates a lack of seriousness or critical awareness, and that:

> The very use of the more formal full word *pornography* has thus inclined towards anti-pornography and pro-censorship positions. But it also signals the higher ground of a more scholarly, distanced and critical approach. And I believe this is the term a scholarly journal, which belongs on higher ground, should adopt.

In naming this journal *Porn Studies*, our primary thoughts were about practicalities – there is a euphony and easy pronounce-ability to *Porn Studies* which contrasts with the more wieldy 'Pornography Studies' or 'Studies in Pornography' and we were very much aware of the likelihood that, whatever the name of the journal, it would inevitably be shortened to *Porn Studies*. This might seem to suggest that we regarded the naming of the journal as a trivial matter, but that is not the case.

Williams rightly draws attention to the ways in which naming 'inevitably indexes an entire world of cultural associations' (Rymes 1996, 242) but does so in a way that establishes the field of investigations as somehow static – the meanings of the terms porn, porno, pornography and pornographic are not fixed, nor stable. Given the almost ubiquitous rehearsal of the etymology of 'pornography' as the Greek 'writing of whores' – with all its attendant shaming of a class of women – the shortening of the term seems little loss. The suggestion that there are some *a priori* connotations where the term 'porn' becomes shorthand for 'celebration' once again reifies study of pornographies to pro and anti stances. We have hopes that the journal will move beyond those 'tired binaries' (Juffer 1998) to explore the varieties of politics, aesthetics, economies and cultures associated with and produced within porn.

We agree with Williams' arguments about establishing the discipline as serious. Bourdieu makes the case that naming is a key element in the struggle for recognition, that being assigned a place in the social order requires acknowledgement by 'the powers of constitution' (1989, 22). The place of Porn Studies in the academy remains precarious; even while pornography is declaimed as the most dangerous 'social experiment' of our times and therefore in urgent need of scholarly attention, there are also the inevitable suspicions of interests in pornography. Wishing to conduct research in this area (from whatever perspective) seemingly invites impertinent questions about one's sexual orientation, proclivities and practices. The accusation that the editorial board of this journal is 'pro-porn' seeks to impose a uniformity on academics who have very different views and approaches – our key requirements for members of the editorial board, to move forward to launch, were 'persistence', 'motivation' and 'commitment', not adherence to a party line or orthodoxy. We intend to focus on the work of inviting and welcoming diverse submissions that, after rigorous peer review, will help to create a journal at the centre of critical debate.

Meant as a collaborative space, the journal will require tolerance for dialogue, dispute and even conflict. *Porn Studies* is a long-term project, its character will develop over time. The journal's status as the locus for critical, engaging, innovative and productive research will not be established in one issue but will be the result of the clashing and criss-crossing of different accents of research. We now open this space to others to engage, debate and contribute in the expectation that *Porn Studies* will acquire further meaning over time: as the journal matures, its landscapes will change too.

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Note

1. An argument also taken up in the Christian press where the mere presence of a journal dedicated to its study gave a 'notable academic imprimatur' that would 'advance acceptance of pornography' (Laurence 2013).

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