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The feminist porn book: the politics of producing pleasure

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While one can identify the gaps in *Carnal Resonance*, readers would be best served treating these comments as indicative of avenues for further research rather than a sustained criticism of Paasonen's work. In this monograph, the author has managed to convincingly straddle multiple disciplines and political and theoretical divisions to develop a vocabulary for analyzing online pornography, and has done so with deftness. For those scholars interested in exploring and further developing new tools that can account for the affective, material, and representational complexities presented by online porn and other new media objects, *Carnal Resonance* is a welcome and timely intervention that merits serious and extended attention and engagement.

Reference

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The feminist porn book: the politics of producing pleasure, edited by Tristan Taormino, Celine Parreñas Shimizu, Constance Penley and Mireille Miller-Young, New York, The Feminist Press, 2013, 328 pp., $13.77 (pbk), ISBN 978-1-558-61818-3

The Feminist Porn Book offers a comprehensive update of contemporary sex-positive feminist approaches to pornography and the feminist pornography genre in particular, and is simultaneously reflexive about the complexities inherent within this area of inquiry. Rather than attempting to adopt a *definitive* stance on feminism, pornography, and feminist pornography, the collection outlines the *fluidity* within the intersection of these categories. Released decades after the now infamous feminist 'porn wars,' *The Feminist Porn Book* is a reminder that the collision between pornography and feminism is more than a noteworthy chapter in the history of the movement; instead, the contributors collectively suggest that there is a dialectical relationship between feminism and porn that can aid our growing understanding of sexual and embodied subjectivity. By presenting the diverse perspectives of 27 contributors, this collection offers a timely feminist re-imagining of the pornographic text. According to the editors:

> Throughout this book, we explore the multiple definitions of feminist porn, but we refuse to fix its boundaries. Feminist porn is a genre and a political vision. And like other genres of film and media, feminist porn shares common themes, aesthetics, and goals even though its parameters are not clearly demarcated. Because it is born out of a feminism that is not one thing but a living, breathing, moving creation, it is necessarily contested – an argument, a polemic, and a debate. (p. 18)

These 'multiple definitions' dominate the substance of *The Feminist Porn Book*, and each of the authors in the collection use their own perspectives to explain the dimensions of this genre. It is fitting, then, that Candida Royalle's essay (in Part One) offers the first pointed reflection on feminist pornography, given her status as the 'pioneer' of the genre. In her effort to redefine what she describes as the 'erotic depiction' of pornography, she suggests that 'adult entertainment could be a tool for sexual knowledge and empowerment for women, and could help men understand how women feel and what they want' (p. 64). For Royalle, feminism becomes the framework for her explicit mediation; but it gets more complicated than that. Royalle later argues that women's porn has been co-opted by mass media and that many allegedly feminist directors are in fact *not* producing texts that advocate sexual empowerment from a women's point of view. In this essay, Royalle describes the paradox surrounding the interpretive nature of feminist pornography; the framework of sex-positive feminism allows directors to mediate sexual practices that some feminists may decode as degrading or violent. However, the authors of *The Feminist Porn Book* recognize such complexities and offer a diversity of arguments meant to deconstruct this genre rather than situate it as *the* feminist response to the politics of pornography.

The structure of *The Feminist Porn Book* is just as important as the content; the juxtaposition of essays from practitioners and theorists situates praxis as the pulse of this particular genre. In Part One, 'Making Porn, Debating Porn,' the essays speak to the moralistic impulses that lie behind particular critical approaches to pornography and offer alternative conceptualizations to 'sex panics' (p. 45). This section highlights the social and institutional demonization of pornography in general and provides some alternatives to this lens of judgment: Betty Dodson, for example, discusses the intersection of sex education and explicit imagery as 'the new porn'; Susie Bright reflects on her work as an adult movie critic and how that experience shifted her perspective on both the industry and the debates surrounding it; and Clarissa Smith, Feona Attwood, and Lynn Comella offer a challenge to the anti-feminist pornography movement and argue, instead, for a contextualized approach that harnesses the agendas of cultural studies.

In Part Two, 'Watching and Being Watched,' the construction of spectatorship, authorship, and performativity are addressed. In particular, issues surrounding black female, queer, and transgender subjectivities are discussed by performers Sinnamon Love and Dylan Ryan, scholars Mireille Miller-Young, Jane Ward, and Ingrid Ryberg, director Tobi Hill-Meyer, and psychotherapist and poet Keiko Lane. In this section, the thorny issue of authenticity is questioned, both as an assumption and as a construction in feminist pornography. As Ryan writes: 'When I say I'm making authentic porn, it means I prioritize my own sexuality, which has allowed me a much less-criticized position than a female performer who may not have thought as much about authenticity in sexual representation' (p. 125).

In Part Three, 'Doing It in School,' feminist pornography as pedagogical discourse and activism is explored in essays by Constance Penley, Ariane Cruz, and Kevin Heffernan, performers Nina Hartley, Christopher Daniel Zeischegg (aka Danny Wylde), Lorelei Lee, and sex educator and director Tristan Taormino, who in the first line of her essay admits that 'My passion for sex education made me a pornographer' (p. 255). In his essay, Heffernan argues that the availability of educational erotic film and feminist pornography 'is the next generation' in activism

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toward female sexual empowerment (p. 253). This section highlights the potential of pornography – in the classroom and beyond – for advancing our comprehension of the politics of sexuality and personal desire.

Finally, Part Four, 'Now Playing: Feminist Porn,' addresses issues surrounding representation and identity politics in feminist pornography, with contributions from performers and scholars dedicated to revealing the persistent complexities behind the signification of marginalized subject positions. Included in this section are essays from entrepreneurs Jiz Lee, April Flores, Buck Angel and Loree Erickson, who have harnessed their identities to connect with audiences that are often alienated from multi-dimensional representations.

The authors of *The Feminist Porn Book* represent the frontline of feminist porn scholarship, and whilst many pages are dedicated to describing the 'what,' 'why,' and 'how,' of this practice, the bulk of this contribution conceptualizes feminist pornography as a 'method of knowledge production' (p. 304). However, despite this invocation of the text as a form of cultural discourse, *The Feminist Porn Book* surprisingly does not include essays that specifically explore audience reception practices. Instead, this volume focuses on the identification of feminist pornography as a fluid, mediated marketplace of 'sex positive synergy' (p. 82) with essays that actively critique the cultural processes of normalization and discipline, resulting in an instructive contribution to contemporary conceptualizations of sexuality, identity, and media culture.

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Hard to swallow: hard-core pornography on screen, edited by Claire Hines and Darren Kerr, London, Wallflower Press, 2012, 249 pp., £17.50 (pbk), ISBN 978-0-231-16213-5

Editors Claire Hines and Darren Kerr describe *Hard to Swallow: Hard-core Pornography on Screen* as a collection of essays dedicated to critically addressing societal perceptions of either film or internet hard-core pornography. The book examines concrete examples of hard-core representations of sex over a 50-year period, ranging from the stag reels of the 1960s to the digital technologies of the twenty-first century. It asks of these representations: 'so, why is hard-core hard to swallow?' (p. 1). The answer lies in the term hard-core itself, which has come to indicate 'unwanted and unwelcome excess' and which is 'habitually contained within moral, ethical and political discourses on public health and collective cultural well-being' (p. 5). The book addresses the claim that 'pornography is now seemingly defined and readily explained before it is even looked at' (p. 5). What the essays collectively discover is the contradictory nature of this genre and 'just how *unknown* the hard core screen really is' (p. 5). In addressing public moral disapprobation and