

Backwards and in High Heels

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Abstract: Feminist arguments on the subject of pornography belong to one of two categories: anti-pornography or anti-censorship. I will take an anti-censorship position, and proceed with an analysis of pornography's effects, presupposing a definition of pornography that falls under the umbrella of representations within the realm of (sexual) fantasy, where fantasy is a particular category of fiction. This paper evaluates the potential for mainstream pornography to produce harmful effects, implementing Judith Butler's analysis of the force of fantasy. I will then present my characterization of the pornography debate as pertaining to the paradox of fiction involving body genres, and examine the potential for egalitarian representations to operate within this framework.

Feminist arguments on the subject of pornography belong to one of two categories: anti-pornography or anti-censorship. Linda Williams notes that this distinction inversely resembles that between arguments surrounding women's right to choose, where both groups are positioned in favor of something: pro-life or pro-choice.¹ In contrast, the feminist debate surrounding pornography concerns two arguments positioned against something, underscored by Susanna Paasonen's term "anti-anti-pornography"² to characterize anti-censorship arguments. Catherine MacKinnon famously presents an anti-pornography feminist argument that pornography constitutes the subordination of women.³ MacKinnon was at the helm of the anti-pornography movement, and arguments in support of her position hinge on verifying a causal relationship between fictional representation and action. Philosophers of language have also developed arguments in defense of MacKinnon's position that are based upon speech act theory,⁴ but I will be focusing here on anti-pornography arguments that understand this causal mechanism as involving the unconscious.

I am most sympathetic towards a definition of pornography that applies to sexually explicit media that is produced with the primary intention of inducing arousal in its viewers. Through this lens, a representation's status as pornographic defers to the authoritative intention of the producer, over the consumer. There is nevertheless appeal to a far less precise

definition of pornography from the perspective of the consumer, which is roughly, “I know it when I see it.”⁵ While inherently sloppy in its application, this definition captures our intuitive approach to discussions surrounding pornography, where there is a fairly incontrovertible mutual understanding of the sort of content in question.

A definition of pornography must also capture an asymmetrical normative status in relation to its counterpart, erotica. To articulate this imbalance succinctly, “pornography is what turns you on; erotica is what turns me on.”⁶ The dynamics of the relationship between pornography and erotica will inform my arguments regarding pornography’s perceived membership among ‘lower’ genres of representation, and the potential for pornography to achieve art status. I will proceed with my analysis of pornography’s effects, presupposing a definition of pornography that falls under the umbrella of representations within the realm of (sexual) fantasy, where fantasy is a particular category of fiction. I will evaluate the potential for mainstream pornography to produce harmful effects implementing Judith Butler’s analysis of the force of fantasy. I will then present my characterization of the pornography debate as pertaining to the paradox of fiction involving body genres, and examine the potential for egalitarian representations to operate within this framework.

Butler attacks Andrea Dworkin’s anti-pornography argument that fantasies are “forcibly imposed”⁷

by certain kinds of representations, which is to say these representations possess some causal force that can lead to action. Critiques of pornography depend on establishing a logical or causal continuum among fantasy, representation, and action. Anti-pornography arguments construe representation as injurious action, and understand fantasy as both producing and being produced by pornographic representations. Butler, in contrast, describes fantasy as a psychic action, where pornographic fantasy is substituted for action and provides for a “catharsis in fantasy”⁸ that makes action superfluous. The realm of the phantasmatic is necessary to the construction of the real, where what qualifies as real depends on a stabilized boundary of the unreal. Fantasy therefore “constitutes a dimension of the real.”⁹ Prohibition is always present in the postulation of desire, so efforts to control the phantasmatic through censorship ironically result in the reproduction and proliferation of the representations that one intends to restrict.

The explanatory circularity between prohibition and fantasy, where prohibitions both generate and restrict phantasmatic narratives, causes Dworkin to conflate the content and rhetorical force of representation. An important characteristic of fantasy is the dissimulation of identity, which distributes among various elements of the scene. Butler argues that there is no one-to-one relationship between a subject in reality and a singular vantage point in a fantasy. Pornography can-

not restrict identification to one position, and therefore cannot force men and women to identify with the dominant and subordinate position respectively within the representation. Dworkin's reading implies a privileged mode of identification involving agency, which would be required for a woman to categorically identify with the passive position. Identification in fantasy is a site of inevitable rifting, which provides the "persistently ungrounded ground"¹⁰ from which feminist discourse can eventually emerge. Butler argues that we must safeguard this uncontrollability of the signified in order to politically undermine terms suppressed by regulatory violence. Feminist theory relies on the capacity of fantasy to postulate an egalitarian future, which cannot be achieved in conjunction with attempts to restrict the phantasmatic. The harmful capacity of mainstream pornography entails the corresponding potential for egalitarian representations to achieve positive effects, through operations in the domain of fantasy.

I understand the causal link between inegalitarian¹¹ pornographic representations and harmful sexual interactions in the real-world as a manifestation of the paradox of fiction.¹² This paradox is familiar from much human experience concerning the consumption of literature, theatre, and film in the realm of fiction. The paradox follows from the premises that it is irrational to feel real emotions as a result of false events, but that we often do experience real emotions when engaging with works of fiction, resulting in the seem-

ingly unacceptable conclusion that we are not justified in feeling those emotions.

I believe the best response to the paradox appeals to a distinction between emotions in isolation versus subsequent action. The tension in the paradox can be illustrated by two contrasting scenarios. In the first scenario, someone is protesting a company's unequal hiring opportunities for women. A more knowledgeable citizen informs the protestor that the company in fact hires more women than men. If the person nevertheless continues to protest, we would consider that action to be unjustified. This scenario is compared with an avid reader of Harry Potter crying when the character Dobby dies. The reader knows that she is having an emotional reaction to a false event, but that knowledge does not mitigate her emotional response. We still consider her response to be rational, which demonstrates the inconsistency involved in the paradox.

This inconsistency can be resolved by pointing out that the protestor continued to act with the knowledge that her information was false, whereas the reader did not take any action inspired by her emotion, which is arguably beyond her rational control. When readers do take real-world action that is morally impermissible, inspired by their emotional engagement with fiction (such as Mark David Chapman stating after murdering John Lennon that he was inspired by the novel, *The Catcher in the Rye*) we do in fact consider their behavior irrational. This distinction becomes blurry in

instances of the paradox of fiction that concern body genres, which are categories of media that operate through representations of excess.

Linda Williams understands the body genres in film as constituted by the subgenres pornography, horror, and 'weepies,' which are films that implement excessive emotion, usually targeted toward an audience of female spectators. These genres are distinguished by their features of bodily excess, with a focus on the ecstasy or uncontrollability involved in arousal, fear, and other extreme emotions. Body genres are named for their associated spectator engagement, where the body of the viewer is caught up in a sort of mimicry of the onscreen bodies. Williams uses this criterion of bodily mimicry to exclude comedy from the realm of body genres, despite the low cultural status it shares with other representations of excess. In comedy, "the audience's physical reaction of laughter does not coincide with the often dead-pan reactions of the clown,"¹³ which contrasts with the more direct resemblance between onscreen bodies and spectator bodies that characterizes the experience of viewing pornography, horror, and weepies. I do not entirely agree with Williams's treatment of comedy as separate from body genres, because the parallels between the physicality of spectators and onscreen bodies can diverge for the other categories of body genres as well. As per Butler's argument, a subject does not have a one-to-one relationship with any single character in a fantasy, rather

identity proliferates beyond recognition. The imperfect parallels involved in bodily mimicry can be aptly illustrated in the genre of horror, where the viewer's experience of fear during a scene where a villain is sneaking up on an unsuspecting victim does not closely resemble the experience of either character in the scene.

I also believe that comedy shares an inherent link with pornography, when considering the way we respond to pornographic representations in a group setting. In stark contrast with viewing pornography in private, where one typically experiences feelings of arousal, watching pornography as part of an audience usually generates laughter. Admittedly, this laughter may be a reaction of embarrassment at viewing socially deemed taboo representations among peers, or an attempt to counteract feelings of arousal which may be considered inappropriate in a public setting. In addition to some resemblance in audience response, pornographic and comedic representations share a similar moral status. Many comedians are infamous for including inflammatory content in their performances, but it is not clear what the appropriate moral requirements for comedic material should be. Morally offensive content can be defended on the grounds that the context of comedy precludes any true normative assertions, because the primary purpose is entertainment. Violently pornographic representations might be defended with a similar argument, that pornography is a genre pri-

marily concerned with inducing arousal in its viewers, and does not take a normative stance on any of the sexual acts depicted.

Returning to the more general discussion of body genres, the fact that these representations can involve parallels of bodily mimicry complicates the solution I proposed to the paradox of fiction. Earlier, I suggested a boundary between the mental and the physical, separating emotion and action to resolve the paradox, but this boundary threatens to dissolve in these cases of physical mimicry. The physical responses of body genre spectators are in a sense involuntary or beyond rational control, but they are instances where the realm of emotional response bleeds into the territory of physical response, and potential for real-world actions.

The bodily mimicry involved in body genre spectatorship does not, however, directly support the anti-pornography position's insistence on a causal relationship between pornographic representation and real-world instances of sexual violence. There is a stark moral difference between a viewer of pornography engaged in sexual bodily mimicry masturbating to inegalitarian pornographic content, versus that viewer enacting sexual violence against women. Butler cites an argument made by Dierdre English that, contrary to the claim that pornographic representations somehow lead to the action of rape by fueling violent fantasies, most men interested in pornography are "just benign masturbators for whom the auto-erotic moment was

the be all and end all of sex.”¹⁴ The progression from emotional to physical spectatorial response to body genres is still isolated to the experience of the viewer, in the action of masturbating to pornography. The argument that this private physical response directly leads to sexual assault against others can be attributed to an inaccurate and anachronistic portrait of (male) sexuality, where male sexual urge is primitive and uncontrollable.

But the discussion of body genres is still relevant to understanding the fearful moral panic that motivates the anti-pornography position, which is illuminated by the link between pornography and horror. This link is best encapsulated in the concept of the ‘snuff film,’ a cinematic display that is alleged to culminate in the actual murder and mutilation of a woman. No agency has been able to authenticate the existence of a genuine snuff film, yet it remains an ominous presence in arguments attacking pornography, as an instantiation of the trajectory from sex to death that allegedly characterizes the pornographic. Before the low-budget exploitation feature *Snuff* (1976), pornography had been viewed generally as a victimless vice. *Snuff*, despite the fact that it was not itself pornographic, contributed to the re-stigmatization of pornography as a dangerous form of low culture that legitimized the exploitation of women. In reality, *Snuff* was a hoax. No one is actually murdered, as any viewer would easily have been able to tell. But the film nonetheless inspired a lingering

fear that, maybe somewhere, such films truly did exist. The remaining dispute over whether there really were ‘snuff films’ in which women were actually murdered inspired concern, because the mere concept seemed to suggest to male viewers that women’s lives were expendable. The anxiety over *Snuff* epitomizes the fear of the anti-pornography movement that representations of violence lead to actual violence.¹⁵

Snuff provides an interesting example of genre confusion, exposing deep divides within society regarding definitions of taste. Descriptive accounts of *Snuff* differed radically depending on people’s genre literacy and assumptions about ‘acceptable’ entertainment. These divides speak to how body genres can be dismissed based on their presumed appeal to lower parts of our persons. *Snuff* was marketed to capitalize on the rumors of snuff films, and the contemporary anxiety over violence. The advertising campaign for *Snuff* was based on techniques used by exploitation filmmakers, to promise displays of the forbidden onscreen.

The Adult Film Association of America opposed the self-proclaimed X-rating of *Snuff* because they feared the film’s graphic violence would provoke more aggressive attacks on nonviolent X-rated films.¹⁶ Investigations into the existence of authentic snuff films coincided with investigations into a link between the pornography industry and organized crime. *Snuff* was a film that threatened onscreen freedom of expression by inciting proponents of censorship. For feminists,

the snuff film became the ultimate instance of male backlash against women's liberation, based on the belief that *Snuff* would inspire demand for the real thing. The public reaction to *Snuff* refers us back to the paradox of fiction, and the question to what extent fictional representations inspire real world effects.

Examining pornography as fiction is not to say that it is fictive, or disconnected with reality. It would be too simplistic to think of pornography as a 'documentary' record of some sexual encounter, where watching porn is indistinguishable from watching people have sex. Pornography therefore falls within the category of fictional representation, which describes imaginary people and events. Pornographic representations play a role both in directly influencing our immediate sexual responses, and in cultivating longer term effects enriching sexual imagination. The longer term imaginative potential for pornography to shape desire is highlighted by Anne Eaton's argument that egalitarian representations can positively inform erotic taste.¹⁷ Fiction can be a tool for moral education, because our imaginative responses to fiction can influence our genuine responses to reality. Eaton argues that inegalitarian pornography leads to inegalitarian attitudes, where the source of harm is the persuasive capacity of representation. Shen-yi Liao and Sara Protsi amend Eaton's position by arguing that fiction is not necessarily responsible for genuine responses in the real world. One must consider the genre of fiction,

which influences the normative conditions for imaginative engagement with fiction and actual responses.

In their discussion of genre, Liao and Protasi use *The Wire* and *Dr. Strangelove* as examples of candid and satirical representations respectively.¹⁸ They argue that in the world of satire, the absurd is normal, so we would not respond to the fictional characters and scenarios in the same way that we would respond to analogous people and situations in the real world. In contrast, worlds that are ‘response-realistic’ are more easily accessible to the imagination, where a subject can envision herself interacting with the characters and situations in the representation with the same expectations she would have in the real world. Because of this direct imaginative accessibility, Liao and Protasi argue that only response-realistic representations can be held responsible for cultivating genuine real-world desires. Whereas mainstream pornography is sufficiently response-realistic to elicit genuine responses, fetish pornography such as BDSM presents a more abnormal world that places no normative claims on reality. Fetish pornography can still result from or constitute harm, but it is susceptible to a different feminist criticism from mainstream pornography.

The importance of attending to genre when viewing pornography adds layers of nuance to Eaton’s argument in favor of egalitarian pornography. Eaton believes that mainstream pornography’s eroticization of male dominance and female submissiveness informs

actions that perpetuate gender inequality. By means of Aristotelian habituation, representations solicit emotional responses that foster a predisposition in the audience, which carries into the real world.¹⁹ These representations must be sufficiently vivid and cumulative to solicit such an emotional response (the same mechanism that works in advertising), and Eaton argues that ‘garden-variety heterosexual porn’ achieves its power in shaping collective erotic taste by eroticizing gender imbalance.

Sensible anti-pornography feminism acknowledges that the power of mainstream pornography operates in this way, but anti-censorship feminists argue that the solution to bad pornography is not no pornography, it’s better pornography. Feminist pornography is committed to fighting gender oppression and rigid gender roles, through production, content, and form. Eaton describes feminist pornography not as softcore, rather as representations of women as active subjects of pleasure and desire, where appropriate attention is paid to the female gaze. Feminist pornography also takes on the responsibility of representing female bodies in a realistic way, portraying male bisexuality, including representations of men as sex objects, and handling BDSM with care.

I agree that the solution to bad pornography is better pornography, but there are several different labels that could be applied to these representations: “feminist,” “alternative,” “egalitarian,” and “radical

egalitarian,” to name a few. Whatever label we choose to promote, the content should not be excessively restricted. There is potential for ethical representations anywhere on the spectrum between egalitarian pornography that does the bare minimum not to promote sexist conduct, and radical content that actively defies gender expectations and sexual scripts. I disagree with the blanket statement that egalitarian pornography cannot eroticize any acts of violence, humiliation, or objectification. Awareness of interpersonal power dynamics is inevitably present in sex, and representations can give attention to such dynamics without enforcing stereotypes that help sustain gender inequality. I see no problem with a female performer actively desiring and consenting to ‘degrading acts,’ so long as these representations are accompanied by the same behavior by male performers. This may, however, be an unrealistic standard, because within a single film, one would not expect all points of view to be represented. There remains the challenge of representing such acts responsibly in their own right, which would involve authentic representations of consent.

Equality among sexual partners does not necessitate total abolition of sadomasochistic inclinations, but egalitarian representations ought to dissolve the association between dominant and submissive roles and the dynamics of societal gender inequality. Deliberate defiance of mainstream active/passive scripting could include the participation of gender-queer performers

to further promote the enjoyment of sadomasochism disassociated with gender roles. Such disassociation can only be achieved if symmetry is actively represented, where male and female performers engage in both active and passive sexual behavior. Dominant/subordinate relationships exist comparatively; men can assume a dominant role only when women are apt to perform submissively. This collaboration resembles that between the iconic dance partners Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire, where “Ginger Rogers did everything Fred Astaire did, except backwards and in high heels.”²⁰

Many egalitarian pornographic representations lay claim to the status of pornographic art, with the aim to expand and educate viewers’ sexual tastes. While achieving art status would pave the way for an open and critical discussion of pornography as a genre, this in itself is not enough to combat the insidious effects of mainstream pornography. The function of art to stimulate new interests and challenge our tastes cannot fully satisfy the inflexible demands of mainstream consumers, who seek only the forms of sexual representation that serve and gratify their preexisting desires. The effectiveness of an egalitarian representation relies on a twofold success, both to be sufficiently egalitarian and to be sufficiently arousing to serve as an enticing picture of what can be progressive and erotic.

I acknowledge that there are obstacles impeding the production and proliferation of respectfully erotic

egalitarian representations. One obstacle is the idea that feelings of sexual attraction often go against our better judgment and are very hard to steer or control. Erotic standards possess a strong inertia, built up over the course of historically sustained gender inequality. Women are bombarded with the message that their attractiveness hinges on their passivity, and the stakes for women to be perceived as sexually attractive are far higher than for men.²¹ Additionally, asymmetrical power associations make men's desire to appear sexy compatible with their other ambitions, while women are expected to abandon all other personal goals that would detract from their presentation as a demure sex object. This expectation of power inequality fuels the beauty myth,²² where older women who have the potential to attain more influence in society are consequently seen as less attractive. The beauty myth imposes two starkly separated categories for female characters within a narrative structure: the protagonist damsel in distress, and the antagonist female villain. A classical heroine must possess youth and beauty combined with helplessness and passivity, whereas older more powerful women make for compellingly sinister villains. The Wicked Witch of the West, Ursula, Circe, Cruella de Vil, Bellatrix Lestrange, and Maleficent, to name a few. Even the goddess Juno had villainous qualities. Correcting the imbalance of the beauty myth would require: both lowering the stakes for female beauty to a reasonable standard where sexiness is not

considered indispensable for any person's self-esteem, and incorporating power and ambition into our concept of female sexual subjectivity.

While pornography has the potential to eroticize and promote healthier female beauty standards, representations that veer into the realm of fetishization are more objectifying than empowering. I am hesitant to embrace Hans Maes's argument that the Internet has a liberating effect on women who struggle with body image. He quotes porn director Anna Span as saying, "if there's something you don't like about your body, put it in a search engine, add the word porn and you will find a load of sites where that is the most attractive thing about you."²³ If a woman (or anyone) has a negative perception of a particular bodily feature, that indicates a dysmorphic self-image that cannot be counterbalanced by fetishizing that bodily feature. An autonomous sexual subject must possess a healthy body image characterized by a conception of their own body as a cohesive and operational whole. Fetishizing individual features is potentially dehumanizing, because it involves a bodily perception that is fragmented or broken.

In addition to the responsibility to realistically portray female bodies, ethical representations of sex require realistic representations of female pleasure. Linda Williams argues that pornography speaks truth to sex,²⁴ but the truth of women's sexual desires and experiences has been historically rewritten and socially

manipulated. Jane Gerhard explores the political significance of sexual pleasure in Anne Koedt's piece "The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm," which seemed to challenge the very foundation of heterosexuality. During early years of women's liberation, clitoral orgasm came to signify the political power of women's self-determination. Koedt's piece outlined a gender analysis of the historic discourse on female heterosexuality, and articulated the stakes for feminists in it. Psychoanalytic experts had made the vagina into a symbol for mature and healthy femininity, but feminists in the late 1960s sought to make the clitoris the symbol of the liberated woman. Koedt was one of the first feminists to theorize clitoral sexuality as a form of sexual expression beyond social designations of homosexual or heterosexual.²⁵

Feminists challenged the essential heterosexuality of both the sexually passive woman of Freudianism, and the liberated woman of the counterculture. Information about the female orgasm and the clitoris had been discussed as extraneous components of women's essential heterosexual identity. Freud's transfer theory acknowledged the clitoris as a sexual organ, but at the same time pathologized it as being out of step with mature femininity. The transfer theory also created a moment where a young girl stood outside of sexual categories, ironically establishing a liminal space or instability in the girl's development of her sexual identity.

Psychoanalysis used the vagina as a symbol that harmonized women's reproductive and sexual

identities, infusing female sexuality with the values of 'healthy' subordination, passivity, and dependency. Helene Deutsch even went so far as to theorize that women come to find what they first experienced as an act of violence as an act of pleasure.²⁶ Psychoanalysts labeled a woman frigid if she was unable to reach vaginal orgasm through intercourse, or if she were under sexual. Women who were deemed overly sexual were subject to the diagnosis of nymphomania. Thus, psychoanalytic labels prescribed a specific level of female sexual desire, and the kinds of sexual behavior women ought to engage in. The clitoris represented the chaos of women behaving like, or overpowering, men. The script of female sexual passivity has therefore been reinforced by historic conflation between gender and sexuality, fueled by myth and misunderstanding of female sexual experiences. Feminists like Koedt set out to reclaim the clitoris to re-imagine a new kind of female sexuality.

In addition to the challenge brought on by historical confusion and misinformation surrounding female sexual experience and simple female anatomy, authentic representation of female pleasure confronts technical obstacles involved in representing the nuances of bodily pleasure through film. Female sexual pleasure does not easily lend itself to onscreen representation, compared with the visual spectacle of male ejaculation. While pornography faces challenges in representing non-orgasmic sexual pleasure for both men and wom-

en, there exists a noteworthy asymmetry where there is no true female equivalent to male ejaculation. This asymmetry is reflected in the pornographic obsession with portraying female ejaculation, as a rare but compelling female equivalent of a visually discernable orgasm. Eithne Johnson explores the representational strategy of “female vocal ejaculation,”²⁷ and how it can be used responsibly to depict female pleasure.

Mainstream pornography implements female vocal ejaculation as an audio strategy to simulate the culturally assumed insatiability of female sexuality. Johnson distinguishes between ecstasy and excess, and argues that mainstream pornography opts for the latter, using female voices in excess of any individual woman. The misalignment of pornographic sounds and images does not persuade the viewer of an authentic representation of female pleasure. Rather, the exaggerated, non-diegetic use of female voice textually embodies the fantasy of the multi-orgasmic and insatiable female. Johnson uses the metaphor of a siren song to describe mainstream pornography’s unconvincingly excessive audial representations of female pleasure. This metaphor astutely captures the harm these representations can cause by convincing male viewers that female pleasure only manifests in excessive vocal displays, and persuading female viewers to enact such displays to reassure male sexual partners. Johnson argues that in conventional pornography, the “woman’s body usually provides the dummy’s lips

through which the porn ventriloquist throws his vocal fantasy.”²⁸ Thus, mainstream porn is dictated by the ‘male ear,’ as well as the male gaze.

Conventional pornography thrives on narratives of sexual difference and gender representation. Johnson analyzes the motives of women pornographers to rewrite the female narrative to maintain erotic immediacy and intimacy, not subordinated to the production process. Audio strategies that diegetically anchor orgasmic voice to a female body, deemphasize voice to privilege musical score, or naturalize voice to merge with ambient sounds, are alternative approaches to audiovisual representation that authenticate female pleasure. It is not necessary for the female orgasm to be ‘real,’ given that pornographic acting is performative, but orgasmic representation ought to be sufficiently convincing to rewrite female sexual pleasure as specific and local, rather than universalistic and essential. Visual techniques that frame rather than fragment the female orgasmic experience, using longer takes and dissolves rather than hard edits, generate proximity to a unified female body. Whereas mainstream pornography represents the male orgasm as visible and finite, egalitarian pornography eroticizes the male body and presents male orgasm in a broader context of bodily responses to sexual activity. Portraying active female desire in contrast with male vulnerability during orgasm constructs a more egalitarian pornotopic fantasy, free from social reality.

Ethical porn ought to position female performers not only as exhibitionists, but also as voyeurs. This allows the viewer to be transported into a scene as the object of a character's gaze, which helps bridge the division between pornographic producer and consumer. Visual representations of female voyeurs complement the audio strategy of deemphasizing female vocal ejaculation, exploiting the connection between narrative and voice. Many narrative theorists maintain that a personified voice is necessary for the construction of a narrative, but mechanisms of power hinge on a voiceless or anonymous subject. The most emblematic illustration of this form of power is Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon²⁹ a prison designed with the intention for all inmates to be observed by a single watchman. Although it is physically impossible for the watchman to observe all cells at once, the fact that the inmates never know when they are being watched motivates them to constantly monitor their own behavior as if they are being observed at all times. The uninterrupted and unverifiable presence of the watchman symbolizes the male gaze, the ultimate voyeur, who maintains authority by remaining voiceless. Panoptic voyeurism aligns with Williams's characterization of pornography as a 'frenzy of the visible,' committed to satisfying a viewer's desire to see the truth of sex in its entirety. Pornographic representations that implement the female gaze and refrain from excessive non-diegetic female vocal ejaculation have the potential to give women a

voice in this frenzy. Egalitarian pornography implements audiovisual techniques to restore female sexual agency, and situate the female body outside the formal logic of male sexual narratives.

Up until this point, I have focused only on questions about producing egalitarian representations. I would like to conclude by asking what we demand of egalitarian viewers of pornography. Returning to the metaphor of the siren song, I do not advocate that viewers avoid all mainstream representations. Rather, as Odysseus restrained himself in order to hear the siren song without being lured to his destruction, a viewer of mainstream pornography must suspend his belief in the reality of a representation. Earlier, I discussed the distinction that Liao and Protasi make between response-realistic and absurd genres, in arguing that only the former can be responsible for altering real-world action. I believe that pornography as a whole should be viewed as absurd. Pornographic representations systematically implement excess, making them almost cartoonish portrayals. While a viewer cannot control his response of arousal to a given pornographic representation, he can remain aware that the representation he is viewing is absurd in the sense that reproducing sex onscreen necessarily requires removing that sex act from reality, and real-world action. Pornography, as a body genre, should not problematize the paradox of fiction, by virtue of a rational viewer's obligation to grasp the inherent absurdity of the genre.

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