GRAPHIC APPROACHES: A THEORETICAL AND ARTISTIC EXPLORATION OF PORNOGRAPHY

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Abstract

Pornography, both its nature and consequences, have been the topic of hot debate in the last few years. Proof of this is the birth of 'Porn Studies', an academic journal dedicated to the study of pornography, in 2014. In particular in the field of aesthetics, the artistic merits (or lack thereof) of pornography have been discussed by Maes, Levinson, Eaton, Mikkola and many others. However, there is a distinct lack of philosophical scholarship produced by (or with) pornographic creators and artists.

At the same time, online censorship directed towards adult content (including but not limited to pornography) and sex workers has been on an extreme rise during the last six years. As a member of both the art and sex working communities, the impact of said censorship on pornography, art and content overall has been obvious – and yet, it has seldom been discussed in academic circles at large (with some notable exceptions, namely Blunt, Are and Rueschendorf), and in the philosophy of aesthetics in particular.

Sitting at the juncture of theory and practice, this thesis tackles questions surrounding the potential artistic nature of pornography and its effects in queer, kinky and other fringe identities. It does so through philosophy, but also engaging with the history of the I Modi and other pornographic artworks as well as through practice-based research.

In Chapter 1 the question of whether pornography can be art is tackled through the theories of several philosophers of aesthetics, examining both normative and non-normative accounts. This chapter also seeks to find a workable definition of art to use throughout the thesis, and introduces important specific frameworks (such as queerness

and colonialism) which are used to further untangle the complicated layers of pornographic practice. Chapter 2 builds onto these frameworks and examines the relationship between dissident identities and pornography, as well as analysing the colonial nature of the medical gaze and its intricate entanglement with pornographic illustrations. Chapter 3 uses my own artistic practice as a research tool, seeking to find the place of creativity in the pornographic process. It also dives into Marks' haptic critique, which is then used to explore the pornographic aesthetic experience of the artist. Finally, by putting my own pieces in conversation with an online audience, it answers questions of pornographic and artistic effectiveness - that is, it tests my theories around what makes pornography and art feel like pornography and art to the audience. Chapter 4 provides the very important legal and social background of online censorship as we know it today, and highlights its relationship to colonial public health and safety control mechanisms as built on by Silicon Valley and new legislation.

In Chapter 5, all these threads are brought together to posit that pornography can indeed be art, and moreover, that censoring this type of art is inherently damaging to dissident identities and populations. This chapter also considers the implications that the philosophy of art has had for sex workers and artists, and proposes some further avenues for the philosophical and artistic research of pornography.

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Chapter 1 — Setting the Scene

1.1 Research Aims and questions

Let me begin by setting out the research questions and aims of the different chapters in this dissertation. In this first chapter, I want to determine whether the difference between pornography and erotica is a reasonable, solid one, or whether it is a distinction based on social biases such as class or misogyny. The reason for this question is that were erotica and pornography to be one and the same, then art and pornography (as categories) would be much closer together.

While this first chapter lays out some of the formal philosophical approaches to this question, I will also continue to explore the broader implications and influences of this question during the second chapter. I will do this by first analysing how dissident identities (that is queer, sexually non-conforming identities) engage with pornography and vice-versa. Secondly, I will look at the relationship between the medical gaze, fatphobia and colonialism. While this may seem like a departure from the original question, I believe that the perceived difference between erotica (acceptable) and pornography (unacceptable) resides in the relationship between obscenity and acceptability. A post-colonial look at the history and application of the medical gaze to the female and dissident bodies will hopefully shine a light on this.

The third chapter focuses on examining pornography from the eye of the pornographer, mainly through my application of practice-based research and the production of pornographic artworks as well as looking at the particular trajectory of the

pornographic programme of the I Modi[1]. When planning this aspect of my research, I set out to find out whether the purpose of pornography was, as Mag Uidhir puts it, manner inspecific. While this is still a central aspect of my research during the chapter, I also seek to explore the aesthetic aspects of pornographic creation in more depth than just whether their results are manner specific or inspecific. I will use Laura Marks' framework of visual haptics to analyse my own artistic practice. I will also look at the development of the pornographic iconographic programme present in the I Modi. Finally, I will put the audience in conversation with my artwork through an online exhibition which will feature these works as well as a survey.

The fourth chapter focuses on the more practical aspects of pornography and how it exists in the world. In this chapter I ask: how do censorship laws impact our ability to create? I seek to explore, in particular, the consequences of online censorship in pornography and art production as a direct result of FOSTA/SESTA. I have experienced the decimation of my online artistic and sex working communities since these laws were passed, and witnessed first-hand how they have shaped artistic creation online. In order to provide an informed view of how censorship laws shape artistic creation, I will look at British censorship during the 20th century, the different laws that surround the passing of FOSTA/SESTA, including the 2023 Online Safety Act, as well as looking at the extremely well-documented effects of FOSTA/SESTA in freedom of speech for queer, artistic and

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[1] The I Modi, also known as The Sixteen Pleasures (1524-1527), is a series of pornographic engravings made by Raphael's workshop, which landed Marcantonio Raimondi (the engraver) in jail over the contents of the engravings.

sex working communities — and compare these effects with the strategies developed by the artists caught in the I Modi scandal to cloak their own pornographic artworks.

Finally, by gathering the evidence from all previous chapters and comparing it with the audience's reaction to my own work by using qualitative research tools, I will seek to answer how the pornographic production/consumption loop may aid in the formation of fringe and queer identities. I will also seek to follow the thread of colonialism and medical gaze laid out in the second chapter and carried on through the research around censorship laws in the fourth. Additionally, I will aim to show how theory and practice come together to shape the pornographic landscape and its relationship to queer and kinky identities.

1.2 Methodology

My main goal with this thesis is not just to give good answers to the questions that I have posed, but answers that take into account the voices of sex workers, queer individuals and researchers, including my own lived experiences as a queer sex worker. I also want the production of this knowledge to occur through artistic practice-based research as well as engaging in philosophical thinking and writing. This thesis will include sexually explicit images, not just of my own artwork, but of pornographic film and photography. These have been included as a way to illustrate my points because the readers may not be as familiar with particular works of pornography as they are with more widely known works of art (such as Courbet's Origin of the World).

I have chosen to work through the framework(s) that the philosophy of aesthetics offers not only because I wish to apply them to pornographic experience and the making of pornography, but because I want to firmly place this research in the history of the aesthetics, where it can hopefully inform current and future discussions about the nature of the aesthetic experience and the meaning of art and its nature. It would also be remiss not to mention the fact that my methodology is partially based on my first-hand experience of the sex industry and queer living as both a sex worker and a queer person. I argue that this does not negate my ability to discuss these topics because I am biassed, but that my lived experience is the backbone against which I am able to develop novel, insightful thinking. Other authors who have used their lived experience to produce academic research include Are, who in her 2022 'The Shadowban Cycle: an autoethnography of pole dancing, nudity and censorship on Instagram' paper published in Feminist Media Studies used her experiences as a pole-dancer with an online profile.

Her use of autoethnography and qualitative research enabled her to produce an accurate and insightful picture of the realities of shadow-banning, and I aim to use those tools to enable my lived experience to serve the production of meaningful knowledge in this thesis.

Methodologically speaking, 'artistic practice-based research' means using artistic research as a way to produce knowledge. I believe that there is a certain embodied knowledge that is intrinsic to any form of artistic and crafting practice, and this is the knowledge that I seek to acquire through the practice-based research aspect of this thesis, in the hopes that it can inform, coexist and enter a loop of feedback with my philosophical thinking and writing. Henk Borgdorff, who has written extensively on the topic of artistic research and its place within academia, says: 'We can justifiably speak of artistic research ('research in the arts') when that artistic practice is not only the result of the research, but also its methodological vehicle, when the research unfolds in and through the acts of creating and performing.' (Borgdorff, 2010, p. 46). I mean to use my artistic practice as a secondary methodological vehicle in order to inform my writing and historical and philosophical research, which I consider my primary methodological vehicles for this thesis. This means that I am aiming to arrive at conclusions and develop ideas through painting, photographing and creating pornography.

This is particularly interesting and relevant in combination with a philosophical aesthetics framework, because 'artistic research – embedded in artistic and academic contexts – is the articulation of the unreflective, non-conceptual content enclosed in aesthetic experiences, **enacted in creative practices** and embodied in artistic products' (ibidem, p. 47, emphasis mine). As it has already been made obvious by the questions

asked in this thesis, I am interested in the potential of the creation of pornography as an aesthetic experience. Painting pornography will, hopefully, effectively engage with this aspect of my questions and lead to some new insights. Borgdorff himself draws attention to the epistemological potential of art present already in Adorno's writing, where art's 'Erkenntnischarakter' (epistemological character) 'reveals the concealed truth about the dark reality of society' (ibidem, p. 50). Whilst I do not have such high hopes for my work, I do believe in art's 'Erkenntnischarakter' and its ability to produce a unique form of knowledge. This artistic research may seem to be only linked to my personal development as an artist, but it is imperative for me that this is a collateral effect of it and not its main goal or purpose. The goal of my artistic, practice-based research, is the production of new knowledge — so that it may satisfy Borgdorff's set of conditions: intent, originality, and the production of knowledge in a particular context (ibidem). The intent is to shift the field of aesthetics forward (if ever so slightly) (ibidem, p. 54); the originality will be measured not just by the novelty of the artworks but the novelty of the knowledge produced through their creation (ibidem, p.55); and in the case of this knowledge and its context, I seek to engage in 'a perceptive, receptive and verstehende[2] engagement with the subject matter' (ibidem, p. 55)

My methodology will be composed of the following elements: art theoretical research, philosophical thinking and writing (understanding these to be the embodied act of thinking), practice-based research (through planning, painting, photographing and

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[2] A term especially associated with Dilthey and Weber, to denote the understanding we have of human activities. In the Verstehen tradition these are understood from within, by means that are opposed to knowing something by objective observation (Oxford Reference, retrieved 2024).

videoing works of pornography), and finally, the creation of an online exhibition and its analysis. Through this I am hoping to cover the two poles of the aesthetic experience, that of the creator and that of the audience: 'Artistic research focuses both on the materiality of art – to the extent that this makes the immaterial possible – and on the immateriality of the art – to the extent that this is embedded in the art world, enacted in creative processes and embodied in the artistic Material.' (ibidem, p. 50)

Additionally, I will utilise the 'I Modi' as the material backdrop and narrative backbone of the thesis. The 'I Modi' were a series of pornographic prints made by Marcantonio Raimondi (between 1524 and 1527) based on designs by Giulio Romano. Whilst racy and pornographic prints had been made before, the response to this set of prints was unprecedented: it landed Raimondi in jail. What is interesting about this case of censorship is that the blame was laid squarely at Raimondi's feet for making these images accessible to the public, all the while Giulio Romano was tucked safely away in Mantua. A.W. Eaton makes the case that, in this infamous case of censorship, it wasn't necessarily the content itself that was the reason behind the response from the papacy, but how accessible it made pornography to the wider public (Eaton, 2018). This case is also made in greater detail by Bette Talvacchia in her book 'Taking Positions' (2001), her in-depth study of not just the I Modi, but their historical context, works it inspired and the potential of pornography in renaissance Italy.

The more I looked into the I Modi, Romano and Raimondi's circle in Rome, their material circumstances, and the projects that came after the I Modi for some of those in this circle of artists (such as decorating the palace of Fontainebleau and the series of prints called 'Loves of The Gods' by fellow artist Caraglio), the more I became interested

in the way that this group of artists used pornography and censorship to advance their artistry (and their careers). As I continue my practice-based research, as well as my research into contemporary sources that speak about the impacts of censorship in erotic and pornographic work, more and more parallels seem to appear between the current plight of artists and sex workers and that of Raimondi's circle. It is because of these parallels that I have chosen to use the I Modi and Talavacchia's text as a narrative thread throughout this thesis, each chapter having a section dedicated to the corresponding aspect of the I Modi. It is my hope that through this, I can use the strategies of the past to reflect on the challenges we are facing in the present.

1.3 Philosophical Framework

It is of the utmost importance that I define the philosophical framework that I will be applying throughout my research and this thesis. In order to do this, I must find a statement or a definition that I can apply to pornography and one that I can apply to art — not just to figure out whether they can overlap, but to delimitate the kinds of works that I will be looking at as well as making. At the same time, since I aim to use queer, postmodern and postcolonial theories of the body and the mind, it is important that I mention which ones and how they interact with the aforementioned philosophical framework. This is the overall aim of this literature review: not just to establish the current state of the art vs pornography debate in aesthetic philosophy and how this thesis may fit into it, but to place it in the wider academic context of the aforementioned disciplines.

What is pornography?

Normative Accounts

According to Hans Maes (2013), there are four axes around which the debate about the distinction between art and pornography can be organised: representational content, moral status, artistic quality and prescribed response. All the statements contained within these categories adjudicate higher moral or artistic value, as well as higher social status, to 'art' than they do to 'pornography', and that most of the definitions and accounts of pornography here presented characterise pornography as opposed to art..

In some of the cases that we will be looking at, there seem to be certain assumptions, views and accounts of pornography underlying these positions that are highly normative. Just as a reminder, descriptive accounts present a series of characteristics that help define or identify a particular subject, whilst normative definitions present an evaluative account of their subject — they aim to explain the (positive or negative) value of something. In this section, we will be looking at definitions and statements that are explicitly or implicitly normative in nature.

Representational Content

The accounts and definitions in this category focus on what is being represented as the defining characteristic of the work: pornography is sexually explicit and rich in anatomical detail, whereas erotica is not. This statement wouldn't in and of itself qualify as a normative element, but all of the accounts included in this section adjudicate some kind of moral value to said explicit content. I will be grouping them in three sub-categories: linking sexual explicitness and shame, linking sexually explicitness with violence, and arguing that sexual explicitness does not engage the viewer's imagination.

Firstly, some of the statements that I evaluate here make a link between being sexually explicit and engaging the spectator in a shameful gaze. This is the case for Bovens, who explicitly links pornography and a shameful gaze when he establishes that 'Pornography is certainly immediate in its graphic nature' (Bovens, 1998, p. 214) and that 'immediacy engages the viewer into a shameful gaze' (ibidem, 1998, p. 216). The argument against this being a universal occurrence can be found in his own text, however, when he

uses a suburban (north-American) public as an example for someone who would engage in a shameful gaze. Engaging in a shameful gaze is not a quality inherent to the sexually explicit material, but to this type of audience. They will feel ashamed of watching sexually explicit materials because of their upbringing, as well as their religious and moral values. Shame is in the eye of the beholder, not in the nature of the representative content of the material. Pornography doesn't only cater to white, suburban, middle-class families in a familiar environment, and I am not sure the shock value of its immediacy would hold water in other, more queer environments.

Secondly, we have authors such as Alyce Mahon (2005), Peter Webb (1975) and Gloria Steinem (1995, 2006, 2013) who have claimed that the sex featured in pornography is aggressive and alienated or alienating. Steinem in particular has said, 'Porne means female slaves' (Steinem, 2013), a quote widely used by anti-pornography campaigns and organisations. The idea seems to be that the origins of the word further prove that pornography is alienating (since it is derived from the greek 'porne', which can be translated as 'female prostitute'). But assuming that the sex had by sex workers is inherently dehumanising is whorephobic and impacts and harms sex workers' lives (Benoit et al. 2017). First and foremost, sex workers are human beings with as much agency as any other person in similar circumstances. If we accept that we live in a capitalist society in which there may be no such thing as ethical consumption nor true free will (since our ability to make choices is heavily impacted by our access to money), and we accept that as workers we exchange our labour for access to money and resources, our 'choice' of labour can not be qualified as free/not free. Other labour that uses the

human body (such as personal training, modelling, mining or cleaning) is not seen as dehumanising as sex work often is, either[3].

If other forms of labour that use the body are not seen as inherently dehumanising, then the only difference between these forms of labour is the way in which the body is used: that is, that sex workers use their body in sexual ways, to elicit sexual responses, or to have sex (in exchange for money). Thus, it follows that the only reason to assume that the sex had by a sex worker is (more) dehumanising (than the sex had in an environment where there is no explicit exchange of money) is finding (heterosexual?) sex itself is a dehumanising endeavour. Additionally, this assumes a very phallocentric and cis-heterosexual positioning towards sex work and erotic labour: it is assumed that the sex worker will act as a passive 'female' receiver of the act itself, instead of an active participant. This removes any agency that the sex worker may have had in this situation. Finally, whilst porne can be translated as a female prostitute, the word pornos existed in ancient Greek to refer to male prostitutes. The erasure of non-femme sex workers from history and discourse is very common. However, authors like Eva Cantarella (2002) who have explored ideas of bisexuality and homosexuality in ancient Greece and Rome have established that male prostitution was rather common (as it continues to be today). I will not propose that these positions were socially acceptable or that their lack of social acceptability was not related to the assumption that the sex worker was the penetrated

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[3] This doesn't preclude that women are not routinely objectified on the Internet irrespective of their profession. Martha Nussbaum offers an excellent account of how misogynistic objectification is hard-baked into the structure of Internet gossip, and how this type of gossip can harm professional women of any background (in this case, young law professionals from an Ivy League University) (Nussbaum, 2010).

party and that this carried an inherent feminization of the individual (Cantarella, 2002, p. 97-120); but there is no reason to claim that sex workers have only inhuman, undesirable and violent sex by default.

This following example, in particular, shows how normative definitions, whilst having value for gathering certain social consensus about pornography, often exert oppressive power against non-normative members of society. Susan Dwyer identifies very accurately how useful a normative characterization can be: 'suppose I want to motivate you to lobby your local officials to ban pornography from newsstands. In this event, I will want to use words that perform the strategic function of language well, and I will use a (negative) normative characterization of pornography. A person would be hard-pressed to fail to be, at least a little, motivated to remove instances of undiluted anti-female propaganda from public view.' (Dwyer, 2008, p. 517). Whilst I agree with her that a normative characterization is ideal to perform the 'strategic function' of language and move groups into action, unfortunately, these actions are often performed without consulting the interested and affected parties and to the detriment of those — the passing of FOSTA/SESTA[4] being a very obvious example in recent history. The passing of this suite of anti-trafficking laws (which essentially make the hosts of a platform responsible for the content published in it) in 2018 didn't hail the start of censorship against sex

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[4]"FOSTA (Allow States and Victims to Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act) and SESTA (Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act) are U.S. Senate and House bills which became law on April 11, 2018. They clarify the country's sex trafficking law to make it illegal to knowingly assist, facilitate, or support sex trafficking, and amend the Section 230 safe harbors of the Communications Decency Act (which make online services immune from civil liability for the actions of their users) to exclude enforcement of federal or state sex trafficking laws from its immunity.' (Wikipedia, 2022)

workers on the internet (since it was already present), but opened up the door for platforms to outright ban them — or face the consequences[5].

Thirdly, authors like Roger Scruton have claimed that pornography doesn't require its audience to engage their imagination, having such explicit content that it leaves no room for imagination or exploration: 'Here we begin to understand the difference between pornography and erotic art. The first addresses a fantasy interest, the second addresses an interest of the imagination; hence the first is explicit and depersonalised, while the second invites us into the subjectivity of another person and relies on suggestion and allusion rather than explicit display.' (Scruton, 2005). I argue that this stems from the idea that sex is a simple series of actions, a 'surface-level' activity that has no impact whatsoever on the participant's psyches.

Moral Status

In the following section, I will be discussing four different approaches to differentiating pornography from art which are based on its moral status or value: Catherine MacKinnon's, Roger Scruton's, Rae Langton's and Jerrold Levinson's. Firstly,

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[5] The best-known instance of the application of these laws is probably the fall of Backpage (a personal ads page that lower-rate sex workers used to announce their services), which massively impacted low-income street-workers, who had their safety network pulled away from them with no notice at all. For more on the impact of FOSTA/SESTA as well as the loss of Backpage, please see Blunt, D., & Wolf, A. (2020). Hacking//Hustling's 2020 Erased. For more on the impact of the recently passed Online Safety Act, please see the interview with Sex Worker Union member Audrey Oppenheim, M. (2024, February 3). 'Online safety bill could put sex workers lives at risk, politicians warn.'

we will look at Catherine MacKinnon's definition of pornography. This definition was provided in 'Feminism Unmodified' (1987) and was developed in the context of a legal argument. MacKinnon worked with Andrea Dworkin at the request of the city of Minneapolis as a 'local human rights ordinance'. Interestingly, at the core of this definition is the idea that the mere existence of pornography goes against the First Amendment of the US Constitution: as long as pornography exists, since its existence attacks women's ability to live life safely and fully, it's impairing the ability of '53% of the population' (MacKinnon, 1987, p. 180) to freely express themselves.

MacKinnon argues that the existence of pornography harms both the women that make it and the women that are exposed to it. The first group is harmed because (in the case of video and photography) they are forced (either physically or by their circumstances) to perform acts that are exceedingly violent against them. The second group is harmed because it teaches them to be submissive; furthers the sexual abuses they face in different areas of their lives; showcases patriarchal violence and presents it as female pleasure; forces them to relive their past sexual abuse trauma; furthers the sexual abuses they face in different areas of their lives and, ultimately, serves as inspiration for serial killers and rapists to perform those acts in real life, harming women. She additionally argues that it harms men's relationships with women because it teaches them how to express their (hetero) sexuality by being violent to women.

The author herself confirms that her definition connects epistemology to politics. Pornography is thus understood as the ultimate media outlet for the exercise of patriarchal power against women's freedom and rights: she quotes Dworkin and argues that pornography 'keeps women silent'. Specificity is of the utmost importance when it

comes to this definition of pornography, as it was meant for a legal framework — there is an intention here to step away from Justice Stewart's vague and evasive 'I know it when I see it' (1969) and ensure a unified definition of pornography that can be applied across the board, no matter who is looking at it (a wealthy white man or a woman in academia):

> The graphic sexually explicit subordination of women through pictures and words that also includes women dehumanized as sexual objects, things, or commodities; enjoying pain or humiliation or rape; being tied up, cut up, mutilated, bruised, or physically hurt; in postures of sexual submission or servility or display; reduced to body parts, penetrated by objects or animals, or presented in scenarios of degradation, injury, torture; shown as filthy or inferior; bleeding, bruised, or hurt in a context that makes these conditions sexual. (MacKinnon, 1987, p. 176)

MacKinnon colours her text with testimonies from Linda Marchiano[6] and other women who had been trafficked or forced into performing for pornographic video and photographic productions. She also highlights how the power dynamic in the traditional movie set and magazine circuit is extremely asymmetrical and allows men to easily predate women.

First, I would like to offer some thoughts regarding MacKinnon's proposed pornographic harms. When it comes to the women in front of the camera, MacKinnon seems to suggest that there is something uniquely perverse about pornography and

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[6] The actor credited as Linda Lovelace in 'Deep Throat' and other golden age pornographic movies, who later on revealed the abusive nature of those sets and became an anti-pornography activist.

prostitution (which she often conflates): I would like to argue that under patriarchy and capitalism, women (and other collectives) are forced to live violently, and those perceived as women, in particular, suffer sexual violence no matter whether they are getting paid for it.

MacKinnon herself points this out when it comes to her arguing about how pornography shapes sexual harassment in the workplace (MacKinnon, 1987, p. 169). I argue that sexual violence is not unique to the sex industry, and moreover, that sex workers' ability to negotiate the conditions of their work (which is affected by their access to safe spaces and resources) directly opposes the idea that every paid sexual encounter must be violent by nature. Moreover, this view of the sex industry as a purely heterosexual space where heterosexual sex reaches the height of its (according to MacKinnon, underlying and true) violent nature is not accurate. It doesn't account for homosexual pornography, BDSM or bizarre pornography, or heterosexual people who may enjoy violent sex or for the pornographic productions that portray sex as non-violent.

MacKinnon's vision forces cis heterosexual women into the position of the receiver, the 'penetrated'. As reminiscent of ancient Roman culture as this is (Cantarella, 2002, p. xi), there are more ways to understand heterosexual penetrative sex. Not every person with a vagina may feel that PIV (penis in vagina) sex makes them into the passive, receiving partner. In the words of Avedon Carol,

> Most rapes and abuse occur under circumstances that do not involve pornography, but these are never mentioned. Most male users of pornography do not become rapists, and most female users of pornography have positive experiences to report, but we are not allowed to hear from them. One sex worker

who has horror stories to tell is believed; then porn models who enjoy their work are not. In other words, victim testimony against pornography is one-sided and gives a wholly inaccurate picture. This is not 'evidence' in any honest respect. (Carol, 1994, p. 88)

As for the group that is affected by the way pornography shapes the world around them (that is, any woman who is not in front of the camera recording), MacKinnon's inability to consider the existence of different forms of pornography and different sexual tastes and inclinations renders this argument somewhat moot. Furthermore, while I think it's fair to say that the media that we consume can shape the way that we look at the world, I find MacKinnon's notion that pornography must look 'as real as possible' and thus, is understood by its audience to be a portrayal of 'true sex' somewhat lacking. I would argue that it is not watching or reading (heterosexual) pornography (as a leisure activity) that shapes harmful or unrealistic views of heterosexual sex, but the lack of sex education and communication in hetero romantic environments that allows for this to happen. As an interesting example, New Zealand recently launched a campaign ('HAVE THE TALK') featuring pornstars where they encouraged parents to teach their kids about sex, making the argument that they are performers and pornography is adult entertainment, not sex education.

This definition of pornography focuses only on mainstream pornography as created for cis, mostly white, heterosexual and 'vanilla' men There is barely a mention of trans people (and only trans women as victims of the industry), queer folks, homosexual pornography, or BDSM pornography that doesn't feature women being 'tortured' (such as Femdom pornography, which has been abundant since the early XIXth century (Nomis,

2013)). On top of these exclusions, this definition is markedly anti-BDSM and anti-kink: showing a person being tied up or humiliated is not in itself sufficient for the work to be regarded as dehumanising. It could be BDSM, where degradation is used as a tool for arousal and not as a tool that in actuality dehumanises the person being degraded. Depicting (consensual) degradation is not inherently dehumanising. In what Carol (Carol, 1994, p. 99) identifies as a trend in carceral and pro-censorship feminism, this definition assigns moral values to different kinds of sex: sex rooted in erotic love that is tender is morally good, whilst sex rooted in (consensual) roughness, degradation and violence is morally bad. In refusing to acknowledge the existence of these kinds of porn, the agency of sex workers and different women and femme-presenting individual's sexual preferences, as well as the author's own internal biases, MacKinnon's definition (for all its specificity) fails to acknowledge the different forms of pornography that are currently produced.

In contrast with (and in response to) MacKinnon, Avedon (2006) proposes that pornography is a space to explore otherness: queerness, blackness, and transness. In placing her discourse as a direct opposite of MacKinnon's, Avedon proposes that pornography is not inherently a place of oppression and that it can, instead, become a place of exploration for identities that are deeply sexualized by a heteronormative, white-supremacist society. If we stack this with the reading of authors such as Sabrina Strings (2020) and her account of how the white, colonised perspective on black bodies shaped both racism and fatphobia whilst fetishizing them, I think there is room to argue that MacKinnon's definition of pornography is deeply steeped in these same moral failings. Her obsession with determining what is objectification, as well as the link

between objectification and degradation can only be sustained if we subscribe to the idea that (white, able-bodied) women are incapable of desiring rough sex or enjoying the depiction of femme sexual submission, and that femme domination is never portrayed for the pleasure of the femme dominant but for that of the masculine submissive. On top of this, both Mikkola (2019), other authors and innumerable sex workers and erotic labourers have criticised the MacKinnon definition for not taking into account the agency of the sex workers that create pornography. Authors such as Rebelle Cunt (2019) have pointed out that ideas like this hyper-focus on sex work and pornography being the root of all evil whilst co-opting those other aspects of patriarchy and capitalism that do exactly the same: 'Capitalism has driven many people into work they would never have considered before and strutural oppression and, particularly in the case of erotic labor, laws created that constrict ad impose upon independent movement and encourage exploitation by third-parties, force people into exploitative situations.' (suprihmbe, 2019, reproduced as originally written). Both these authors as well as Blunt, Liara Roux, and many other pro-decriminalisation sex working authors recognize that trafficking is an issue, and also that choice is fairly limited under capitalism.

Secondly, let's focus on Scruton's argument against pornography and how he differentiates pornography from art. There are two principal axes in Scruton's argument that pornography is inherently harmful: his Kantian conception of the relationship between fantasy and reality, and the idea that substitution, instead of representation, is central to the creation of pornography. Let's explore the latter, since in a way it lays the foundation for the former. Scruton writes that: 'When critics distinguish erotic art from pornography, they often have some distinction in mind such as that between

representation, which is addressed to the creative imagination and bound by a principle of truth, and substitution, which is addressed to the sexual fantasy and bound only by the requirement of gratificatory power. The latter must always offend against the proprieties of art, while the former may remain obedient to them.' (Scruton, 1986, p. 251) As we can see, he associates representation with creative imagination, bound by 'a principle of truth', and remains obedient to the proprieties of art, whereas substitution is associated with sexual fantasy (which as we have shown on has a negative moral implication for Scruton), bound by 'the requirement of gratificatory power, and offending against the proprieties of art'.

Let's assume that Scruton's definition of truth is that of a matter being concordant with the external world. Being bound by a principle of truth would then mean being bound to a concordance with the external world. He doesn't offer a list of 'properties of art' in this text, but if we go back to his essay 'Photography and Representation' (Scruton, 1981) he determines that in order for something to be considered a work of art, it would need to sustain an aesthetic interest in and of itself. He then rules out photography as a work of art since the photographer would have to look outside of the photographic process to add meaning to their work. For our purposes, we will consider that Scruton's characterization of erotica has an aesthetic interest in and of itself. Finally, the issue with associating certain forms of expression with creative imagination goes back to the idea that crafts and industrially produced creative outputs (such as pornography) are formulaic and thus, devoid of creative imagination. These three principles come together to become 'representation', or a work bound to concordance

with the external world that sustains an aesthetic interest in and of itself and made possible through creative imagination.

On the other hand, we have sexual fantasy, where an object is 'represented […] but the aim is to approach as nearly as possible to a substitute for the absent object: though a substitute that is free from danger.' (Scruton, 1986, p. 251) As we can see, the substitution aspect comes through in that this representation is free from danger, and thus not concordant with the external world (where the fantasizer would face social and legal consequences for enacting them). Moreover, the work here is bound by the requirement of gratificatory power, or its ability to provide gratification to the audience/user. According to Scruton, there is no interposition of thought between audience and object, merely the surrogacy of a substitution that is not bound by truth. Finally, it is devoid of creative imagination, meaning that it simply re-uses patterns, ideas and archetypes in an unoriginal way. These principles together create 'substitution', which is diametrically opposed to 'representation'.

The tension between representation and substitution carries on to Scruton's understanding of reality and fantasy. Fantasy is a dangerous threat to reality because it tends to replace it, but since fantasy is but a substitution of reality, this displacement will create a dangerous, violent and undesirable outcome: 'The harmless wanker with the video-machine can at any moment, turn into the desperate rapist with a gun.' (Scruton, 1986, p. 272). When talking about masturbation he distinguishes the 'normal' and the 'perverted' masturbators: the former uses representation (mental re-creation of acts 'towards which his body tends' (ibidem, 1986, p. 251)) whilst the latter uses pornography (which, according to Scruton, is 'purged of the dangers and difficulties presented by the

human soul' (ibidem, 1986, p. 251)). Thus, pornographic materials are dangerous because they threaten reality, they purge our experience of difficulties that are necessary to experience, are devoid of aesthetic interest, and they are unoriginal.

The idea that sexual fantasies enhanced with/by pornographic materials threaten reality with violence is at the basis of Scruton's characterization of pornography as harmful to the fabric of society. However, I would like to introduce alternative evidence that suggests that (some of) these violent sexual fantasies do not only not threaten reality, but are a direct result of the conflict between being subject to sexual violence (in real life) and the desire to maintain or regain one's own sexual and bodily agency: In Nancy Friday's 'My Secret Garden' (1979) we find a number of women who often recreate rape scenarios (of which they were victims) in their sexual fantasies (pp. 109-136). Some of the women quoted masturbate to these fantasies, whilst others find they appear as intrusive thoughts during sex. But in all of the cases, a key part of the fantasy is that their fantasy counterparts desire the rape (although, obviously, this was not the case when they were assaulted) and derive pleasure from the encounter. This suggests a strong desire to reassert their sexual agency and ability to enjoy sexual encounters by reshaping the narrative of violent assault into one of (violent) desire.

Scruton's conception of sexual desire and sexual fantasies does not leave space to even consider this process — he conceives violent sexual fantasies as polluting because the sexual experience that he describes is deeply rooted in a cisheterosexual, patriarchal, western and shameful idea of sex. Sex can only serve the purpose of deepening a connection with another romantic partner (and, of course, reproduction), never with oneself. The self-serving violent fantasy (which is, first and foremost, self-serving) directly

threatens this idea because it means that sex can be used as a tool to deepen the connection with oneself — it's this that Scruton finds onanistic and polluting.

Going back to Scruton's conception of sex, the underlying idea that sexual gratification is surrounded by difficulties that are necessary to experience (such as shameful rejection, or the consequences of violent acts) reveals a lack of consideration for other types of sexuality. Violence may be a desirable outcome in certain types of sexual experience. Whilst rejection may not be a particularly palatable emotion, the way in which sexual preferences and interests are discussed in some queer circles makes it far less violent than what Scruton seems to suggest. Moreover, it is the promoting of 'normative' sexuality (which Scruton defends as the only moral way to have sexual desire) that creates violent and impossible standards (such as cis men being the conqueror and sexual conquest being desirable, whilst rejection being shameful) which makes these experiences difficult.

When it comes to the assertion that pornography is unoriginal, Scruton's understanding of what constitutes art (and more importantly, what doesn't) is central: if photography is not art because the process of photography is mechanical (and thus, one must look outside of it to find the creative mind and the aesthetic components), any industrial 'art' (which includes film, photography, or even digital art) is bound to lack originality. On top of that, Scruton also subscribes to the idea that pornography is formulaic and thus unoriginal, a view shared by Kenneth Clark amongst others. Linda Nead (1992) called into question this particular aspect of Clark's distinction of erotica and pornography when pointing out the many similarities shared between Venuses or different classical erotic scenes (such as Leda and the Swan or the rape of Europa), which

tend to share a 'canon' or 'formula' that makes them recognisable and sets one myth apart from the other — perhaps in a similar fashion that different categories of pornographic films share a common structure, or the way that 'beaver shots' became a genre.

Other authors, like Rae Langton (1998), also argue similarly that pornography is harmful in the making and in the consumption, but also in the sense that it silences and subordinates women and as such constitutes harm. As a matter of fact, Langton compares pornography with hate speech (2012) in a very philosophically compelling chapter. However, there are three big issues with the way that she approaches this topic. First, Langton fails to engage with actual pornographic materials, sex workers, or porn audiences. Her methodology is biased because she is working from her own assumptions on pornography (as well as other philosopher's), and she does not reference a single piece of theory, research or even an interview with a sex worker or a pornography consumer. However, the second issue is perhaps more relevant for the philosophical validity of her proposition. At a certain point in the article she compares anti-semitic articles written before Hitler's rise to power and how they manufactured consent for the eventual genocide of Jewish, Romani, POC and queer populations with pornography and how it may manufacture consent for the mistreatment of women. The biggest problem with this comparison is that a piece of pornography does not have same authority as a piece of journalism published in a well-known newspaper. The consumption of pornography is still socially taboo, and the more violent the pornography, the more taboo it is to consume it. A piece of pornographic work does not have the social or moral authority of a journalist who is part of the social, ethnic and economic ruling class of a nation (in the case of Langton's example). Therefore, it is difficult to follow the parallel completely - this

is not to say that pornography can not be harmful, but it certainly lacks the social authority to be as harmful as an opinion piece in a newspaper. It is also interesting to note that the mechanism invoked by said opinion pieces is a staple of how white supremacy and colonialism have defended themselves against the existence of queer people, migrants and sex workers - for more on this, please see Chapter 2.

Finally, the use of conative appeal that Langton proposes needs some more interrogation. Desiring violent sexual submission is not automatically followed by hating the partner who is submitting sexually. Langton argues that pornography's conative appeal is: "Desire to harm women!". If we are looking at mainstream, vanilla pornography (which is what I must assume Langton is talking about, since she doesn't specify what pieces of pornography, types, categories, dates, or genres she is looking at), its conative appeal tends to be more: "Desire to be so overcome by desire that societal expectations of behaviour go out of the window!" or "Your desire for sex overcomes everything else!". It is difficult to carry on this argument without looking at a specific piece of pornographic media, and this is another problem with Langton's text (and many others that I have discussed here): while it quotes several articles written in newspapers, she does not quote a single actual pornographic text (or scene, or movie). It is hard to argue against an image of pornography that exists only in the realm of philosophy.

Susan Dwyer when speaking about pornography that 'involves humiliating, degrading, and abusive treatment of others in a highly sexualized context' (Dwyer 2008, p. 522) also proposes that 'consuming pornography makes the consumer engage in bad thoughts about others' (Maes, 2012), which erodes one's moral stand and values. Again, this is anti-BDSM, kink-shaming and fails to mention two key points: that submissives of

any gender do consume this kind of pornography (for the enjoyment and enactment of the fantasy of being humiliated) and that these are consensual acts. Additionally, it assigns a moral value to (certain) sexual fantasies. Andrew Gilden (2016) has reviewed how social disgust acts as moral judgement and has made its way into courtrooms, and adds that 'As the law is increasingly presented with digitised evidence of individuals' intimate lives, the law has struggled to view the data trails of fantasy as precisely that—external recordings of mental processes and not damning proof of the scenarios described.' (Gilden, 2016). As mentioned before, Nancy Friday gathered a number of women's sexual fantasies during the 60s and 70s and found that rape fantasies were exceedingly prevalent, particularly amongst women that had been raped (Friday, 1973). Normative definitions of pornography that assign a (negative) moral value to the consumption of pornography not only prevent research and developments in our understanding of the human psyche but may back dangerous detriments to the personal rights and liberties of the same populations they purport to protect.

Levinson (2003) adds that, if masturbation is the main way an individual chooses to engage in sex, this prevents said individual's flourishing, perverting authentic interpersonal sexual relations: 'agents not only pursue the seriously sexually suboptimal but are more or less cognizant in doing so' (Levinson, 2003). The idea here seems to be that engaging in masturbation with the 'aid' of pornography is an unhealthy or incomplete way to have sex, and it actively harms one's sexual development because it prevents people from connecting with one another through more traditional ways to have sex, such as one-on-one intercourse with no external stimuli. This is a very ableist point of view that doesn't account for how paralysed people, people with vaginismus, recovering rape

survivors and many other people choose to have sex (with themselves and/or others). It is also lacking an understanding of the different types of sex that can be had with oneself or others. On top of that, it reproduces harmful, western and patriarchal ideas about sex rooted in a colonial, capitalistic, Christian understanding of the 'good reasons' to have sex: namely, that it's only right and worth having if it's being had with other people for a 'productive' reason (such as affirming romantic love for one another in a -heterosexual- relationship that has been sanctioned by a higher authority; or having children) (Nguyen, 2021).

Artistic Quality

Fred Berger defines pornography as something 'which explicitly depicts sexual activity or arousal in a manner having little or no artistic or literary value' (Berger, 1977, p. 184) — and this is something that many authors seem to agree with. There seem to be five different reasons that are invoked to justify this judgement: one-dimensionality, pornography's formulaic nature, being inherently mass-produced, being pure fantasy, and its 'smutty' nature (see also Maes 2012).

Claims are often made that pornography is 'one-dimensional', which connects with the idea that pornography is too explicit and 'obvious' and thus, works only at surface level and lacks depth. I would argue that many works of art are one-dimensional and/or explicit and that many works of pornography aren't. This normative definition can not be applied across the board. Additionally, authors like Laura Kipnis (2006) defend

that pornography allows us to have a privileged look into the human cultural psyche: she proposes that the pornographic experience is complex and can offer a layered rendition of cultural taboos, deeply steeped in the complications of personhood. It makes pornography valuable not only for the individuals who enjoy it but for larger groups as a sort of collective personal chronicle that helps establish relationships between personal sexual interests and larger socio-psychological trends and patterns.

Very tied to the dimensionality aspect, we often find authors such as Steiner (1975), who claim that pornography is formulaic: "the mathematics of sex stop somewhere around the region of soixante-neuf' — meaning that there are only a finite number of sexual positions that we can engage in, which then limits the ways in which we can represent sex in pornography. Heterosexism and lack of imagination aside, there are several arguments that can be made here, including that pornography is not inherently formulaic. A quick look at a number of sex-worker owned pornography studios will debunk this myth (Four Chambered and their impeccable mix of renaissance and pre raphaelite style with hardcore pornography comes to mind).

Fig. 1 — Stills in the set of 'Birth of Venus' (Fourchambered), by Valerie August

By contrast, we can find formulaic approaches to art all throughout art history. Paintings of the Theotokos[7] are inherently formulaic and that doesn't seem to make them less valuable. Whilst it could be argued that the 'categorization' of pornographic clips is indicative of their formulaic nature, it is born out of the necessity to establish a common language with the audience that aids in the understanding and interpretation of the piece. It does not necessarily mean that the content is formulaic: cuckolding clips are often very varied in the narratives and angles they pursue. We could compare a Bardot Smith cuckolding clip (Your Sex Life — Chastity Cuckold Training, 2018), which doesn't even include the presence of a man on-screen with a Mistress Caramel one (Cuckold Double Creampie, 2019), which would include a male lover and explicit genital shots.

The argument is also made that pornography is industrial in nature (Maes, 2013). First and foremost, this can also be said of film and any other art form that was born after the industrial revolution. I also think that it would be interesting to contrast this take on pornography with the custom-made pornographic clips that are the figurative 'bread and butter' of many online sex workers. This practice entails offering a five to twenty-minute clip filmed for the customer, where the customer has certain input in the narrative (asking for a specific fetish that the sex worker offers, for customization in the outfits or environment, to be called by a particular name, etc.). The customer may pay a premium to ensure that this clip is not later sold to the wider public. Does a commissioned product that may not be available for mass sale, but was created with methods of mass-production, still count as a mass-produced item?

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[7] A type of eastern christian icon, similar to the Madonna with Child, where the Virgin Mary is holding Jesus in her arms.

Matthew Kieran (2001) reflects on Scruton's characterization of pornography as 'fantasy, pure wish-fulfilment'. As it happens often when discussing pornography and sexuality, the fact that a lot of artistic representations have been 'fantasy, pure wish-fulfilment' for powerful people is ignored. Clara Peeters' still-lifes can be read as the wish-fulfilment of an up-and-coming merchant class that wanted to see their wealth crystallised on canvas. I fail to see the difference between old man/young chick pornography and most representations of 'Susana and the Elders': they both present young, 'desirable' femmes being desired and/or molested by older, almost 'disgusting' men. Whilst the pornographic film may deliver the explicit conclusion of its premise, they both tease the same scenario and tend to engage with the male gaze in similar ways. With that being said, if this definition were to be applied, I also find little difference between pornography and Artemisia Gentileschi's 'Judith and Holofernes'. When Gentileschi uses the face of her rapist to depict Holofernes and herself as a model for Judith, she is obviously enacting a revenge fantasy that can only be described as 'pure wish-fulfilment'. Lynda Nead makes some excellent points about the male gaze and the kinds of portraits and nudes that have been commissioned through history (Nead, 1992) but so do Germaine Greer (1979) and Angeles Caso (2017) when talking about how women artists chose to represent themselves.

Furthermore, there is nothing morally wrong with art being wish-fulfilment or pure fantasy, and to imply that there is and that it is one of the defining qualities of a pornographic work implies a very privileged point of view — oppressed populations have turned to art in order to create wish-fulfilment as a coping mechanism for centuries. Feminist north-American fanzines in the 90s are an excellent example (the so-called

'Wimmen Comix'), and the suffragette embroidered cloths made in the Holloway prison (Jones, 2020) also come to mind.

Finally, as Maes points out, pornography is commonly considered 'smutty', meaning that it is aggressively, unapologetically and obscenely sexual: 'smutty pictures that focus on sexual organs and serve only one purpose.' (Maes, 2016). There seems to be a moral and a capitalistic value assigned to this: it is not desirable for things to be smutty, as smutty things do not conform to the status quo, may make people uncomfortable and are not conducive to the reproduction of the family unit. It makes me wonder whether making an audience (especially, perhaps, a privileged audience) uncomfortable could be one of the most important characteristics of pornography were we to cast it under a different light. Being that it's also often said of groundbreaking art, it is another reason to think that they might not be too far apart.

Prescribed Response

Maes points out that one of the major semantic distinctions that we make when talking about pornography versus art is that we frame pornography as being consumed and art as being contemplated (Maes, 2015). This ties in with the mass-produced aspect mentioned above and also indicates very different roles for the expected audiences: pornographic audiences take the role of consumers, whereas art audiences take the role of humans having an aesthetic experience. Of course, contemplation is a highly-valued activity, one that leaves room for growth and various rewarding mental states.

Clark and Scruton both proposed that contemplation is impossible whilst masturbating: 'Aesthetic interest, while it is based in sensory experience, is the prerogative of the 'cognitive' senses — of the eye and the ear. These senses present us with experiences whose sensory quality is inseparably bound to an epistemic content. The pleasures of taste, touch and smell —at least those that we share with the animals — have a large sensory component. The pleasures of the eye and the ear, however, are intentional pleasures — pleasures of contemplation." (Scruton, 1983). The pleasure of touch is regarded here as part of our animalistic nature, whereas the pleasure of the eye and ear are regarded as 'intentional', pleasures 'of contemplation'. Additionally, if a work of art 'arouses the viewer, then this is an aesthetic defect, a 'fall' into another kind of interest than that which has beauty as its target' (Scruton, 2006). The two kinds of pleasures can not interact or even, apparently, coexist.

This only works to separate art and pornography under certain assumptions: one, that the consumption/contemplation of pornography will always end in masturbation, and two, that masturbation is an animalistic state that leaves no room for more 'civilised' mental states. It also assumes that contemplation is a disembodied state, one in which the body must be still and lend all of its energy to the mind so that it can contemplate. But such a notion of contemplation seems rather ableist: many autistic people and people with ADHD find stimming (repetitive patterns of movement) to aid their mental and emotional processes (Perry, 2018). Certain spiritual practices (such as some derivatives of Thelema) propose masturbating whilst focusing on a goal as a way to ensure that goal will happen, while others, such as tantric masturbation, use it as a way to clear the mind or

further one's own spiritual journey. Others have demonstrated that heightened states brought about by BDSM practices can be used as a way to pursue spirituality and states of enlightenment (Greenberg, 2019). I don't think this separation of states holds up when cross-referenced with non-white, non-able-bodied experiences.

Clark famously said that art can not be an incentive to action: 'To my mind art exists in the realm of contemplation . . . the moment art becomes an incentive to action it loses its true character. That is my objection to painting with a communist programme, and it would also apply to pornography' (Clarke, 1972). This places an inherently negative moral value in aiming for the sexual arousal of an audience and also assigns different values to physically passive and active states (not to speak of the inherent moral value of complying with the political values of the ruling class). There are conversations happening around the possible racial bias on how the colonialist west understands that contemplation must be undertaken: in a way that educates the mind but doesn't bring about states of arousal, nor serves as a way to call for the dismantling of the current system. The mind must be impacted, but the result of that impact can not be a 'call to action' that disrupts the status quo. In a 2021 interview, Anthea Butler said: 'The word 'contemplative' at this moment is a word that says 'privilege.' It means that you have time, and most people don't have time.' The luxury of time is not often afforded to those who are part of an oppressed population — which would rule them out of being able to contemplate, to engage in this particular form of thought exercise. This kind of contemplation as a non-physically engaged moment in time automatically excludes most of the world's population and makes it almost as approachable as fox hunts or luxury shopping. If only those with the privilege and the ability to stand still can engage in

contemplation, and this contemplation should not bring about states of arousal (as Clark mentions in his analysis of the nude and the naked) or 'agitation', this contemplation will serve as a tool to perpetuate the current systems of oppression.

Non-normative accounts

Following Maes (2012), I will now consider definitions and accounts of pornography that are more descriptive in nature — the ones presented by Michael Rea, Christy Mag Uidhir, Bernard Williams, Linda Williams and Matthew Kieran.

Rea's definition of pornography contains two parts:

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

Part 2: *x is pornography* = DF it is reasonable to believe that x will be used (or treated) as pornography by most of the audience for which it was produced.

Unfortunately, there are a few problems present when applying it to newer forms of pornography: in particular, the aforementioned 'custom' pornography. Most online sex workers right now offer 'customs', where a customer can buy a personalised video. The customer that buys this type of video is seeking or has already established some intimacy with the sex worker: they have more than likely already consumed their public content, follow them on their social media and may even be subscribed to their fan service. They have a parasocial intimate relationship with this creator, which is enhanced when they purchase a product made 'just for them'.

On top of that, the idea that 'if S's desire to be sexually aroused or gratified by the communicative content of x were no longer among S's reason for attending to that content, S would have at most a weak desire to attend to x's content' is again rooted in a heterosexual, able-bodied, westernised, orgasm-centric idea of desire, pleasure and the sexual/sensual experience. It assumes that the only reason for using the material is the search for an orgasm (being sexually gratified is not the same as being sexually aroused, nor does one necessarily have to be a consequence of the other). It leaves out the very common use of pornography as an exploratory material. Queer people often use pornography not only to find out whether they are aroused by the material or not, but also to investigate techniques and find new ideas – especially in less urban areas where it might be harder to find a physically connected community that may offer this kind of opportunity in person or when their access to 'queer elders' is more limited. It leaves out disabled people who may not be able to achieve orgasm but who still watch pornography, and it leaves out the idea of sexual contemplation (watching pornography just for the sake of aesthetically enjoying the material, whether in pursuit of sexual arousal or not).

Mag Uidhir' set of necessary conditions for pornography appears to be descriptive at first. It doesn't include any evaluative terms (or obvious moral judgments). It focuses on the purpose of art and the purpose of pornography, and proposes the following:

(1) If something is pornography, then that something has the purpose of sexual arousal (of some audience).

(2) If something is pornography, then that something has the purpose of sexual arousal and that purpose is manner inspecific.

(3) If something is art, then if that something has a purpose, then that purpose is manner specific.

(4) If something is art, then if that something has the purpose of sexual arousal, then that purpose is manner specific.

(5) A purpose cannot be both manner specific and manner inspecific[8].

(6) Therefore, if something is pornography, then it is not art.

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[8]'The somewhat idiosyncratic notion of a manner specific purpose is defined as a purpose that is essentially constituted both by an action (or state of affairs) and a manner, such that the purpose is to perform that action (or bring about that state of affairs) in that particular manner (2009: 194). For a purpose to be manner inspecific, by contrast, is simply for it not to be manner specific. In other words, if a purpose is manner inspecific, then failure to bring about the state of affairs in the prescribed manner does not constitute failure to satisfy the purpose.' (Maes & Levinson, 2012, p. 34)

For the sake of defining pornography itself, let's leave to one side the consideration of whether art could be pornography or vice versa for now. As a creator of both art and sexual content (using Uidhir's language), the purpose behind (some of) my art is rather manner inspecific, whereas the purpose of (some of) my pornography is manner specific. When I am painting a portrait, I am not particularly concerned with bringing about a specific state (or communicating something specific) to my audience. I do not expect my audience to react in a particular way to the image I paint or the colours I choose. It is a much more narcissistic and 'selfish' process than making an illustration, drawing a comic or filming a pornographic clip.

For either of those three processes, I am extremely concerned with bringing about a particular state of affairs in a certain way, and I will use every trick in my book to ensure it happens. In the case of a pornographic comic, for example, I will use my knowledge of image theory, framing and rhythm to ensure that the pace of the story adequately matches the state that I wish my audience to be in. Since I mostly work around fetishes and BDSM scenarios, I will use the particular code of the fetish (or fetishes) that I and my audience are interested in to arouse their interest and ensure that my message goes through in the way that I intend it to. This is crucial for the success of any piece of communicative art, and pornography, comics or illustration are no exception.

In my experience, pornography presents carefully curated scenarios that intend to arouse the audience in very specific manners. I think this is particularly obvious when we're looking at Fetish, Bizarre and Queer pornography. But it's also present in mainstream pornography: if we are looking at a scene portraying an act of cis-het fellatio,

the team behind the film intended for our arousal (a state of affairs) to be incited by the identification with the cis male pornstar and his own arousal at watching the femme performer enjoying the scene (which makes it manner specific). Moreover, it is in the best interest of the pornographer(s) for their pieces to be manner specific: it ensures that in a highly competitive market, they will cater to a niche and will gain returning customers.

On the other hand, artists often propose an experience to the public, instead of prescribing a specific response (or state of affairs) to their pieces. — However, the argument can be made that proposing an experience to the public could inherently be manner specific (we're seeking to bring about a state of affairs (a reaction, any reaction) by carefully curating a series of elements (whether they're colours, shapes, movements...) in a particular manner. I am not claiming that every artist's purpose for every one of their pieces is manner inspecific. However, there is a tendency within postmodern, early 20th century and some contemporary art to make the purpose of the pieces to be either shocking (at any cost) or simply, a conversation with the artist. Louise Bourgeois "Maman' (1999, edition cast in 2001), for instance, is a sculpture full of historical, contextual and personal meaning, but it doesn't have a very prescriptive response (particularly in her current setting, installed outside of Bilbao's Guggenheim museum, where children interact with it quite often). I would argue that it is rather manner inspecific — it explores the idea of western maternity from an extremely dual perspective, but it doesn't lead the audience to these conclusions in the way that another of her works, 'Cell (The Last Climb)' (2008) does. This work quite literally leads the audience inside of itself inviting a reflection on death in a way that I can only describe as manner specific.

The same artist, at two different points of her career, appears to have chosen two different mechanisms (or to have had two different intentions) behind two different pieces.

In any case, Mag Uidhir's set of necessary conditions for pornography doesn't seem to fit a good number of pornographic films available to the public right now. Moreover, there seems to be an underlying moral stance behind the idea of pornography being manner inspecific: it is implied that pornographers want their audience to be aroused no-matter-what. Mag Uidhir seems to assume that pornographers only care about making money and that their customers/audience don't care about anything but ejaculating or reaching an orgasm which is a rather pejorative and one-sided view on pornography. It's this idea of pornography being a tool for ejaculation or cis-male orgasm that lies under this apparently descriptive definition and stirs it away from some of the realities of both the pornography industry as well as pornographic artworks.

Bernard Williams proposed the following definition when he was chairing the Committee on Obscenity and Film Censorship in the 70s, and it is probably close to what some of the public may think that pornography is: "a pornographic representation is one that combines two features: it has a certain function or intention, to arouse its audience sexually, and also has a certain content, explicit representations of sexual material (organs, postures, activity, etc.)" (1982:8). Both Rea (2001 and Mag Uidhir (2009) have argued that the second part of this definition fails to acknowledge plenty of fetish and BDSM pornography that might not necessarily include explicit representations. Maes (2013) argues that this second condition is added to distinguish erotic representations from pornographic ones. On the other hand, Levinson (2005) argues that the degree of

explicitness present in the second half of the definition is not a good enough measure to set the two apart since many erotic photographs are often more explicit than pornographic ones.

Linda Williams, the film scholar, offers a definition of pornography similar to the one proposed by Bernard Williams above: 'the visual (and sometimes aural) representation of living, moving bodies engaged in explicit, usually unfaked, sexual acts with a primary intent of arousing viewers' (1989: 30). The inclusion of the aural aspect is particularly interesting because it reflects the still booming industry of phone sex and pornographic audio clips, which are still a big source of revenue for many sex workers. It is also a particularly interesting aspect of the definition to revisit in the age of sexting and WhatsApp audio notes: would an explicit audio note sent by one partner to another as a form of foreplay count as pornography? One could argue that it is not clear whether it would or not under her particular definition: it is not the representation of bodies, in plural, but the narration of a particular sexual fantasy.

Matthew Kieran proposes that pornography 'seeks, via the explicit representation of sexual behaviour and attributes, to elicit sexual arousal or desire' (Kieran, 2001, p. 32). Again, this is similar to Bernard William's definition, but offers an addendum to the explicitness clause: it also needs to be an explicit representation of sexual behaviour. I argue that the addition of the explicitness clause is inaccurate because not all representations of explicit sexual behaviour are sexually explicit (i.e. include sexual acts being performed on view of the camera). A good example of this is the scene in Emmanuelle (1974) in which Christine Boisson is shown explicitly masturbating whilst still wearing shorts. There is no explicit 'beaver shot', we can't even see the contour of her

labia (as it's very common in 'gym' pornography or when looking at instances of 'cameltoe'[9]) — and although we can see her breasts, the camera focuses on her facial expressions and the insinuation of what her hand is doing under her clothing.

There also is Maes' own definition: 'one could say that a pornographic representation is (1) made with the intention to arouse its audience sexually, (2) by prescribing attention to its sexually explicit representational content' (2013:32). The requirement of the content to be sexually explicit would seem to (again) rule out certain categories of pornography and I'm not sure it could be applied to, for example, The Only Theodora's 'Slave to my Loubs' (2017), where there is no sexually explicit content per se (unless we agree that stroking her legs and/or wearing very short skirts count as sexually explicit content, in which case I would have to argue that many perfume advertisements certainly skirt on pornography). I think what this fails to capture is how non-sexually explicit elements can definitely be brought together to create content that is intentionally sexually arousing.

Conclusion

Even though I am not completely satisfied with any of the definitions presented to date, I must determine a framework to work with for my research on the matter. For the purposes of this research, I don't need to have a watertight definition, and additionally, for socio-political reasons I want to operate with a very broad conception of pornography. This will allow me to look at the work of both sex workers and other

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[9] Cameltoe refers to the contours of the outer labia that can be seen through tight clothing such as leggings

marginalised populations as well as artists. If we agree with Maes (2012, pp. 38-39) that classifying pornography as lowbrow and non-artistic by nature would drive artists away from it and rob us of potential masterpieces that explore the human psyche, it makes sense to me to maintain an open mind when it comes to what pornography is or is not.

Additionally, but still central to this discussion, I would be remiss not to mention the inherent classist, racist bias that we are carrying over when all that we worry about is whether something is pornography or erotica. Eaton makes the connection between this separation and the separation between arts and crafts crystal clear :

> When one looks closely at the features that purportedly distinguish art from other artifacts and practices, and when one considers which traditions and kinds of artifact and practice fall on the "not art" side of the distinction, one always, to my knowledge, finds traditional class, racial, or (conjunctive) gender hierarchies being reinforced. This is as true of attempts to distinguish "erotic art" from "pornography" as it is of attempts to distinguish "art" from "craft." (Eaton, 2023, p. 493)

I still maintain that the distinction between pornography and erotica is mainly an issue of class (and how this affects marketability, accessibility, desirability of the piece). However, in the spirit of this quote, I would like to encourage the kind of thinking that takes into account how the way that we make list of features that 'purportedly distinguish' art from craft (pornography from erotica, or art from pornography) may reflect the internal biases of ourselves and the field. Moreover, as I will argue throughout this thesis (see Chapter 4, section 4) and in the final chapter (see Chapter 5, sections 3 and 4), we must understand the material conditions brought about by the imposition of those

categories of features - which are never devoid of consequences for both sex workers, artists, and others at the margins.

Then, what is art?

Modern definitions of art attempt to bring together the historically contingent cultural features that are relevant to art as well as the pan-cultural and trans-historical characteristics that would point to a more stable 'aesthetic core' that art would have (Adajian, 2018). My aim is to briefly go over some of these theories in order to arrive at a working definition that I can use as a baseline for my research on the relationship between pornography and art.

Institutional definitions

Both institutional and historical definitions are considered conventionalist: they deny that art has any essential connection to aesthetic, formal or expressive properties. In the case of institutional definitions, the idea of an 'artworld' is fundamental. This concept was coined by Arthur Danto and is understood as an atmosphere of art theory (Danto, 1964, p. 581). However, Danto himself did not propose or support an institutional definition of art. The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy summarises Danto's account in the following way: 'Danto's definition has been glossed as follows: something is a work of art if and only if (i) it has a subject (ii) about which it projects some attitude or point of view (has a style) (iii) by means of rhetorical ellipsis (usually metaphorical) which

ellipsis engages audience participation in filling in what is missing, and (iv) where the work in question and the interpretations thereof require an art historical context (Danto, Carroll)' (Adajian, 2018).

George Dickie's institutional theory of art is probably the most prominent, and it consists of five interlocking definitions: '(1) An artist is a person who participates with understanding in the making of a work of art. (2) A work of art is an artefact of a kind created to be presented to an artworld public. (3) A public is a set of persons, the members of which are prepared in some degree to understand an object which is presented to them. (4) The artworld is the totality of all artworld systems. (5) An artworld system is a framework for the presentation of a work of art by an artist to an artworld public.' (Dickie, 1984, p. 80- 2).

There are several objections that have been made against Dickie's institutionalism. First and foremost, there is its apparent circularity — acknowledged by the author himself: 'Admittedly, in a sense the definition is circular, but not viciously so' (Dickie, 1974, p. 43). Furthermore, the existence of such an institution as the artworld can be called into question, and this theory certainly leaves out works that have never been exhibited (or seen/read/heard) in the artworld. It also presents a dilemma, as either representatives of the artworld have good reasons to confer art status onto an object, which would mean those reasons can be seen as independent grounds for granting said object status; or they don't have good reasons at all, in which case their decisions will seem arbitrary and we have no reason to accept them (or the status of art conferred to the object). The representatives of the artworld cannot at the same time have good, valid

reasons (that could be applied to other objects without their intervention) and be the only ones with power to apply them. Additionally, by assuming that art can only be created inside an institution, this theory not only leaves out certain forms of art (certain forms of music that were originally created outside of the traditional musical institutions, such as blues, rock, R&B, etc.), but it also confers almost unlimited authority to this institution — which tends to be massively populated by white, upper-class citizens of colonial powers. Dickie has claimed that 'anyone who sees herself as a member of the artworld is a member of the artworld' (Adajian, 2018), but I still find that somewhat lacking: if there is not enough representation of marginalised people in the 'artworld' and if marginalised people are not afforded enough resources (material, psychological and spiritual), it will become extremely hard (and thus, unnecessarily exceptional) for them to become artists. This would not only lead to the world missing potential contributions but also negates that they can be a member of the artworld, since they can not see themselves as such.

Historical definitions

Historical definitions maintain that what is characteristic of an artwork is its relationship to previous artworks: certain entities belong to the class of 'artworks' unconditionally, and the rest belong there because they are in a certain way related to the previous ones (Adajian, 2018). Levinson proposes an intentional-historical definition: 'an artwork is a thing that has been seriously intended for regard in any way preexisting or prior artworks are or were correctly regarded' (Levinson, 1990, pp. 38–39). This must mean that there's either one true historical narrative that paints the artwork as part of a

recognised art institution, or at least that there are some internal relations between itself and already established artworks.

One of the main criticisms against historical definitions is that they fail to characterise these same art traditions or to distinguish them from non-artistic traditions. Additionally, they've been criticised for simply not working when it comes to non-western art. I would wager that we would also be hard-pressed to apply these theories to AI-generated art and other forms of modern art co-created with technology.

Defenders of these theories claim that anything that someone (or a significant number of people) consider to be an art tradition or an artistic practice would display aesthetic concerns and thus qualify as an art tradition — which would mean that aesthetic concern is a historical and sociopolitical truth. Whilst I think there is inherently a lot of value in being aware of how our historical traditions affect the lens through which we see the world, the West has a tradition of only recognising art traditions once they've been appropriated from marginalised groups (again, rock and roll comes to mind, but so does burlesque or erotic filmmaking). We need to reckon with the fact that under capitalism and white supremacy, it is unlikely that a 'significant amount of people' who are not white and/or in power will be recognised as a source of authority when it comes to defining an art tradition.

Cluster accounts

Cluster accounts have been defended by several philosophers, such as Denis Dutton and Berys Gaut. They typically provide a list of properties of which the work of

art should at least have one, but more than likely, will have several. This allows for these definitions to be extremely flexible and adaptable. Here is Gaut's proposed list of properties (which, he admits, is subject to change): '(1) possessing positive aesthetic properties; (2) being expressive of emotion; (3) being intellectually challenging; (4) being formally complex and coherent; (5) having the capacity to convey complex meanings; (6) exhibiting an individual point of view; (7) being original; (8) being an artifact or performance which is the product of a high degree of skill; (9) belonging to an established artistic form; (10) being the product of an intention to make a work of art.' (Gaut, 2000, p. 28).

Gaut proposes that his cluster account is not a definition, but it has been criticised for being exactly that given its logical structure (and how this might be equivalent to a finite disjunction) (Davies, 2006). Additionally, if the list of properties is incomplete (as both Gaut and other theorists hold), then a justification or principle would be needed for extending it. His account has also been criticised on the basis of its 9th property (Adajian, 2022) which could be understood as regenerating (rather than answering) the definitional question. This property also seems to tie it back to institutional definitions, if we take the idea of an 'established art form' to mean one sanctioned by the 'artworld' or some of its institutions/representatives.

On the other hand, the extreme flexibility of this cluster account makes it work really well with both early XXth century dadaist artworks and more modern forms of art such as video essays, memes and even products of the fan culture such as fanzines or fanart.

Gaut seems to share Wittgenstein's view that art cannot be defined (Guter, 2005). However, he proposes that art can be characterised. But not in terms of family resemblances, as other aestheticians influenced by Wittgenstein had suggested in the 1950s: 'if we characterize works of art as those which resemble certain paradigms, [...] the account is incomplete (it needs to state which objects are paradigm works), and, second, the notion of resemblance is sufficiently vacuous [...] that the characterization would count anything as art' (Gaut, 2000, p. 25). He specifically argues that his characterization is not a resemblance-to-paradigm construal but a cluster concept construal. (Gaut, 2000, p. 28).

When it comes to understanding the characteristics/properties of his cluster account, Gaut defines the 'notion of their counting toward the application of a concept' must be understood as a minimum common denomination: '... the cluster account also claims that if fewer than all the criteria are instantiated, this is sufficient for the application of the concept' (Gaut, 2000, p. 28). This is a particularly interesting aspect of the cluster theory because it could be used to initiate a discussion around the high-brow/low-brow or fine art/crafts separation: if the minimum common denomination is enough for an object to be deemed art, how does this affect our understanding of the 'position' of that object within the 'artworld'? Do 'more' characteristics equal better quality or higher value? Whilst Gaut does say that 'any account of a concept should ideally fit into a larger heuristic package about the domain concerned' (Gaut, 2000, p. 31), I do find it a potentially interesting application of his theory.

Gaut has pointed out that his theory is applicable to a world where there is no art as we know it. But in a certain sense, such a world with art that is not 'art as we know it' is not a fiction: we are living in it. From the rise and fall of NFTs, to selfies and homemade pornography, Instagram and Snapchat filters, fanart and even TikTok videos, we are surrounded by art that is not art as we know it, art that is evolving at the same (or even faster) rate than our technology is. His cluster account proposes that 'artworks are the products of actions, which products possess some indeterminately large number of the listed properties' whilst it 'holds that art as an activity is the producing of such artworks' (Gaut, 2000, p. 28). Can an action (or a group of them), in and on itself, constitute an artwork? Do we count the performative social media channels of a sex-workers (or comedians, or actors, or artists) as performance art or are they a product? Additionally, framing art as a product of something assumes that art-making is not a journey without a destination (which leaves sketches considered unfinished by the author in an interesting limbo), that the process of art-making must always result in the creation of an artwork (as opposed to thinking that the process of art-making is art, in and on itself), and since we live in a capitalistic system, this final product will have a certain value attached to it.

Conclusion

We've already briefly touched upon how both institutional and historical definitions have been widely criticised (Adajian, 2018) for their inability to account for how capitalism, patriarchy and colonialism have shaped both the institutions and the history of art.

All things considered, Gaut's cluster account does not face some of the objections that the historical and institutional accounts face and affords a very welcome flexibility with new and emerging art forms and genres. I think it's somewhat more applicable to emerging forms of art and pornography as well as sex work (both as artwork and as art). It is not as blatantly affected by constrictive systems and it can be used to recognise non-western forms of art and technologically co-created art.

Finally, one comes to the question of whether pornography can be art - or whether there is indeed any meaningful reason why pornography could not be art. Using the flexibility that Gaut allows us with this account, I really fail to see any reason why pornography can not be art. This is not to say that all pornography will be art: I think a helpful metaphor may be to think about pornography the way one thinks about film. Not every blockbuster will be considered a piece of art, but in order for film to evolve as an artistic medium it must be afforded the protections of said artistic medium. In order for pornography to evolve as an artistic medium, it must be afforded those protections too.

1.4 Queer Perspectives and Decolonisation

Algorithmic Censorship and Social Media

The application of censorship via algorithmic means will be one of the main techniques of censorship that I will be looking at throughout my thesis. In order to understand how censorship affects queer and sex working populations, I can rely not just on my own and my colleagues' experiences advertising sex work online, selling adult content online and also posting queer art and pornographic art on different websites and social media platforms. I will be referring to four main texts to help navigate this topic. The first one is particularly interesting because it lays out very clearly how anti-queer bias has been built into the nature of the Internet itself. I'm referring to Alexander Monea's 'The Internet Closet' (2023), which tracks the queerphobic history of Silicon Valley and analyses the way in which Google and other tech giants have been dealing with pornography since the beginning of the net. In order to understand how sex workers have been affected by the passing of laws like FOSTA and SESTA, I will be looking at the hacking//hustling report 'Erased' (Blunt et. al, 2020), which records and analyses a wide spectrum of sex worker responses in the 4 years since the passing of those two laws. Additionally, with the intention of zeroing-in into how algorithmic censorship affects creators, and particularly, femme creators who work with their bodies, I will be looking at both Carolina Are's 'The Emotional and Financial Impact of De-Platforming on Creators at the Margins. Social Media' (2023) as well as Milena Rueschendorf's MA thesis, 'Social Media and Power Structures – Questions of Feminism and the Limits Between Freedom of Expression and Censorship Practices' (2021). Both of these texts explore the relationship between creators (artists) and algorithmic censorship and the tensions that

arise from having to compromise their work in order to not lose their platform — which is crucial for my efforts to understand whether censorship can be a 'productive power' in this scenario.

A queer perspective

There are a number of texts that I relied on to provide me with a framework that would help think through some of the questions I posed for this thesis from a queer perspective. On top of that, since I will be looking at historical cases of the use of censorship and its co-occurrence with moral panics, it made sense to look at contemporary sources, particularly when it comes to the infamous Section 28 laws and the AIDS crisis. I achieved this particularly through Simon Watney's 'Policing Desire: pornography, AIDS and the media' (1997). Watney lived through this period and is able to accurately articulate both a post-facto analysis of the media discourse and how it affected public sentiment, and also provide a vivid picture of what the reality of the AIDS crisis felt like for a gay man (and his community). Another text that was very useful in helping me understand how the legal system has used censorship was 'Sex and Punishment: four thousand years of judging desire' by Eric Berkowitz (2013), which gives an overview of the laws and regulations that have been utilised by different western empires and countries. His in-depth analysis of the Victorian victim rescue industry (although not named as such by him) is fundamental to understand how FOSTA/SESTA came to be.

I used Ingrid Ryberg's 'Carnal Fantasizing' (2015) as a starting point from which to start thinking about the queer experience of pornography. This article does an outstanding job at looking at the way that queer individuals experience collective pornography in festivals, but it also served to articulate the way I wanted to think about how queer pornographers make queer (or not so queer) pornography. Sarah Ahmed's 'Feminist Killjoy' (2023) was very useful when looking at the utilisation of moral panics to further the anti-queer agenda, but so was her 'Queer Phenomenology' (2006) when it came to thinking relationally about the way that queer folks occupy and interact with spaces in pornography as well as in art.

In order to better understand the ways in which BDSM can be both a framework as well as an artistic experience, I will look at Anne O Noomis' most recent work which categorises the different states of being that submissives experience throughout a scene, and also authors like Sam E. Greenberg who in his 2019 paper 'Divine Kink' explores the relationship between ritual, BDSM scene, and heightened states of being. Finally, I will turn to the 'Leather and Bizarre Archive' in the Bishopsgate Institute in order to find out more about both the media narrative as well as the cultural responses around different moral panics that have occurred in the XXth century, including the Spanner case and the 1980s production of 'Romans in Britain'.

Colonialism and the body

The connection between patriarchy, colonialism and how we look at sex work has been made obvious a number of times, but probably most famously in 'Revolting Prostitutes' by Molly Smith and Juno Mac (2018). The relationship between patriarchy, colonialism and how the internet was meant to work and how it was built is also made clear in Monea's 'The Internet Closet' (2023). However, Sabrina Strings' 'Fearing the black body: the racial origins of fatphobia' (2019), offers an important insight into how different states that were partaking in colonialism used philosophy as a way to justify their violent actions. Additionally, it lays out very clearly why dissident bodies[10] keep facing considerable censorship in most forms of art and media (including social media) today. It also provided me with invaluable insight into the connection between purity and thinness, which is a pivotal aspect of high-end sex-work marketing that I hadn't been able to articulate beforehand. 'The Belly of the Beast: The politics of anti-blackness as anti-fatness' by Da'shaun Harrison (2021), gives me a more contemporary look at the matter which also intersects with queerness. Harrison gives a unique radiography of how western beauty standards and our use of femininity perpetuate harmful racial narratives. Finally, Elite Capture (2022) by Olúfẹmi O. Táíwò provides me with an excellent framework to look at the way that identity politics have shaped many of these discussions.

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[10] Non-white, disabled, queer, sex-working and/or fat bodies

The reason why I bring these sources, and particularly String's research, into the discussion is that they do an excellent job at establishing a connection between fat/black bodies and obscenity which still carries to this day. I find this to be particularly pertinent to the discussion around art and pornography.

During this thesis, in tandem to the I Modi, I will be paying close attention to another category of works, the Anatomical Venuses. Pieces such as the Medici Venus (1780-82) constitute an example of the links between science and the objectification of women (albeit in this case, not black ones). Here we have a piece that is both scientific and explicit, that objectifies the female body and co-opts the language of scientific illustration/divulgation at a time when both science and sexism were particularly tied together. It could also be used to illustrate how Scruton establishes a link between voyeurism, shame and pornography in his paper 'On the abuse of sex' (Scruton, 2010). He proposes that 'people are tempted to retreat from the direct forms of sexual desire, and **take refuge in fantasy objects** – objects which cannot damage or threaten you, which cannot withhold consent since they cannot give it, which are without the capacity to embarrass or shame the one who watches them. Such objects are provided by pornography' (ibidem, 2020, p. 12, emphasis mine). These sexually explicit 'fantasy objects' can not 'shame the one who watches them' but still engage the viewer in a shameful activity — that of harming oneself through sexual self-gratification. The Medici Venus, who either represents a dead or asleep cis woman, is indeed a very passive object. She can certainly not give consent or damage the viewer, yet I am not sure this piece would qualify as pornography for Scruton.

1.5 Conclusion: moving forward with my research

This chapter has laid out the general state of play when it comes to some of the current attitudes, definitions and ways of thinking about pornography in the field of philosophy. It has also established the framework that I will be using in my research moving forward. As I mentioned, I will not be using a narrowing definition of pornography and instead I will keep a more open and flexible framework on what pornography is, which dovetails nicely with using Gaut's cluster definition of art.

I have also brought forward other texts that I will be using to further my research, including the auto-ethnography works mentioned above, and the works that will help me think through not just a philosophical, but a queer and hopefully, less colonial lens. This is of the utmost importance because I will be using art-making as part of my research process, and these frameworks will make a definite difference in my artistic production. Through the next chapter, I will explore both the queer and the fat and how they pertain to pornography (and vice-versa), which will further inform my practice-based artistic research.

Chapter 2 — Dissident Identities and Colonialism

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I inspect the relationship between pornography and dissident identities, particularly, queer, kink and fat identities. In the first instance I look at the commonalities between queer and kink identities and how their relationship has shaped one another. I do this by analysing how geographical contexts shape queer identity (rural vs. urban queerness), as well as the history of queer and BDSM spaces. Additionally, I engage with qualitative interviews with queer and kink-identified folks and their analysis as anecdotal evidence of how kink experiences can help deepen queer folks' understanding and enjoyment of their own identities.

After having examined how queer and kinky identities may shape one another, I turn my attention to how engaging with art as well as creating it may play a fundamental role in shaping identities. Utilising some of Dewey's readings of Hume found in Art as Experience (Dewey, 1934) I try to ascertain how communal and individual identities may be affected by engaging and interacting with the art of both our own and other communities through fanzines, online fanart communities and the exchange of amateur pornographic photography. I also place an important emphasis in discussing how cultural appropriation and intersectional identities can affect the dissemination and original meaning of the artwork that is being engaged with.

Thirdly, I analyse three case-studies in order to ascertain how pornography may reflect and perhaps shape queer identities: comparing CyberDyke with Girl Next Door, looking at queer spectatorship of pornographic films in communal settings, and finally

turning to amateur photographic pornographic productions in Eastern Germany during the second half of the XXth century.

During these sections, the overlap between queer and kinky identities will be clear. Additionally, I will explore the connection between queer and BDSM sex. Then, through the Foucauldian lens of productive power, I explore whether it is possible that violence as used in BDSM scenes may have the power to produce both aesthetic as well as artistic experiences for those involved in the queer and kinky communities.

Afterwards, in the following two sections I look at the way in which medicalization has been used to fetishise otherness through the device of scientific illustration. Particularly, in section five I analyse the relationship between wax figures, anatomical models and the possibilities offered by the uncanny to deliver a pornographic experience. In section six, I explore how colonialism is deeply intertwined with the development of the medical gaze while looking at one of the works inspired by the I Modi and The Loves of the Gods, two series of pornographic renaissance engravings.

In the final section I look at fatphobia, fatism and how they're intertwined with online censorship practices. Additionally, I will explore the fat/morbid/dead continuum through the work of Da'Shaun L. Harrison, A.W. Eaton and Sherri Irvin in an attempt to further cement the link between the marginalisation of fat, queer and black identities under white supremacy — and how this is showcased not just by the kind of art that is deemed palatable, but by the hypersexualization of dissident bodies and the push to firmly place the images they produce into the category of pornography.

2.2 Dissident Identities and Pornography

How are dissident identities shaped? Queerness vs kink

The aim of this section is to establish how queer identities are shaped by their environment, including access to particular spaces and narratives. First, I will explore the differences between the urban and rural contexts when it comes to the formation of queer identities. Then, I will look at the connection between queer and kinky identities and how they have developed (and continue to develop) together. Finally, I will turn my attention to the possibilities that kink and BDSM spaces offer for the development of queerness.

There is no question that queer identities have been heavily associated with cosmopolitan and urban elements, particularly since the mid 20th century. This is particularly obvious when we look at identity politics and the way that queer and gay activism have shaped the fight for LGBTQIA+ rights since the Stonewall riot. Even though urban queer culture has often travelled the line between overt and secret mannerisms or dress-codes, these identities have often been shaped by identity politics (and have often informed them as well). This means that urban and cosmopolitan queer identities are characterised by being 'out out' and often find their site of identification in communal spaces such as ballroom culture, drag shows, protests, demos, gay bars, etc.

A mythos often present in the queer community is that of the rural queer kid who moves to the big city, where they're finally able to find community and acceptance, where they can finally 'be themselves' by visiting these sites of identification and community and behaving in accordance. This presents an interesting dilemma: happy out queer who must leave all they know behind to live in an urban environment vs. unhappy

closeted queer who remains in the rural environment in which they were born. It assumes that the desirable queer life and expression of queer identity is that which occurs in the urban space. In particular, through mass media (with shows like Queer Eye, Will and Grace, The L World, etc.) and the internet (through algorithmic discovery platforms that push similar content and the commodification of queer aesthetics (Ramadhanu, 2024)), the anglophonic cosmopolitan queer identity that stems from New York, LA and London has become the baseline for queer identity (Baker, 2011, p. 1). Of course, without even stepping into what non-western-centric cultures may understand as queer, that leaves a lot of queer identities out of the equation. I think it would be ill-informed to pretend that the urban/rural axis is not a somewhat preconceived and preconstructed social dynamic, because there are many differences between LA, an urban, cosmopolitan, anglophonic context; and, for example, Manzanares de Rioja, a smaller, rural, Spanish context. But the truth is that the rural queer identity presents some interesting challenges to the understanding of queer identity presented by the cosmopolitan hegemony — from within that same western cultural understanding. According to Kelly Baker 'While urban queer visibility politics centre on the different-but-equal paradigm, I argue that rural queer visibility politics involve a delicate balance of queerness and localness, putting forth an approach of different-but-similar' and 'may therefore complicate dominant conceptions of the closet model.' (Baker, 2011, p. 1). Now, visibility politics are not quite the same as identity politics, but they are definitely intertwined. According to the Oxford Handbook of U.S. Women's Social Movement Activism, "Identity politics' refers to organising around the specific experience or perspective — or the collective identity, in sociological terms — of a given group, as well as to organizing that has identity visibility as a goal.' (Mccammon, 2017, p. 377) Additionally, since the interest of this thesis is to look at how

the visibility of dissident sexual identities in pornography affects and offers opportunities to those with dissident sexual identities, looking at the intersection between the two may prove to be particularly productive.

Baker's research shows that queer members of US rural communities seek to find a place in their communities through how their closeness to the existing community is perceived: some through hard work (a desirable quality in a rural context), others through family ties (being part of the same community since birth or for a long time). There doesn't seem to be a particular interest in being perceived as openly queer, or at least, the same interest that drives urban queer communities together and that can be distilled into slogans like 'We are here, we are queer', often chanted at protests and demonstrations. Therefore, community assimilation is much more primordial than individual assertion. I am not here to cast judgement on which one is the better option, because I believe that both strategies serve different goals. Moreover, to pretend that there is a univocal agenda at the helm of such a diverse and fluid community is, I believe, a moot point. Therefore, discussions on whether assimilation or individuation are the better strategies are doomed to fail, given the impossibility to agree on a common goal in the first place.

While not every queer person is into kink[11], there does seem to be a connection between queer individuals and people who are into kink. According to Robert A. Sprott, 'Even though the number of studies measuring the prevalence of kink/BDSM is relatively small, these studies have noted a heightened correspondence between LGBTQ identities,

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[11]Kink is commonly defined as a type of sex that deviates from the norm, which usually includes interests in power play, bondage, sadomasochism, role play, etc. It is distinct from BDSM but both share some commonalities.

non-heterosexual orientations, and kink/BDSM sexualities.' (Sprott and Benoit Hadcock, 2017) Additionally, the historical link between the leather[12], D/s[13] and queer communities can not be ignored. Leather culture is deeply ingrained in the history of the gay community, as is kink in general for the lesbian community. Additionally, kinky processes of feminisation have interesting ties to both transvestism and trans folk. According to Gayle Rubin, male leather culture has existed since the 1940s, likely as a continuation of post WWII motorbike culture.

The dissatisfaction of the North-American culture with mainstream values was somehow channeled into Marlon Brando's character and looks in 'The Wild One' (1953), a look that many butch gays started to imitate and that prevails even to this day: white t shirt, leather jacket, leather cap and leather boots. This leather community also started to become the place where men could openly explore kink and BDSM safely. The first gay leather club opened in San Francisco in 1958. The scene soon expanded into places like Germany, and many different forms of art started to reflect it: it is difficult to imagine gay culture without icons like Tom of Finland, whose pornographic illustrations distilled the air of hyper masculinity and hypertrophy that would become somewhat quintessentially associated with leather culture. Other aspects of leather culture that are particularly relevant to this genealogy and to the understanding of how community shapes dissident

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[12] Often associated with BDSM communities, Wikipedia defines it as denoting 'practices and styles of dress organised around sexual activities that involve leather garments, such as leather jackets, vests, boots, chaps, harnesses, or other items.'

[13] Domination/submission, referring to two of the letters present in the BDSM acronym (Bondage, Domination/submission, Sadism & Masochism).

identities are Leather Daddies — usually, older men who would top younger bottoms[14]. They would often act as mentors, introducing new members of the community to its rules, taboos and customs, and ensuring the safety of their mentees while allowing them to explore their sexuality. The BDSM scene quickly evolved hand in hand with the gay leather scene, and in 1970, Cynthia Slater, a lesbian activist, successfully campaigned for Catacomb, the legendary S/M club in San Francisco that was known as 'the temple of fisting', to allow women in (Call, 2012, p. 5). Slater was also head of the Society of Janus, which operated at the intersection of kink, queerness and fetish, to allow lesbian women a place to explore sexuality amongst gay men. Pat Califia and Gayle Rubin would go on to create Samois, the first lesbian BDSM club in the United States. BLADeaf (Baltimore Leather Association of the Deaf) was founded in 1986, and the Leather Pride Flag was unveiled in 1989. As we can see by its history, the leather community has long been a space for not just dissident sexualities, but for dissident identities to explore their sexuality.

It may be somewhat difficult to understand how BDSM and kink spaces — which are sometimes thought as spaces that further gender inequality or promote antiquated gender roles (submissive women, dominant men) — can be so integral to queer identities. I believe this stems from both a lack of understanding of the history of BDSM in the XXth century as well as a fundamental misunderstanding of the practices and the spaces

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[14] Bottom has two different meanings here — when it comes to queer sex, it means the one who is being penetrated (irrespective of the nature of the genitals of the people involved). When it comes to BDSM, it is distinct from a submissive (who is interested in serving the Dominant in a more or less permanent basis) although they may be perceived to fulfil similar roles by an external observer. A BDSM bottom is someone who is being played with and on the receiving end of the actions occurring in the scene.

that it creates. BDSM spaces and practices are organised around an understanding of gendered roles and experiences that allows those partaking in the BDSM experience to pick and choose what aspects of these roles they want to explore and engage with:

> '...SM creates a space in which participants achieve a gendered experience; the participants inhabit gender paradoxes of action and service, passivity and strength, powerfulness and powerlessness, but these paradoxes are linked neither to biological sex nor to gender identity' (Newmahr, 2011, p. 118). The challenge of the categorical boundaries of sexual orientation or gender, as commonly accepted, may create a unique experience for people who identify as bisexual or queer, adding new dimensions to what those identities might mean for them. (Sprott and Benoit Hadcock, 2017)

The boundaries between 'queer' and 'straight' people tend to become very blurry, very quickly in the middle of a scene. I do not mean to imply that playing the role of a bottom will turn a white, cis, straight man into a convinced ally of the queer community, or indeed inspire any meaningful political change in their outlook of life. But queer sex is not straight sex, and BDSM scenes[15] are not straight sex either: this is because of the aforementioned characteristics (Newmahr, 2011) of the gendered experience that BDSM affords the people who participate in it. Dissident sexual identities, even when they

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[15] A BDSM scene is a 'play session' during which one or more partners develop the previously agreed upon interaction. This may or may not include sexual interaction, physical and/or verbal violence, and other BDSM acts and/or components. The level to which the interaction has been agreed or discussed will also vary in a case by case basis.

intersect with the seats of power (such as whiteness or maleness), refuse to be categorised easily. With all that being said, it is not the concern of this thesis to examine the intersection of BDSM with cis, white, straight sexualities.

BDSM scenes, like fetish and kink scenes, allow those participating in them to exist outside of our 'assigned' ontological categories[16], and outside of those categorical boundaries. The controversial and taboo[17] nature of the acts themselves seems to act as some kind of dissolvent of these categorical boundaries — after all, once you've been stripped naked and made to walk on all fours like a dog, and perhaps discovered the productive power of shame, what is to stop you from trying out new (or shameful) genders, new (or shameless) behaviours? Because we are already acting outside the boundaries of polite society, because the baseline for the people in these groups is already a sexuality (perhaps even an identity) that is dissident, ontological categories seem to hold a different weight and impact play experiences in a different way. This is not to say that the patriarchy or white supremacy have no bearing in the BDSM or kink scenes — they most definitely do, and it is true that a lot of the most popular players (both professional and amateur) are white, thin and abled-bodied, with enough monetary resources to have both the time and the toys to play with. But BDSM and kink scenes

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[16] Such as 'male', 'female', 'adult', etc.

[17] Although it may be tempting to think that there is nothing taboo or controversial for kinksters or BDSM players, it is precisely the weight of taboo and controversy that makes these activities interesting and worth exploring. The taboo of being penetrated as a male is often cited as the reason for pursuing pegging scenes, for example. For more on taboo subjects and how they may be explored through sexual fantasy, please see Friday, N. (2013). *My Secret Garden*. Rosetta Books as well as 'Women on Top' (2012) by the same author.

definitely hold a very cathartic power that can be identity-defining — and to many, life-changing. If we look at the following excerpt from an interview with a queer participant of the Sprott and Benoit Hadcock study, the 'kinky' label has allowed her to explore and broaden the ideas around her own identity.

> Labels such as queer, genderqueer, and queer dyke fem were used as identifiers by participants, when asked, 'How do you identify?' Participant #106, a 45-year-old cisgender White female, responded:

> I consider myself to be queer. I consider myself to be a leather person. Kinky is a big umbrella. US leather people fall into kinky. I used to use the label Leather Dyke. But I've grown and I've changed — so have my definitions of myself. I am still a dyke on many levels. But, queer is a much broader word. I sleep with people who don't identify as women. I am not a heterosexual. I'm a switch. Also, poly. (Sprott and Benoit Hadcock, 2017)

Sprott and Benoit Hadcock claim that qualitative analysis of their 25 interviews with kink and queer identified people highlighted that 'the term queer, for some people, includes kink or BDSM sexualities' (Sprott and Benoit Hadcock, 2017). This is something that we see reflected in the above testimony: being a switch is somehow connected to being poly, to being queer. There is a fluid way in which members of the community, particularly members who were already queer-identified, navigate the terms. They are stacked, existing at the same time and yet perhaps not in the same order of importance. Queering the BDSM terminology allows for enriching, broadening experiences — experiences that tend to betray how homophobic and transphobic discourses aim to shape dissident lives. Queerness resists immobile, improductive categorisation.

Another example of both this fluidity as well as an example of how BDSM practices can act as a gateway for profound reflections upon one's own identity is the testimony of participant #81, a crossdresser that eventually identified as part of the trans community:

As part of the transgender thing, I would be secretly wearing clothes that others wouldn't know about. And there was this kind of danger – a feeling of danger element where I could be in the face of the priests wearing full clothes underneath and they wouldn't know. But I was always in imminent danger of being caught. And that added a fear – frightening factor which then played into the BDSM, ultimately identifying as a submissive at the time. So that would be the first place in which feelings of excited fear, which I identify in BDSM.

Thus, for participant #81, while transsexual identity is more central, he also stresses throughout the interview that the intertwining of his sexual orientation, gender identity, and kink sexuality is important to his own self-understanding and identity development.' (Sprott and Benoit Hadcock, 2017)

Here arises one of the most interesting aspects of how kink and queerness interact: the productive power of fear. BDSM and kink offer a space in which not

completely safely[18], not unashamedly, but playfully to explore the elements that make us afraid and ashamed. And it is important that this exploration is 'not safe' and is 'ashamed', because it is through the experiencing of those feelings of shame and lack of safety, the experiencing of fear, that a deeper understanding of our own identity can be found. I theorise that this is not just because of the cathartic experience that fear can provide, but because of how rare it is to be allowed to experience fear itself. In our western society, fear is often understood as a negative emotion to be quickly conquered, not one to be relished. The fear of one's own identity being socially unacceptable is one that plagues queer people because it threatens our ability to exist. Very often, we are expected to sail through this fear, and particularly in urban environments (as mentioned in the beginning), to completely discard it when we find 'our community'. Kink spaces offer a (mock?) exploration of these fears, this lack of safety and plunging into deep shame that is simply

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[18] There are two widely-used safety protocols in BDSM: SSC (Safe, Sane and Consensual) and RACK (Risk-Aware Consensual Kink). The community moved away from SSC during the beginning of the XXth century in an effort to move forward with disabled rights (therefore dropping the Sane label). It was also an effort to acknowledge the fact that some BDSM and some sexual practices are inherently risky: sex without prophylactics, fluid exchange, choking, bloodplay, etc. Therefore, the use of 'risk-aware' as a way of proposing a more mindful space where people are aware of the risks they're engaging with. Conversations around risk-management can be more realistic and useful (similar to a harm-reduction approach) instead of becoming about the optics of the practices and whether they're seen as 'safe' or not. All in all, this means more safety since all parties involved are better aware of the risks, the possible outcomes, and how to mitigate them. However, it is important to acknowledge that there is not a completely safe scenario when it comes to neither sexual practices nor BDSM itself. This is particularly relevant for newcomers, although it does not negate the interest and importance of these practices.

unacceptable even in other queer spaces. I believe this is one of the reasons why kink and queerness are deeply intertwined.

It is common to feel queasy, at the very least, when fear and sex are mentioned together. But through BDSM and kink, danger and fear are not just the harbingers of oppression, but can be experienced as the agents of change and exploration. This kind of danger, the danger of wearing the wrong clothes in public/yet in private, and the arousal of 'pulling one over' society, are not uncommon to hear amongst kinksters. And that is a powerful space that breeds and broadens our understanding of queer identity.

How is identity shaped through engagement with art?

In his Art as Experience, Dewey proposed that 'Every culture[19] has its own collective individuality. Like the individuality of the person from whom a work of art issues, this collective individuality leaves its indelible imprint upon the art that is produced.' (Dewey, 1934, p. 330). I find that Dewey's proposal of art as an ecosystem is a particularly fruitful way to examine the relationship between dissident identities and dissident forms of art. Dewey does not go as far as to imply that identity and community are creating the artist — only that as a member of their community, the artist produces art that is imbued by their culture and community. Later in the text, Dewey also says that 'Nevertheless, when the art of another culture enters into attitudes that determine our

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[19] Although Dewey seems to be talking here about culture in the more anthropological and slightly othering sense (aboriginal culture, etc.) , throughout the text I will be using it to refer to the cultures particular to different social groups (such as queer folk, kinky and BDSM practitioners, migrant folk, etc.)

experience genuine continuity is effected. [...] A community and continuity that do not exist physically are created. ' (Dewey, 1934, p. 336). Both of these statements indicate that art affects communities, and that leads me to question whether communities affect art.

Artists are in a constant process of feedback with the communities they are part of. They are part of the political discourse, which they partake in, and which affects and changes them. A sex working artist is likely to be politically active because most sex workers are likely to be politically active; a sex worker is likely to be politically active because they are part of a very politically charged community. They are also the audience of media products made in their community, which have an effect on them — a sex working artist will often consume artwork from other sex working artists, for example, I own many Exotic Cancer[20] prints and products, and I often visit exhibitions that centre around sex working artists. Following Dewey, when they are exposed to the 'art of another culture' (or in this case, of another community), they access a new community and a sense of continuity that didn't previously exist for them. They may not be 'part' of this community, but they are certainly affected by these other works of art. If these works of art affect them, then, their art is highly likely to be affected too, because they are now operating under new information, with a new sense of 'community and continuity'. It follows that this new sense of 'community and continuity' has the potential to change the identity of the artist, at least somewhat. Therefore, I do believe that community and identity play a role in creating 'the artist', because community and identity affect the people who experience them.

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[20] Well-known Australian artist who is also an exotic dancer.

If the experience of art has the potential to affect the artist, then it must follow that art itself has a role in the creation of artists. This process of feedback in which the artist, their art, and their communities are in constant dialogue seems to fit particularly well with ideas of queering the process of art. Of course, with services such as social media and the internet now available, the propagation of community-specific art and language outside of said community (including the re-packaging of said art into easily consumable content) lends itself particularly well to this feedback loop: the culture of replication and remixing that the internet bred has lead to many collaborative forms of art and forms of art that are particularly reflective of that 'community creates art that creates community' loop mentioned before.

One of the most obvious ways in which engagement with art may shape our identity is how art functions as a surrogate community of sorts: when we find a part of ourselves reflected in a work of art (particularly a part of ourselves that we may not feel fits within our current environment) we feel 'seen'. Perhaps, depending on the context in which that part of ourselves is shown in the work of art, we feel more or less validated by it. The work of art becomes a surrogate community for the dissident identity which has been an orphan so far because it proves that whoever made this work, another human being, 'is just like us'. Suddenly, the dissident identity is no longer alone, no longer an orphan or a pariah. Now, the dissident identity knows that there are others like them out there, and they are making works of art. In a way, the work of art may act like a beacon of hope (or a Bat Signal, even) for other members of the dissident identity community. It's not just a validating experience in that the dissident identity sees a reflection of itself in this work of art (others like me exist) but that others like me feel that this part of

themselves is worth being made into art. The dissident identity is suddenly not worthless, but worthy of being part of the art-making process. The work of art becomes a community link, even a community space, for the dissident identity — and for the identification process.

One of the most interesting things about engaging with art and identitary processes is that we can benefit from someone else's imagination by engaging with their art. Futures, looks, outcomes and ideas that we couldn't even imagine become possible because an artist (or an artist team) conjured them into reality. Art lends dissident identities future possibilities. One excellent example of this which also highlights how identities shape art can be found in Afrofuturism, 'an intersection of imagination, technology, the future and liberation' (Womack, 2013, p. 9) which focuses on imagining the future from a black perspective.

However, this of course means that art as a medium is rife for cultural appropriation[21] — which is exceedingly common when we consider that a lot of art is consumed without context and through the internet, disseminated with no particular concern as to whom the original intended audience (and community) was. An example of this is how intertwined African American Vernacular English (AAVE[22]) is with 'queer

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[21] Defined by Oxford's Lexicon as the inappropriate or unacknowledged adoption of an element or elements of one culture or identity by members of another culture or identity.

[22] Walter Edwards defines African-American Vernacular English (AAVE) as 'the variety of English natively spoken, particularly in urban communities, by most working- and middle-class African Americans and some Black Canadians' in A Handbook of Varieties of English: A Multimedia Reference Tool(Kortmann, Schneider, Burridge, Mesthrie, & Upton, 2004)

slang'. It makes perfect sense considering that vogue and ballroom culture were mainly created by black people and POC. However, younger white queers may not be aware of the origin of these expressions while still using expressions like 'slay', 'spill the tea', etc. Another good example of this is the use of the term 'ho/hoe/heaux', also appropriated by white people from AAVE and sex working communities, which is now being used by many white people with no affiliation to sex work whatsoever. Being exposed to art through the aforementioned creation of a new 'community and continuity' can act as a surrogate community. Unfortunately, it can not make up for the way in which a more personal, 'real' community and actual context provides education, as well as checks and balances on what elements or said community and culture are fair use for which members. Dissident identities are inherently intersectional, which means that it is extremely difficult without having a good working knowledge of the history of those identities and communities to understand what elements of said culture can be used by whom.

While engaging with art itself may offer surrogate community and experience, it can also lead the way for an individual to finding actual connection to actual communities

as well as strengthen the links inside it. Fanzines[23] are a great example of this. Fanzines were left in community spaces (where members of the community could easily access them), as well communal spaces not particular to the community (like university halls and libraries, where newbies to the community could find them), and some could even be mail-ordered (for those members of the community who could not access the aforementioned spaces easily). These fanzines were used both as a site of communication with and for the community as well as a first point of contact with the art that said community had been producing. If an individual finds the art in the fanzine gives them a sense of surrogate community, they also have the chance to connect with the community through the channels laid out in the fanzine itself. This is also true of fan-art communities found online (Jenkins, 2019).

Another example of art as a conduct towards community can be found in amateur pornographic photography. Collections of queer and kinky erotic and pornographic photography have long been shared amongst dissident communities as a way to both initiate a novice, strengthen community ties and enjoy them together. Making queer and kinky art is at the core of these communities — it's not just a collection

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[23] Some examples may be Homocore, Gutterfag, Pink Mince, Holytitclamps, Broomstick, and many more. The Queer Zine Library catalogue (https://www.librarycat.org/lib/QueerZineLibrary) can be consulted online. For more on this subject, see Fenster, M. (1993). Queer Punk Fanzines: Identity, Community, and The Articulation of Homosexuality and Hardcore. *Journal of Communication Inquiry, 17*(1), 73–94. https://doi.org/10.1177/019685999301700105, Watson, B. M., & Derie, B. (2020). Queer Beginnings: From Fanzines to Rule 34. *Scholarworks.iu.edu*. and Long, T. L. (2000). Plague of Pariahs: AIDS 'Zines and the Rhetoric of Transgression. *Journal of Communication Inquiry, 24*(4), 401–411. https://doi.org/10.1177/0196859900024004004

of exercises in individual self-expression, but more often than not an affirmation of collective value (We are here, we are queer, and we will take pictures of ourselves). It is thanks to all of those artists and the invaluable work of their communities preserving their work that now we have archives such as The Fetish & Bizarre Archive in London, a celebration of over a century of queer and kinky art including photographs, illustrations, fanzines, magazines and artefacts.

Queer and kinky communities are usually committed to the keeping of such archives, and for good reason: these pieces of art prove that such dissident identities have long existed and will probably continue to exist irrespective of whether their environment is supportive of them or not. If we consider historical events such as the AIDS crisis, or how sex workers will often have to leave the sex working communities behind in order to transition to more secure employment, these archives also make sense as a way to act as surrogate 'elders' — artefacts and artworks that, while not able to pass on their wisdom like an actual elder would, still carry a world of significance and can help people with dissident identities find a space in their community. Queer and kinky art, including pornography, doesn't just function then as art, but it also functions as a kind of religious and communal collection of artefacts that have a community-identity-building purpose to them.

I have so far pointed out how dissident art may help people with dissident identities feel validated, imagine a different future and even find dissident communities, as well as how the community collects and preserves these artworks and artefacts. But dissident art also breeds dissident artists: by exposing members of non-dissident identities to dissident art, non-dissident artists are better able to foster and care for the art of

communities that are not their own (as long as they're respectful about their interactions with the art and choose not to appropriate it). It is not the goal of dissident art to educate non-dissident artists or communities, but as a by-product of its own existence, it helps make space for dissidence as difference[24]. This is, however, a complicated aspect of the art-ideation-identity process, because it can easily become assimilation, a process by which the aspect of the dissidence that would prove too transgressive of the system is removed and the dissidence becomes a quirky new instance ready to be easily consumed. Dissident art will in principle not always be easy to consume for a wider audience — while being a source of comfort for some members of the dissident community.

A good example of this would be the performance art of Blacklips during the early 90s in Manhattan. The performance group which featured numerous artists was a particular outlet for femme identified creators who were reflecting on the state of anti-AIDS and anti-queer policies in the state of New York. Their work was often confrontational and full of sexuality: 'It was kind of a joke that every Blacklips show would end with a pile of dead bodies.' (ANOHNI & Wilkerson, 2023). Another interesting example that plays with explicitness is the work of Michael Petry, which often features body parts (whether allegorically or literally) in the context of gay intercourse. The internal/external, comfort/discomfort, dissident/systemic tension is fundamental for

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[24] An excellent example of this can be found in how boudoir and lingerie photography has changed during the last ten years — due to the rise in online marketing in the sex working industry, escorts have been getting more and more creative with their shots. If we trace their poses (particularly, laying on the floor with the legs up on a sofa) we can see them reflected in mainstream boudoir photography as well as lingerie and high-fashion adverts (including campaigns by Armani, Honey Birdette, etc.)

this kind of art. Of course, this tension is not inherently part of the artwork itself as much as it is part of the multifaceted readings available to different audiences. Additionally, discomfort shouldn't be conflated with shock value. What used to be a racy image may not have any shock value a few years later, but an uncomfortable dissident image will remain somewhat uncomfortable to those who are not part of the dissident community for as long as the community carries on being dissident. This is reflective of the imbalance of power that said community is enduring and has endured. Until said imbalance of power is resolved, that discomfort will remain as a celebration of dissidence and difference.

How can pornography reflect and shape queer identities?

The first distinction that must be made is regarding the kind of pornography that we are talking about. Asking how straight pornography reflects queer identities can be an unfair and rather unproductive question. We could examine how purportedly queer pornography made by and for straight people reflects queer identities, and there is a lot of scope to ask how certain pornographic works may be queering straight identity, but I am choosing to focus on queer works made by/for queer folks.

There are many works of LGBTQIA+ pornography that may not necessarily fall under the umbrella of queer pornography. This may be puzzling to read, but it is important to understand why queerness is different from lesbian or gay. In his 1995 'In defense of queer nation: From identity politics to the politics of difference' Slagle makes this very important clarification: 'Queer activists construct a collective identity based on

differences rather than similarities.' (1995, Slagle). While certain aspects of lesbian and gay liberation movements (and, therefore, their cultural products) during the XXth century were interested in exploring their identities as a continuity with straight identities (which proved to be a somewhat effective way of recruiting some particular forms of conditional allyship), queerness is not interested in maintaining said continuity. Understanding this is integral to produce any meaningful analysis of queer pornography, because it can help identify what tropes and devices are a continuation of straight pornography, which ones are a subversion of it, and what others are a completely new addition. There are other more obvious examples, such as lesbian pornography made for straight audiences, but here I am talking about the kind of difference found, for example, between how the money shot (male ejaculation) is used in straight pornography, some types of gay pornography, and other types of gay 'queer' pornography. For a deeper dive in this particular subject, Byron Lee's 'It's a question of breeding: Visualizing queer masculinity in bareback pornography' (2014) is particularly instructive[25].

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[25]Lee says of the way that masculinity is portrayed in the films of Treasure Island Media (TIM) that 'TIM films show masculinity as athletic, risky, and sacred. Though these are recognizable, normative frames of masculinity, TIM films visibly articulate queer erotics and bodies in queer(ed) activity.' (2014, Lee). What makes these films queer is not the elements that form part of the 'mise-en-place', but the way in which those elements interact with one another and with the camera.

Queer is a political identity in flux[26], and while it is not my place as a white woman[27] to prescribe the boundaries of it, it is my understanding that it is precisely a commitment to the mercurial and fluid nature of queerness that transmutates it as a political identity. Queerness is the commitment to creating the necessary material circumstances that will facilitate a world that allows (other) queer people[28] to continue to be queer. This is a political stance because the queer identity is still a dissident identity, which means an identity that is not recognised as the identity of a fully fledged citizen by the state (Bell, 1995). In order to create those spaces and circumstances, queer people need to politically organise, politically create and politically fight for their identity. Pretending otherwise is not only a moot point but a disservice to the potential of queerness itself.

I will mainly attend to two types of queer pornography: contemporary productions made by queer companies that need to sell their product in order to stay afloat, and photographic works created by queer folks with the intention of selling, exchanging or just increasing their archives. In the case of the first category, I will be looking at CyberDyke and Girls Next Door as representative case studies that provide a

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[26] As a group of people, queerness is always expanding its definition to accept new identities (think of LGB expanding to LGBTQIA+).

[27] Considering that queer-adjacent identities were present in many cultures before the advent of colonisation, how colonisation violently affected those with the aforementioned identities, as well as the fact that queer thinkers of colour have been at the forefront of queer theory for the last fifty years at least, it would hardly be my place to do this. I simply lack the experience of oppression that this would require.

[28] Other queer people meaning people whose queerness is different from our own queerness

very useful look at the real (queer pornography) and fake ('lesbian' pornography made for straight audiences) dichotomy. As for the second case, I will be looking at pornographic photographic works produced in Germany before the fall of the Berlin wall.

Firstly, at the heart of both queer and straight contemporary pornographic productions lies a very intense tension between 'realness' and 'fakeness'. This is further pushed forward by sites like OnlyFans, where many customers and clients expect sex workers to make pornography 'for fun' or as a 'side-hustle', and expect this facade to be maintained for their benefit. Additionally, since the whole industry is always facing moral panics over trafficking and exploitation, it is in the industry's best interest to pretend that no one is working because they have to, but because they love to. On top of that, the 'fake' vs. 'real' pleasure dichotomy, which as we will see is sometimes used as a 'selling point', is also part of a white feminist idea of what is worthwhile to pursue in terms of pleasure. In a bid to centre women's pleasure over men's, some strands of feminism have become extremely prescriptive about the kind of pleasure that is permissible or acceptable. Dworkin offers an excellent example of this when they deem women who are involved in BDSM activities are victims of the patriarchy instead of people with sexual agency (Dworkin, 1974, p. 183).

In 'The Real Thing' Julie Levin Russo analyses this real/fake dichotomy when it comes to online queer pornography, and in particular, to CyberDyke, an online sapphic pornography repository that ran for 20 years before its closure, and WeLiveTogether.com. At WeLiveTogether.com one could buy the pornographic tapes of 'three supposed roommates who pick up a different girl each week for a group lesbian scene. It also invited

potential customers to 'Find out how REAL lesbians live'' (Levin Russo, 2007, p. 239). In CyberDyke's own words, their difference with sites like WeLiveTogether.com was:

> We use real people and couples as often as possible, and narratives based on real-life and real fantasies. We try to depict the sex the way people really have it, not just in positions that maximise expos[ure] to the camera or that make the women look a certain way... That other kind of porn is easy to recognize: it has obvious cues, like a silly contrived plot-line or artificial-looking women; it's not about the real world at all... Even if the content is almost identical in terms of the action and explicitness, the personality of the camera holder makes [a] big difference; he or she is a proxy for the viewer. (Levin Russo, 2007, p. 240)

Interestingly, Russo includes Wendy Chun's analysis of amateur online pornography and its aesthetics as a way to make the internet appear transparent:

> 'Amateur' webcam sites... mimic voyeurism in order to create indexicality and authenticity within a seemingly nonindexical medium... 'voyeuristic' images lend the Internet an authenticity it otherwise does not have... further buttressing the 'reality effect' necessary to making fiber-optic communications and computer-generated images seem transparent. (Chun, 2006, p. 103)

Russo understands CyberDyke to invoke a realness of representation (naturalistic staging and implied viewer positioning), a realness of reception (because it is 'aimed at real women and lesbians') and 'contextual realness' (the addition of contextual elements outside of the pornography itself, such as the language describing the films, the copy of

the website, etc.), which is made obvious in this extract from their website that Russo highlights in the paper:

> they write that 'we're out to redeem porn!... women often don't have much extra pocket-change for things like porn sites, and... they are anxious about signing up for adult sites as well. I thought a network of sites made by women, a safe space on the Net where sex was given respect, was needed.' This is a project to intervene, through porn, in the broader socio political field of gendered sexuality. (Levin Russo, 2007, p. 240).

Again, here is that necessary political element of queerness that we touched on earlier. Russo adds as well that: 'When the regulation of pornography becomes a means of defining and policing sexual subcultures, the production of pornography becomes an important means of self defining identity and community' (Levin Russo, 2007, p. 246), bringing us back to queer identities using pornography as a tool or a medium to define themselves and their community — something that seems to be one of the main motivations behind amateur queer pornographic photography. This is consistent with Avedon Carol's findings in 'Nudes, Prudes and Attitudes' (Carol & Kennedy, 1995a, pp. 9-24).

In any case, there seems to be a dance between realness and fakeness that Russo identifies with 'strategic realness' meant to be part of a community's identity building process. CyberDyke uses elements of dissident identities that are part of the lesbian community (butch aesthetics, piercings, fetish attires) but that do not represent every real lesbian. This strategic realness allows CyberDyke to define (part of) their community through pornography as part of a somewhat participative process. To further understand

how some queer people may feel about this 'protean' process of identification and individuation, we can look at the work of Ingrid Ryberg. Ingrid Ryberg is a film director and scholar, currently a senior lecturer in the unit of Aesthetics at the University of Gothenburg who directed 'An Army of Lovers', a documentary about the importance of queer filmmaking during the 1970s Swedish gay liberation movement in 2018. She conducted a series of interviews with queer spectators at the Pornfilmfestival Berlin in October in 2008, which she then used as a basis for a paper that looks at the spectatorship of queer pornography in the context of pornography festivals and pornography screenings in clubs, which was published in the academic journal 'Porn Studies' in 2014. One of the films discussed with the interviewees was One Night Stand, directed by Emilie Juvet, and which features several scenes with women and trans people and which Ryberg credits with being 'crucial to the emergence of a reinvigorated transnational queer, feminist and lesbian porn film culture' (Ryberg, 2014):

With One Night Stand, first time I saw it, the whole crowd, I think we all felt something was changing ... I don't know what happened but everybody left really flushed and like, it was a really different energy around. It was really funny to experience and sometimes you have that at festivals, the people just come in – 'oh we're gonna watch a film' – and then they come out in a whole different state. And that's an added value of seeing it with other people ... (Marije Janssen, interview, Berlin, October 2008) (Ryberg, 2015)

Here appears a new element that seems to be distinctive of queer pornography: watching it becomes a community event that is open to all sorts of possibilities. This is an interesting distinction between queer and straight pornography, because straight

pornography is often understood to be a matter of private, if not shameful, consumption. Queer pornography spectators who are queer identified, on the other hand, seem to be happy to make watching pornography a communal event. Some queer pornography festivals, as many other forms of queer celebration, give members of the community a chance to come together and recognise themselves openly, with all of their queerness and kinks — they are an opportunity for growth and recognition. This idea is also collected from Kay, another of Ryberg's interviewees, who said about the festival: "It is more like a party...everybody is laughing and flirting and it's a whole new sort of confidence.' ' (Ryberg, 2015) Ryberg talks about the goal of 'Carnal fantasizing: embodied spectatorship of queer, feminist and lesbian pornography', the aforementioned article on Porn Studies, as an opportunity of 'claiming that queer, feminist and lesbian porn potentially contributes to a greater sense of sexual agency and exploration of desires than dominant notions of gender and sexuality allow. Importantly, however, while interview accounts testifying to such experiences of increased sexual self-esteem and empowerment form the empirical basis of my analysis, these accounts are not self-evident facts or proofs of any truth. Rather, interview accounts are understood as discourse and as articulations produced under specific conditions in specific contexts.' (Ryberg, 2015)

Further to Ryberg's investigation and interviews, we can see an interesting argument about the type of (embodied?) 'bodily' knowledge produced by pornography in Richard Dyer's "Male Gay Porn: Coming to Terms" (1985): 'that an art rooted in bodily effect can give us a knowledge of the body that other art cannot. Even now porn does give us knowledge of the body—only it is mainly bad knowledge, reinforcing the worst aspects of the social construction of masculinity that men learn to experience in our bodies. All

the same, porn can be a site for "re-educating desire", and in a way that constructs desire in the body, not merely theoretically in relation to, and often against, it.' (Dyer, 1985) What is so interesting here is not just the fact that Dyer proposes that pornography can serve as a way to "re-educate desire", but the fact that this is brought about because of the type of knowledge that pornography produces. As we will see in Chapter 4, Section 4, pornoliteracy[29] improves when people make their own pornographic content and partake in a pornographic communal space (an online one, in this case). This is consistent with Ryberg's findings but also with Dyer's argument of pornography as a tool for specific knowledge production which can be used for the exploration of alternative bodily desires.

Through Lynda Williams, who expertly used Walter Benjamin's theories of spectatorship in *Hard Core* (2008)[30], Ryberg suggests that watching pornography has an impact in the way that audiences (or in her case, spectators) think and feel about arousal: 'screening sex both as a technology disciplining and educating viewers into specific forms of arousal and desire and as a more open and undisciplined process and space for imagination. ' (Ryberg, 2015). In regards to queer spectatorship, the idea that pornography can serve as a space for imagination is particularly true for queer people, who must exercise our imagination at any given point because our identities, sexualities and relationships are so often pushed out of public view. In the words of Janssen, interviewed

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[29] I define pornoliteracy as the ability to find the type of pornographic content one is looking for as well as find new types of content that one may be interested in, but also the ability to engage with pornography with enough digital media literacy to understand its import/export rules (Liao & Protasi, 2013). For more on this term, please see Monea, A. (2022). *The digital closet : how the internet became straight.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press.

[30] Williams also found through her research for Hard Core that she was able to identify with diverse individuals and positions, even those whose identities had nothing to do with her own — the queering potential of pornography, perhaps.

above: 'I was intrigued by my feelings of sexual arousal and attraction to these women and sexuality – women I wouldn't find particularly attractive, but this raw sexuality, that just did it for me." (Ryberg, 2015) Although we might be tempted to collude this 'raw sexuality' with 'realness', we would do better by thinking about the aesthetic potential of it and analysing the necessary elements and processes that must be undertaken in order to make (at least some) audiences feel like Janssen did: 'Interpreting her account via Williams, her body could be said to have become 'habituated' and 'opened up' to these 'diverse qualities and kinds of sexual experiences"(Ryberg, 2015). Ryberg concludes that 'Not only do events such as Pornfilmfestival Berlin legitimise and create space for queer, feminist and lesbian porn spectatorship, but such participation in this film culture enables habituation to being a spectator and to enjoying 'different varieties of pleasure" (Ryberg, 2015). It is, however, worth considering whether this legitimization happens when pornography is consumed in private, as well as the economic dynamics that impact the creation of pornographic works — including what festivals they might or might not be screened in.

Moving onto our second set of pornography, there is a plethora of memories to be uncovered through looking at the personal collections of many queer photographers and models who have created their own pornography. Generally, we find an abundance of 'gay' pornography (meaning cis men in attitudes considered to be homosexual), although we can also find plenty of trans femme and dyke self-made pornography. As we've discussed before, fanzines have long been part of the queer community's legacy, and there

has never been a shortage of Tijuana Bibles[31] to look at, but given the nature of our question — how does (queer) pornography reflect queer identities — I would like to look at some of the materials created during the GDR in East Germany. Kyle Frackman has some excellent research on this published in Radical History Review. According to Frackman, this cultural production occurred as an unintended consequence of the GDR promoting productive hobbies such as photography — another neat example of the dissident potential of pornography. These photographs are amateur in nature, often displaying processing errors such as glares or overprints, and as Frackman highlights, often show the men on display against a backdrop of the 'state-approved' photography and film magazines, which makes them much more political:

Fig 2. — One of the images featured by Frackman in his article, showing a male figure with an erection posing in front of many state-sanctioned magazines

When talking about their context and production, Frackman sees the community-strengthening potential of these artefacts: 'Turning to the 'what,' these images

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[31] Tijuana Bibles were short, small pornographic comic books (usually eight pages long) produced in the US roughly from 1920 to 1960.

have been creative expression, memento, social tool, and pornography, while also standing as a critique and, importantly, a record of existence.' (Frackman, 2022) Particularly interesting in regards to the 'critique' aspect the second photograph (reproduced above) that he looks at where a man proudly shows off his erection in front of a number of state-funded magazines, proves to be an excellent example — a joyful, even gleeful, perhaps literal 'flipping the bird' to the state's control of what images are available and desirable.

> The images, which circulated among like-minded connoisseurs, not only testify to the existence of the desire they document, but they also pose a challenge to acceptable public discourses in the GDR in their very composition, like the existence of same-sex desire and its role in the creation of visual records. (Frackman, 2022)

Again, we find self-made pornography as a tool for self-ratification, self-recognition — this pornography is very concerned with the contextual realness mentioned before, but it also has immense potential as a communal site for generational co-creation (and, perhaps, creative procreation). This pornography also poses interesting questions around privacy. The fact is that these images were meant originally to be 'privately circulated', but they are now part of several growing collections that attest to the existence of queer people before our contemporary times. This porous relationship between public and private lives is further complicated because of the legal standing of both pornography and queerness at the time of their creation and currently, as well.

Finally, Frackman highlights how the doubly controversial nature of these images (pornographic and queer) put their producers in a dangerous position, socially and legally. The production of these images was against the law, and so was their distribution:

> Individuals involved in the production of these images put themselves in a compromising position. Usually, such photos were taken by amateur photographers who also had the skills and materials to develop the film. [...] These images could be controversial in at least two ways. First, they were legally dangerous because they violated the law against the distribution of pornographic material. [...] Second, and perhaps more important, the photos ran afoul of the official views of sexuality, both for their non-procreative focus and for their homoeroticism, as men were the objects of other men's sexual desires. (Frackman, 2022)

Still, the queer people in the photographs thought that producing and sharing this kind of pornography was important enough to face such risks. Whether they were just hungry for the kind of pornography that they could gratify themselves to or whether they wanted to reaffirm their existence and the existence of their own community against the censorship of the state, those needs were greater than the threat of fines, jail-time and social banishment — which I believe speaks to how important the way in which queer pornography reflects queer identities is for queer folks.

The productive potential of violence

One of the most often discussed topics in the scholarly literature on pornography is whether its creation and consumption lead to, or constitute, harm. Leading

pro-censorship and anti-pornography feminists argue that pornography contains inordinate amounts of violence against women (NCOSE, n.d.), and this leads to the reproduction of this violence in real life with horrible consequences (Mackinnon and Dworkin, 1998). This is called the model of perceived harm by censorship scholars such as Lise Gotell in 'Shaping Butler: The New Politics of Anti-pornography', whose work will be discussed in Chapter 4 . Much less attention, however, has been paid to the productive, aesthetic, and artistic potential of violence in pornography. This is what I shall investigate in this section. Inspired both by Foucault's proposal of censorship as a productive power and my own experiences as a sex worker who is part of the BDSM community, it is my understanding that there is ample potential for change when it comes to the use of violence in sexual situations. Additionally, staged violence has the potential of becoming an aesthetic experience.

Foucault proposed censorship as a 'productive power' in his 'History of Sexuality' (1978). This is consistent with his understanding of power as something that is not just wielded by authorities and social elites, but as something that permeates society and can be wielded by anyone that inhabits it. It is this definition of productive power as something that has generative or fecund abilities that I want to keep in mind while we look at the potential of violence in this chapter. Before jumping ahead and looking at this potential we must first define what constitutes or entails violence. Hamby defines violence as 'behavior that is (a) intentional, (b) unwanted, (c) nonessential, and (d) harmful.' (Hamby, 2017 p. 168), and claims that any behaviour that doesn't fulfil those four conditions is merely aggression. For the purposes of this chapter, I will consider violence to be behaviour that is intentional, nonessential and painful. The reason why I

don't want to call the behaviours present in BDSM mere aggression is because there is a very complex relationship between what is welcomed and what is unwanted in BDSM scenarios that is beyond the scope of this thesis. While Hamby's paper acknowledges this to some extent when talking about the unwanted condition, I am interested in a more morally neutral definition of violence whereby the lawfulness of the act itself is not a relevant part of the argument. I will elaborate on welcomed yet unwanted violence and why I prefer these terms further down below.

In BDSM, violence is a means to an end, and it may be enacted in many different ways. There is physical violence[32] and psychological violence[33]. Obviously, none of this violence should be enacted without the prior consent of the bottom(s) or submissive(s) taking part in it, but that doesn't necessarily mean that all the minute details have been discussed with them[34]. This would prevent most psychological violence from reaching its full transformative and/or intended effect, so the relationship with the top(s) should be one based in trust and understanding. This doesn't mean that the violence is not painful

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[32] Impact play [spanking, flogging, whipping], breath play [choking, mummification], etc

[33] Restraining/bondage, humiliation play, furniture play, pet play, etc.

[34] This would fall under the RACK (Risk Aware Consensual Kink) framework, as opposed to the formerly widely used SSC (Safe, Sane and Consensual).

or that it's less impactful, or that scenes can't go very wrong very quickly, but acknowledging this reality doesn't detract from its productive potential[35].

Violence, and the promise of it (particularly when it's fulfilled), are powerful elements that can be used as aphrodisiacs in the appropriate situation. Violence in BDSM is composed of at least two elements: the threat and the pain. This is what I was referring to when I mentioned that in BDSM there is a complicated relationship between wanted/unwanted violence: the fear of the threat must come from a certain reticence to experiencing said violence, but the subject is still willing to acquiesce to this. This violence is both welcomed and unwanted. Pain is part of the sensation spectrum, but instead of imagining pleasure on one end and pain on the other, I would like to propose that this spectrum works more like a three-dimensional colour wheel, where different 'sensations' (pain, pleasure, tickles, discomfort, tenderness) affect and colour each other and how they're perceived. The threat acts as a regulator of intensity, either promising more or less of the particular sensation being felt (or seeked, or feared) at the time. The two elements exist in constant tension, and if the tension is lost, violence loses its transformative power.

But how is it that violence can be a productive power? Violence breeds transformation: of the skin that it touches, but also of the psyche that is subjected to it. I mean transformation in the sense of L.A. Paul's third type of transformation, the one that

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[35] While it may be tempting to imagine that this violence is 'pretend violence' where no one is being harmed, in order to account for all aspects of BDSM (including the more 'extreme' aspects of knife play, breath play, needle play, genital mutilation, etc.) there needs to be an acknowledgement of both the possibility and the reality of harm.

is a combination of epistemic and personal transformations (Aumann, 2022). This transformation may not always be wanted or positive, of course — the wounds suffered from an abuser are hardly a good result for the victim. However, when one seeks violence (when one's agency is present enough in the decision making process), there is a certain transformational potential to it. There is very little actual scholarship on the phenomenology and aesthetics of BDSM experiences. One of the few authors to address this is Anne O. Noomis, though it should be said that her work straddles the line between academic research and popular self-help literature. Nevertheless, it contains an insightful taxonomy that I will use to illuminate the different states that a person may go through during a BDSM scene (O Noomis, 2023). While Wuyts and Morrens produced an impressive review on the biology of BDSM (The Biology of BDSM: A Systematic Review, 2022), this review lacks insight into the aesthetic aspects of BDSM that I am interested in, which is why I've turned to Noomis' work in an effort to chart this particular territory through this lens. Most of her work so far has been done exploring the submissive side of the equation, but this doesn't preclude the transformative potential of violence for the Dominant side.

O Noomis proposes that there are at least six states of the Thewen[36], similar to the states of grief and the fight/freeze/fawn/flight trauma responses (also known as the 4F system[37]). These states (or stages) represent a journey towards the last one, a state of

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[36] The originating violence, or according to Noomis, the energetic source of it

[37] Introduced by trauma expert Pete Walker in his paper 'The 4Fs: A Trauma Typology in Complex PTSD' (Walker, 2013), this is a way of categorising the types of responses that people with Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder display as a result of their trauma.

laxitude, full reception and passivity. The way to bring the submissive through these states is violence, whether physical or psychological, and to wield the tension contained in the violence with expert artistry. The states are Bellator, Detorquent, Placant, Angust, Thrall and Acquiescent. In this taxonomy, O Noomis proposes that all these states occur as a response to the exertion (or push) of violence. To understand this, we must first look at the Bellator state as the one most associated with the Dominant, or the one exerting violence — this is where the aforementioned push (Thewen) originates, and it is associated with the Fight state in the 4F system (Walker, 2013). In this taxonomy, this is the originator of all other states because all other states are a response to this violence. I do not fully agree with this aspect of the taxonomy because I believe that the other states can 'request' the violence to occur by displaying their characteristic behaviours, but for the sake of clarity, let's consider the Bellator as the originating behaviour from which the violence emerges. The Detorquent state is the one that 'manipulates to gain advantage' (O Noomis, 2023), where instead of receiving the violence per se, the response is to twist and bend it to 'send it back'. The Placant state is one where the submissive seeks to 'please and appease to gain favour' (O Noomis, 2023) with the Dominant, and it's associated with the Fawn response in the 4F system. The Angust state is one of immobilisation and constriction, waiting to assess the situation before responding, and it's associated with the Freeze response in the 4F system. The Thrall state is 'to follow steps to gain security' (O Noomis, 2023), identified with the Flight response in the 4F system. Finally, the Acquiescent state is to collapse, to completely surrender, an almost liminal state between waking life and a subconscious state, which relates to the Flop response in the 5F

system[38]. As I said, albeit O Noomis' research may walk a fine line when it comes to academic scholarship, it is also reflective of the experiences of the BDSM community and it is a useful tool for thinking about these experiences.

All of these states are brought about by the application of violence and the way in which that violence is received and responded to by the person the violence is applied to. They might not always follow one another, but there is a certain rhythm to a scene where, if the relationship and the chemistry between Dominant and submissive is good enough, some of these states will be brought about for the submissive. Different people react differently and at different times, but in my experience, most submissives will either go through a Detorquent, Placant or Thrall state at first, and eventually reach Acquiescence, sometimes through Angust. Angust is particularly useful for both Detorquent and Thrall states, because it transforms reactive responses into passive ones, forcing the submissive to receive the violence differently, which heightens the chances of them reaching the state of Acquiescence.

According to this system, violence can be used to reach a heightened meditative state (also commonly known as subspace) when being received by a submissive. This would account for at least some of the transformative effects of violence. Violence can also work as an enhancer of physical pleasure, and it is not uncommon in both BDSM scenes and vanilla sex to seek a mixture of pain and pleasure as a way to enhance

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[38] The 5F system is different from the aforementioned 4F system which includes the 'Flop' response. This was introduced by Babette Rotschild in the book 'The Body Remembers: the psychophysiology of trauma and trauma responses'(2000).

orgasmic feelings: anything from bites, scratches and spanking while engaging in sexual relationships, to ruined orgasms[39].

But what about the Dominants and the aesthetic and artistic potential of violence? Can violence be as transformative for those who apply it as it is for those who receive it? While I do not think that this is the place to wax poetic about how exquisite it can be to apply violence expertly, I will do my best to present a case for the aesthetic potential of its application. According to Noël Carroll, 'if attention is directed to the form of the art work and/or to its aesthetic and expressive properties and/or to the interaction thereof and/or to the way in which the aforesaid factors modulate our response to the art work, then the experience is aesthetic.' (Carroll, 2002, p.164). Let's look for example as the application of the whip, meaning delivering a number of whip lashes onto someone. If we understand form as the arrangement between the properties of the object (or in this case, the action of whipping), the Dominant holding the whip is certainly paying attention to the way in which the whip's tail moves back and forth and balances in their hand. This is not just because the practicalities of whipping require it[40], but because there is a certain beauty in the rhythmic relationship between the stages of a whip strike, and attention can (and should) be paid to the forms and shapes that the whip describes mid-air. In order to appreciate the relationship between all of the components of a whip strike (the arch of the whip in the air, the sound and vibration of the hit, the weight changes throughout the

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[39]The continued stimulation of the genitals after the person has reached an orgasm tends to result in exalted tenderness of the area and 'ruin' the orgasm, which is a form of psychological violence

[40] A bad application of the whip can make the whip 'bite back' whoever is holding it, which happens when the whip-holder is trying to interrupt the curve of the whip's tail too early and the tail hits them.

movement), one must at least be able to perceive said components. Then, one can pay attention to the aesthetic properties of said components.

In my case, I am always very concerned with the arch of the whip — so much so that I will often record my practice sessions so I can understand the relationship between the arch and the weight changes that I feel when applying the whip. After much practice I now know how to apply pressure changes in order to describe a wide, sweeping arch (which is my aesthetic preference) that to me, evokes a sense of certain decadence. When it comes to the way that these factors 'modulate our response to the artwork', the way in which the whip strikes the submissive will definitely modulate the way in which the Dominant responds to the whipping (and may change the next strike, which is in the nature of many performance pieces). In turn, the submissive's response to the strike may also affect the Dominant's. The submissive's response (the wails of pain, the writhing and slithering of their body) can also be enjoyed as an aesthetic experience, and I am quite certain that plenty of Dominants spend a good amount of time not just dissecting its components but relishing in their aesthetic properties.

This doesn't mean that I am making the case that the only aesthetic potential of violence lies in its application and not its reception. However, I am interested in the application of violence because it is often this aspect that is understood to be morally worse (than just receiving it). Finally, there is the consideration of what happens when the violence is self-inflicted, which applies both to remote slaves and to people who choose to have BDSM relationships with themselves — I do not intend to deal with this particular case at length, but it would be remiss not to mention its existence.

The application of violence is a rather fine art. At least, it seems to meet many of the criteria put forward in the cluster account of art: it is expressive of emotion, it is intellectually challenging, it has the capacity to convey complex meanings, and it is the performance which is the product of a high degree of skill (Gaut, 2000). It requires, perhaps most obviously, an in-depth knowledge of whatever delivery vehicle one has chosen. One can not just wave a whip about and expect it to work. Same goes for canes, floggers, riding crops, paddles and even plain old hand spanking, not to speak of more dangerous instruments such as pinwheels, blades, ropes, syringes, and a number of other medical fetish supplies. Many things can be turned into a delivery vehicle for violence if one is knowledgeable and creative enough. But in order to apply the violence meaningfully, and in order to control the risks of its application, the Dominant must know what they are doing. They must have a working understanding of anatomy (such as understanding that hitting the kidney area might result in very serious outcomes), and they must have a working understanding of the tool at hand. Like any craft and any art, knowledge of the medium is absolutely paramount. The Dominant is the responsible figure, whether under RACK (Risk-Aware Consensual Kink) or SSC (Safe, Sane and Consensual) protocols.

But besides basic safety training and good knowledge of their weapon of choice (or vehicle for the delivery of violence), the Dominant must also know their submissive. The ability to quickly read and understand how different people react to different inputs is highly valued in all sex work, and Domination is no different. The Dominant should also understand the psychology behind the kink, and how it applies to the particular

submissive individual in front of them. What state are they in? What kind of thrill are they seeking? These are fundamental questions and their answers will directly affect how the violence is applied, the outcome of said violence and ultimately, the outcome of the scene. Different masochists seek different thrills and react differently to different applications of violence — determining how to manage the tension between pain and threat is fundamental when it comes to creating a good outcome for both players.

All of this seems perhaps too technical to evoke any aesthetic feeling or possibility, but I do not think that Caravaggio's really good understanding of the effects of light as well as the management of pigments and their application precludes the possibility of painting as an aesthetic experience, and it certainly does not preclude the possibility of his paintings being an aesthetic experience for others. As a painter myself, this comparison makes sense to me. However, I understand that this may not be the most obvious example of an art form that may be related to BDSM. Excellent accounts of BDSM as performance can be found from a submissive point of view (Cinquino's thesis 'BDSM as Performance: The Experience of Empowerment in the 'Submissive' Role' (Cinquino, 2020)) as well as from the point of view of the observer (Leiser's 'Deviants Performing Deviance: A Participant/Observer Case for BDSM as Performance' (Lesier, 2019)). Leiser highlights the ways in which BDSM borrows language and aspects of theatrical performance (scenes, roles, etc.), but also the fact that both more traditional performances as well as BDSM exist in (and perhaps create) liminal spaces. In a similar way to my previous Caravaggio example, just because an actor is aware of the breathing or body-positioning techniques they're using to fulfil a role, this doesn't preclude their aesthetic enjoyment of their own work while it's happening.

Going back to BDSM, there is a certain rhythm that occurs when both Dominant and submissive are working well together that certainly speaks of a sublime experience. As a brief aside, I think this Schopenhauer quote can be a particularly interesting lens through which to explore the potential sublime contained in the BDSM experience: 'a hostile relation to the human will in general (as it presents itself in its objecthood, the human body) and oppose it, threatening it with a superior power that suppresses all resistance, or reducing it to nothing with its immense size.' (Schopenhauer and Payne, 1966, p. 201). This is because it's very easy to find both the character of the Dominant as well as the submissive in it, but also because for Schopenhauer, the sublime is deeply interconnected with both (human) will and power, and particularly, with a hostile relation to it. It is here, in that space between the threat of suppressing all resistance and the realisation of that threat when said resistance is reduced to nothing and the rhythm that is found between these two states, that the sublime can occur in a BDSM scene.

Let's consider what this sublime may look like for participants in the scene. It can be a sexual sensation, and for the top it may often feel like being drunk on power, able to do whatever they want and completely in sync with their environment — the 'top space'. This is also an altered state of mind, similar to the Acquiescent state discussed previously. The top or the Dominant in a scene may feel like an unstoppable force of nature, sometimes even coming to identify with one or more aspects of it: feeling like the force itself. On the other hand, they may experience sublime awe in witnessing the absolute submission of their partner to their will, or the extremes to which they can subject their partners body or mind without them breaking. In this case, although it may seem

counter-intuitive to think about it this way, the bottom becomes the unstoppable force of nature: able to withstand untold amounts of violence, transform through it, and come out the other side. For the bottom or the submissive, this may feel like facing a completely unwavering force that they can not help but submit to. Common comments amongst submissive partners are that they enjoy 'being made to feel small', which is an integral part of the sublime experience as defined by many philosophers. The 'unescapableness' of the situation is even translated literally to some kinks/fetishes, such as bondage, mummification, shibari, etc. Both in the case of the top as well as the case of the bottom, it is the (expert) application of violence and the (expert) receiving of it that brings it about. Violence can create sublime outcomes, transformative outcomes, and not just for those who are receiving it.

Does this mean that I do not believe that violence against women features prominently on pornographic material? No. I believe it features just as much as it does in many other forms of mass media. Eaton herself in 'A Sensible Anti-Porn Feminism' points to the many ways in which anti-egalitarian gender roles (and to a degree, violence against women) are present in early socialisation through different media products: 'The modi operandi of this socialization include religion, the household division of labor, and the influence of various representational forms such as advertisements, television, movies, popular music and music videos, fashion magazines, and high art, all of which often promote masculinity and femininity as ideals for men and women, respectively' (Eaton, 2007, p. 678, emphasis mine). I believe this is particularly obvious if one is to look at the genre of romantic comedies, where violence against women is often portrayed in a subtle manner, but which are seldom billed as the main reason behind violence against women.

It also means that I do not believe that all forms of violence on screen lead to social harm, as is acknowledged by some of the more complex and subtle accounts on the moral ethics of pornography. Protasi and Liao offer an extremely sharp analysis of this in 'The Fictional Character of Pornography', where they sustain that the mode of engagement of the audience is directly affected by the audience's understanding of the genre of media they're engaging with: 'Genre influences the normative conditions of our imaginative engagements with fictions and our actual responses.' (Liao and Protasi, 2013, p. 108). They argue for two types of media: response-realistic, and not response-realistic. This has to do with whether the audience is expected to import their beliefs into the watching experience (response-realistic) or not: 'BDSM fictional worlds differ from ours in important respects. For example, plausibly in BDSM fictional worlds women universally find pain to be sexually pleasurable. So, consumers are prescribed not to import their belief that, in reality, women have different preferences and tolerances with pain.' (Liao and Protasi, 2013, p. 110). Of course, the export rules are similar: a response-realistic media's audience is expected to export the rules and beliefs they've been presented with back into their real world experience (which is where, according to Liao and Protasi, the social harm starts to occur), while the not response-realistic media's audience is not expected to export anything back into their real world. As long as the audience is engaging with the media work in a not response-realistic way, I would argue that the violence shown on screen does not lead to social harm.

Moreover, I argue that certain forms of violence can be a productive power with aesthetic possibilities. Agency is one of the central conditions for violence to be a productive power. This doesn't preclude the fact that violence that is not sought or consented to (as per Hamby's definition of violence) can also be thought of as a kind of productive power, as many survivors of many forms of violence constantly demonstrate. But this is due to the survivors ability to transform a negative situation into a productive outcome, post-facto. This is an extremely important distinction, because when it comes to the productive power of violence as has been explored above, the aesthetic possibilities materialise as the scene is happening. In the case of violence that has not been consented to, it is the survivor's choices and effort after the fact, that is, their response to the violence where the productive power originates. For more on how sexual fantasies may help achieve this goal, Friday's 'My Secret Garden' (1973) demonstrates that survivors of sexual abuse may sometimes engage in rape fantasies as a mean to gain power and agency over their abuse.

At this point, one may feel tempted to draw a strict line between the type of violence that can be productive (what we could call the representation of violence, whether imagined, fictional, or even staged) and that which can not (the type that harms). I propose that it would be perhaps more useful to think about violence as something which exists on a spectrum. That is, to take a RACK approach to our definition of violence — since when we apply productive violence in real life (whether staged or fictional) we always run the risk that it may become harmful. If we think about the RGB colour spectrum, for example, we can argue that a particular orange contains both traces of red as well yellow. This orange will lean more red or more yellow, but it is made of

both components - and would not work without them. What I am suggesting is that it is possible that transformative violence sometimes presents with traces of regular, harmful violence - but these do not negate its transformative power, and they are not the main driving force behind the transformation. Of course, it is at this point that aftercare[41] must be applied judiciously in order for the experience to be as positively transformative as possible. This will apply whether one is part of a scene, or one is dealing with more virtual forms of violence, like those contained in pornography, online role playing, etc.

However, agreed-upon violence that respects every involved player's agency is, as demonstrated above, a power that can generate interesting, transformative, and aesthetic experiences for those involved in the process — which brings me back full-circle to the Foucauldian understanding of a productive power, one that when wielded by members of society can be fecund and generative.

2.3 Pornography and the medical gaze

The medicalization and fetishisation of the feminine image throughout the 18th and 19th centuries

The goal of this section is to investigate the so-called 'medical gaze' and show its relationship to pornography. First, how this 'medical gaze' can be used to sanitise, hide or perpetuate aesthetic ideas tied to concepts such as fatphobia, racism or sexism. Also, how it has formed an excuse for white, powerful men to access pornographic experiences that they either have kept off from the rest of the populations, or pornographic experiences

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[41] In BDSM/kink scenes, aftercare occurs after a scene and it includes physical and psychological remedial care. This may mean hydrating cream for roughened buttocks, but also cuddling, talking through the scene, etc. The goal is to ensure the wellbeing of all those involved, as well as to work through any conflicts that may have arisen through it.

where they have exploited said populations. I will do this through the analysis of the Venerina, an Anatomical Venus figure, as well as Curtius' Sleeping Beauty, both of which are wax figures with heavy anatomical components. Finally, I will then look at and compare them to the real-life case of Sarah Baartman, a black woman who was paraded through Europe as an anatomical curiosity. All of these, while presented as scientific curiosities, were enjoyed as sexual objects by people in positions of power. Analysing them together will showcase how the medical gaze has been used to both sanitise pornographic experiences and to put an obscene label on certain bodily categories.

Wax has been used to preserve the effigies of the dead (and in the case of catholic mummies, or even Jeremy Bentham's mummy, to preserve the dead themselves), with wax effigies being in full use at Westminster Abbey by the 13th century and wax being a preferred material for ex votos even earlier. Wax has also been the preferred material for casting death masks since Roman times. It would seem that the relationship between death and wax figures has been present for millenia — and to this day they seem to possess some of this 'unnerving appeal' (McKenzie, 2023).

It may seem odd to start looking at wax figures when trying to find the connection between the medical gaze, scientific illustration, the objectification of feminine bodies and pornography. Whilst they have an obvious connection with death, and morbid curiosity (which can be present in medical and scientific illustrations), the connection with sexual objectification may not be immediately clear. However, one of the Madame Tussaud wax figures offers an excellent example of the intersection between the erotic and scientific interests of the 18th century. Let's now turn our attention to the oldest surviving waxwork in the Madame Tussaud London location: the 'Sleeping Beauty'

dating from 1765 and created by her mentor, Philippe Curtius on his arrival to Paris. This figure is said to represent Madame Du Barry[42], future mistress of Louis XV, at the age of 22. With a clockwork mechanism inserted in her chest to make it look like she is still breathing, the illusion is complete. This is one of the few figures in Madame Tussaud's original collection that posed alive for her 'portrait' — after Du Barry was executed, Curtius did take a posthumous impression of her facial features, which heightens this association with morbidity and death.

Fig. 2 — Philippe Curtius' 'Sleeping Beauty'. Courtesy of The MET

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[42] Jeanne Bécu, the future Madame du Barry, started off as a sex worker of commonner origin.

The reason why we look at the Sleeping Beauty is because she is a distant cousin of the Anatomical Venus. An Anatomical Venus is a typology of artwork that arose in the 18th century in Europe and which sits at the intersection between scientific discovery, mortuary practices and erotic (or pornographic) sculpture. These figures range from life-size to smaller scales (such as 1:4). Most of them act as anatomy mannequins where their parts can be removed in order to observe their internal organs as well as musculoskeletal systems. The Museo di Palazzo Poggi Anatomy & Obstetrics Collection contains several wonderful examples, but perhaps the most famous is the 'Venerina' created by Clemente Susini in 1782. Laid back in ecstatic delight (or death) with her eyes closed, she offers her full internal anatomy on display — then to anatomy students, and now to the visitors of the Bologna museum.

Fig. 3 — The Venerina at the Palazzo Poggi Museum. Courtesy of JJ Delvine

Both Curtius' Sleeping Beauty and these Anatomical Venuses are presented 'in the language of erotic art, lain languorous on velvet cushions, bedecked with jewels' (Warner, 2008, p. 49), and both of them appear to tread this line between death and sexualisation, of gruesome and morbid allure. According to Warner, in the case of the Anatomical Venus, 'their secondary sexual characteristics were stressed, their abdomens revealed' (Warner, 2008, p. 49) — and she poses the further theory that while anatomical male models were often depicted upright, showing blood circulation and muscle movement, all associated with qualities like strength and reason, the sleeping venuses (and beauties) were used to document the nervous system and the reproductive system, associated with affect and eros (Warner, 2008). Interestingly, Warner also proposes that Curtius' Sleeping Beauty may have started her life as an anatomical venus, which would explain her chest cavity (the one that would later be used to make her chest appear to breathe): 'Such a sculpture conveys a deductive vision of erotic, feminine catalepsy, which the peculiar translucence and slight sweatiness of the wax medium suit so creepily' (Warner, 2008, p. 49).

Warner is not the first or the last to talk about the peculiarities of wax as a medium, and how well-suited it is to the reproduction of 'humanity' (McKenzie, 2023). There seems to be something about the translucence and texture of the medium that not only lends itself extremely well to lifelike simulations, but there seems to be an inherent feeling of the 'uncanny' creepiness in the medium itself. This simulation of impossible reality seems to suit Mark Windsor's proposed definition of the uncanny: 'an anxious uncertainty about what is real caused by an apparent impossibility' (Windsor, 2019, p. 51). Since Windsor is mainly interested in 'the uncanny' as an emotional state, I think this is a

particularly apt definition to use when talking about these wax figures. He provides a more in-depth definition of this emotional state as it follows; 'I experience x as uncanny if and only if (1) I experience x as some concrete object or event; (2) I have an experience of x that is incongruous relative to what I believe is possible, which (3) causes me to have uncertainty about x, which (4) causes me to direct feelings of anxiety towards x.' (Windsor, 2019, p. 60).

The Sleeping Beauty is a concrete object, so it is likely that the audience will experience her as such. As per McKenzie above, wax as a medium offers certain qualities that make it very apt for the reproduction of lifelike figures — this can be experienced as incongruous relative to what one believes is possible, since we know that we can not create lifelike figures that are truly alive, and yet wax as a medium seems to offer that possibility. In the case of Curtius' Sleeping Beauty, the inclusion of the moving chest only heightens this effect. The experience of this figure causes the audience, at least for a moment, to feel uncertain about whether life can be recreated and for that feeling to cause direct feelings of anxiety towards the very nature of our existence. It is also possible that this feeling of 'uncanniness' that audiences experience with the Sleeping Beauty (and the Anatomical Venuses) is because of the long-standing association of the medium with post-mortem effigies, heightened by the relationship between Curtius and Tussaud with

the guillotine, or due to the 'uncanny valley'[43] that robots, wax figures and automata tend to provoke.

We have seen how the Sleeping Beauty and the Anatomical Venuses act as a bridge between life and death due to the uncanny nature of the experience that they offer to the audience, but where is the sexual aspect? Before we dive into the erotic nature of how they are presented, we should look at yet another intersection featuring death: the relationship between death, sex and sleep[44]. Both the Sleeping Beauty and the Anatomical Venuses seem to present sleep as an ecstatic and transient state. The growing interest in sleep happening at the time at which some of these sculptures were made, which coincides with the growth of mesmerism and hypnosis, provides an interesting background against which to further analyse this morbid relationship. Sleep as a liminal state, as a state of consciousness and unconsciousness, is a state that wax not only renders, but freezes in time and makes eternal. The anatomical venuses expose their anatomy while suspended in this liminal state in which they pose 'no threat' to the observer (for they are unable to return their gaze). They inhabit this uncanny valley between life and death (Ebenstein, 2016, p. 18), sometimes appearing to be trapped in an almost ecstatic

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[43] Masahiro Mori's original hypothesis states that as the appearance of a robot is made more human, some observers' emotional response to the robot becomes increasingly positive and empathetic, until it becomes almost human, at which point the response quickly becomes strong revulsion. However, as the robot's appearance continues to become less distinguishable from that of a human being, the emotional response becomes positive once again and approaches human-to-human empathy levels. (Wikipedia, 2019)

[44] In some versions of the Sleeping Beauty fairytale she is raped in her sleep. This aspect, interestingly, is also elaborated on by Anne Rice in her Sleeping Beauty trilogy which transforms the fairytale into a BDSM fantasy.

(dare I say orgasmic) haze, which is so unlike life when we are awake: 'the ecstatic was understood at that time not merely as a profane, sensual experience, but as an expression of the sacred: a mystical experience' (Ebenstein, 2016, p. 180). This expression of an ecstatic state (understood as a mystical, sensual experience) fulfils the visual description of both death and sleep and reaches its full expression through the lens of the 'uncanny'.

At this point it is relevant to bring in yet another 'medical venus' — this time one that is not lying supine but was alive and standing prone at the time of her fame: Sara Baartman (1789-1815) named the 'Hottentot Venus' in a marketing effort. The reason why I bring in such a different 'venus' is that Baartman is in many ways the opposite of the Anatomical Venuses (a woman alive while they are representations of death, black where they are white, and fat while they are thin), and yet the way in which she was objectified and sexualised are deeply intertwined with this medicalizing gaze, just like the artworks that we have been discussing. Baartman, who led a difficult life under white supremacy and colonialism, was viewed by contemporary men of science in a similar way to how anatomical models were viewed: through the medical gaze.

Fig. 4 — An engraving of Sartjie Sara Baartman. Courtesy of Wikipedia

Foucault traced the medicalisation of sex, or the birth of a medical discipline that dealt with sexuality, to the middle of the 19th century (Foucault, 1994) and particularly to the publication of Psychopathia Sexualis in 1845 by physician Heinrich Kann. But while his theories around confession, psychoanalysis and how the state shapes our sexual orientations are extremely valuable, I do not necessarily agree with the timeframe he presented. Further in this chapter, and in accordance with Bette Talvacchia's theories, I will showcase how the first medical manuals lifted some of their illustrations from the I Modi, but right now I would like to focus on Baartman and how the men who paid to engage erotically with her (whether by looking at her, touching her or having sex with her) were able to 'elevate' the nature of their intentions in the name of science — and how this is intertwined with the observation/enjoyment of Anatomical Venuses. I think this is particularly relevant for the Foucauldian narrative around the medicalisation of sex and

sexuality because this analysis brings to light the colonial and racial elements of the medical gaze. By doing this comparative analysis, this is tied together with the racist element that underlies the understanding of Beauty, Desirability[45] and the management of (mainly male, but certainly always white) sexual desire

In my investigation of this case, I will also be making a fair amount of inferences and drawing on my lived experience as a (white) migrant sex worker. I will furthermore be drawing on the experiences that other non-white sex workers have shared with me, as well as using DaShaun L. Harrison's theories in 'Belly of the Beast' (where the relationship between Beauty, Desire and racism is made patently obvious) and Sabrina Strings' 'Fearing the Black Body' as a framework. However, while I actively work on decolonising my thinking and my living, there is room for error in this analysis – I will never be able to fully understand the lived experiences of those with fatter, darker bodies than mine. Therefore, I offer this not just as a disclaimer, but as an invitation for the reader to doubt me, and to engage with the possibilities that this analysis opens.

Foucault's medical gaze can be summarised as 'how doctors modify the patient's story, fitting it into a biomedical paradigm, filtering out non-biomedical material.' (Misselbrook, 2013, p. 312). A gaze is a selective way of looking; in the case of the

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[45] 'Desire/ability politics is the methodology through which the sovereignty of those deemed (conventionally) Attractive/Beautiful is determined. Put another way, the politics of Desire labels that which determines who gains and holds both social and structural power through the affairs of sensuality, often predicated on anti-Blackness, anti-fatness, (trans) misogynoir, cissexism, queer antagonism, and all other structural violence. It is intended to name the social, political, and economic capital one obtains / is given access to through their ability to be Desired.' (Harrison, 2021, p. 13)

Foucauldian definition of the medical gaze, it discards any aspects that are not relevant to a particular understanding of the biomedical paradigm that the 'looker' subscribes to. Foucault develops his medical gaze as a way to explain (or understand) the shifting paradigm in the production of knowledge during the 18th century, which is one of the reasons why it is so apt for this analysis. When I write about the medical gaze, I am referring to a visual, theoretical and medical framework based on colonialism. This framework is made evident in Francois Bernier's racial classification published anonymously in 1684 in which he divided humanity into four distinct races with different physical and psychological characteristics. This is, according to Strings (2007), one of the backbones of white supremacy and racism. What is interesting for my analysis is that Bernier's racial classification, as with many of the works that follow it, laid the groundwork for this medical gaze to bloom because they purported themselves to be 'scientific and neutral' and refused to admit their own internal biases. This allowed for anyone's history to be turned into their medical history because medicine was now 'the domain of its experience and the structure of its rationality' (Foucault, 1994, p. 15). Observations made by doctors and men of science, who were reading, writing and thinking in ways that were extremely biassed, were understood as rational, scientific (i.e. neutral, unbiased) observations[46].

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[46] One only needs to look at the whole history of obstetrics to find examples of this claim, but excellent examples can be found by looking at the treatment of 'hysteria' in women (which was not removed from the APA's DSM until 1968), the lack of diagnostic tools for women with ADHD or autism during the 1990s, or the treatment faced by fat people when it comes to the medical industrial complex (Pausé, 2014).

As for 'pornographic experience', I am not aware of anyone having coined this term before, although I have heard several of my sex-working colleagues use similar terms (as a matter of fact, one of the services that a full-service sex worker may offer is the 'PSE', or 'pornstar experience'). When I use it, I am referring to a pornographic aesthetic experience. This may be achieved by watching pornography, engaging in sexual activities, watching a burlesque show, watching erotically charged films or works of art, etc. This does not mean that the experience itself is modelled after a particular type of pornography (such as the aforementioned PSE), but that the experience itself is pornographic by virtue of being sexually titillating and/or sexually moving through aesthetic means.

Now that we have a good grasp of both concepts and how I intend to use them, I believe it should start to become apparent how one can occlude the other. In the following paragraphs, I will look to establish how a pornographic experience may have been possible with these wax figures and then with Sara Baartman. I do so in order to demonstrate the usage of scientific curiosity and medicalisation as a way to cloak the pornographic experience. The erotic value of most Anatomical Venuses is rather obvious[47], and can be easily intuited through the shock of modern audiences (Ebenstein, 2016, p. 181) when engaging with these artworks: the modern mind is not at ease when death and the erotic or pornographic are so obviously intertwined. Additionally, they are

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[47] For a more elaborate argumentation on the erotic value of the Venuses, please see (Morbid Anatomy Museum & Ebenstein, 2016), D. Nichols, M. (2013) as well as Venus Dissected: The Visual Blazon of Mid-Eighteenth-Century Medical Atlases. In *Sex and Death in Eighteenth-Century Literature*. New York: Routledge.

portrayed as women in the peak of their life, beautiful, laying back and offering their bounty to those who open up their cavities, and have a lineage that goes back to the I Modi (which will be discussed later). Thus, the erotic/pornographic value of these pieces of art is established.

In order to establish whether a pornographic experience is possible with these artworks, we should look at the characteristics of the artists who created them, as well as their audience. If we look at some of the artists behind the Sleeping Beauty and Anatomical Venuses we have Philippe Curtius (1737-1794), physician turned fine art wax figure modeller, Clemente Susini (1754-1814), Italian sculptor who specialised in anatomical models, or Marie Catherin Biheron (1719-1795), scientific illustrator and wax figure artist, who 'from the age of sixteen, created wax anatomical models that she exhibited to the public' (Ebenstein, 2016, p. 37). Looking at the contemporary public of the Anatomical Venuses, we can find medical students, fellow artists and men of a certain station who could gain access to them. Later on when wax models became more common and started touring c. 19th century, even whole families would have been able to look at some of them, although the most explicit displays would still be only accessible to men. The motivations of these different audiences would have obviously differed, with medical students looking to understand the anatomy for medical purposes and artists looking to either emulate the work for their own wax figures or gain an underlying understanding of anatomy for other artworks.

So, who could have had a 'pornographic experience' when looking at these objects? Considering how the artworks themselves are posed and created, I think it's difficult to argue that there was no titillating feelings or erotic intention in their design.

Again, if there was no erotic intention in their design, why portray some of them with such enraptured, orgasmic expressions? I don't think that adjudicating those expressions to mystic rapture (such as was the case in Bernini's well known St Therese statue) or to a social convention to make the portrayal of death less distasteful removes their erotic potential. And as I am not arguing that erotic titillation was their sole purpose, proving their potential is sufficient to at least consider that there was some kind of erotic intention in their creation.

As for the medical students, we can speculate on the sexually voyeuristic role of the spectator when faced with these figures. The act of laying these Beautiful, pseudo-orgasming, female figures bare and rummaging around their innards (the absolutely most literally intimate experience one can have with a human body[48]) is very likely going to be a pornographic experience in and of itself. This would potentially have been the case whether it was the medical student or man of a certain station who was being offered to look at the object.

Once the Anatomical Venus left the theatre of operations and entered the world stage, we can find written evidence of their erotic potential and how this was acknowledged (Morbid Anatomy Museum & Ebenstein, 2016, p. 148). Additionally, when these models started to be toured in the 19th century, they are sometimes talked about in

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[48] While I concede that prima facie this may not seem like a particularly pornographic, erotic or sexually intimate experience, the argument that I am making is that coupling that experience with the erotic and pornographic potential of the figures themselves can result in a pornographic experience.

newspapers where young men (specifically) are invited[49] to 'learn about the anatomical mysteries with little effort' (Ebenstein, 2016, p. 148) – which would mean that, among other things, they can learn how female anatomy works without having to pay a sex worker to give them a tour of their body. Thus, I consider the possibility of a pornographic experience a crucial although often overlooked element in the reception of Anatomical Venuses.

Let's now look at the 'pornographic experience' as it pertained to the shows that Baartman took part in during her touring years. It is important to understand that the 'showing off' of Baartman started as plain, obvious, literal sex work – her owner sold her sexual services to ailing soldiers: 'Her first shows took place at the local Naval Hospital [in Cape Town] [...] Sara would reveal her naked boy to the soldiers for their last gasp of sexual entertainment before welcoming sweet death.' (Sabrina Strings, 2019, p. 90). According to Clifton Crais and Pamela Scully (Sabrina Strings, 2019, p. 92), for a fee the men would have been able to touch her or have intercourse with her. The 'pornographic experience' was built into her shows from the beginning. And the 'medical gaze' component would come, at first, by the hand of Alexander Dunlop, a scottish physician who would convince Baartman's owner to travel with her to London, where she could be toured for more money: Dunlop 'promoted Sara as an erotic and scientific curiosity' (Sabrina Strings, 2019, p. 91). And it would be this mix of the erotic and the scientific that

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[49] 'When Signor Sarti's exhibition — a collection of anatomical waxworks featuring an Anatomical Venus and an Anatomical Adonis — opened in London in 1839, the distinguished literary magazine Athenaeum recommended it to 'younger male readers' who wanted to obtain 'a few general ideas on the subject of anatomy, which they may do without labour or distrust'.' (Ebenstein, 2016, p. 148)

carried Sara's shows all around Europe. Georges Cuvier, the head of the Museum of Natural History in Paris when Sara visited, was apparently obsessed with measuring and recording all of her features (while, at the same time, being utterly disgusted by her weight – and probably his attraction to her). He was particularly interested in measuring the length of her labia, which she denied him. Unfortunately, he got hold of her body when she died in 1815. In an act that would sadly render Baartman in a similar position to the Anatomical Venuses, he ended up performing an autopsy and having unfettered access to her body. Only in death had she lost all the agency that she had managed to retain during her life. As we can see, in the case of Baartman, the 'medical gaze' and the 'pornographic experience' had been foundational characteristics of her shows.

If Baartman's live body elicited such 'scientific curiosity' and had such erotic potential, why are there no Anatomical Venuses that are fat and black? Why are they (all of them) white and thin? The 'pornographic experience' offered by Baartman was an extremely subversive one, and we can see that in Cuvier's obsession with, and apparent dislike of, her fatness. As a tattooed, not-quite-thin sex worker, I can attest to clients hiring me because I offered a similarly subversive 'pornographic experience' — one where they could indulge in their desire for a fatter, fuller femme figure without having to defend the choice of pursuing fat femmes in public. This allowed them (like I imagine it allowed the men who paid Baartman) to enjoy their chosen 'pornographic experience' without losing any social standing for liking bodies that do not align with Thinness and Beauty (Harrison, 2021). But the Anatomical Venuses started as an institutional scientific project (Ebenstein, 2016, p. 25). They made death and dissection attractive by using the Beauty canon of their time — white, young and thin. They were a tool for education,

designed for the perpetuation of the contemporary system, and the system wasn't concerned with teaching doctors about black, fat bodies that were 'inDesirable'. The system, always concerned with self-perpetuation, would only allow for ideal bodies to be (re)produced, hence, there was no room for subversive 'pornographic experiences' in the initial design of the Anatomical Venus. Of course, undesirable characteristics would eventually make their way into some anatomical wax displays, such as those showing venereal illnesses — which poses a further set of very interesting questions on the intersection between disgust and Desire.

The 'medical gaze' was able to cloak the 'pornographic experience' very effectively, as we have seen in the cases mentioned above. By pretending to be a fully external gaze, one that is not dependant on internal biases, likes or dislikes (going back to the colonial idea that science is impartial and only concerned with universal truths), this discourse appears to eliminate the possibility of any erotic titillation (or any other form of enjoyment that is not sheer scientific prowess). It reframes the 'pornographic experience' as a 'scientific experiment', and thus it can avoid state, religious or public criticism, as it is in pursuit of greater scientific knowledge. But in the cloaking of the 'pornographic experience' it also affects it, as it forces the spectator to position themselves above the performer (in the case of Baartman) or object (in the case of the Anatomical Venuses), effectively turning the 'pornographic experience' into a forcefully voyeuristic and sometimes abusive one.

I Modi vs. Scientific Illustration

Joanna Ebstein proposes in her book, *The Anatomical Venus*, that these figures exemplify the tension between science and mysticism, and between scientist and the Catholic Church trying to negotiate both the dissection and preservation of the human body. They inhabit many liminal spaces, including the one between art and science that is now mostly occupied by scientific illustration and 3D models. But Ebstein also proposes that they are the brainchild of a moment in time in which 'it was still possible for religion, art, philosophy and science to coexist peacefully' (Ebstein, 2016, p. 19), which could perhaps partially account for how uncanny and unsettling they appear to a modern audience.

The creation of any anatomical venus required the artists to be familiar with dissection, and not only that, but necessitated fresh cadavers being dissected by the artists in order to make the models what they are: 'Over two hundred cadavers were sometimes required to craft a single dissectible figure, owing to the speed with which bodies decayed' (Ebstein, 2016, p. 49). One of the main goals of the venuses was to avoid the need for medical students to dissect so many cadavers. This was the aim behind the collection at La Specola, which is considered to be the first scientific museum in Europe. Housed in a former observatory (hence the name) in Florence and brought about under the auspice of the Medici Family, then-Grand Duke of Tuscany Leopold II funded the opening of the wax figure workshop that would produce pieces such as the Venerina, featured above. Some of La Specola's artworks are so accurate that 'some of them [demonstrate] anatomical structures that had yet to be named or described at the time of their making' (Ebstein, 2016, p. 29). Besides how incredibly on-point the anatomical observations

recorded in the artworks/models are, these works are also of extreme artistic quality and incredibly accomplished. The Anatomical Venuses are beautifully laid on rich fabrics, the ecstasy captured in their bodies' slight movements and tension speaking of incredible craftsmanship, not to speak of the attention to detail shown in the application of hair, colour, etc. These are actual masterpieces that showcased not just the relationship between sensual ecstasy and death, but also reverence and awe to the divinity of life (Ebenstein, 2016).

Ebstein proposes that the reason for choosing Venus, the goddess of love, as an inspiration for these figures is the long-standing relationship between Florence, where the workshop was located, and the goddess, as well as Leopold II's attempt to put make La Specola a location that could go toe to toe with other Venusian artworks in the Uffizi Gallery, who was already featuring as a destination of the Grand Tour. But I would also like to point out the relationship between previous illustrated medical manuals and the rich tradition of I Modi and other pornographic images, where there is also an obvious relationship between pornography and the portrayal of anatomy.
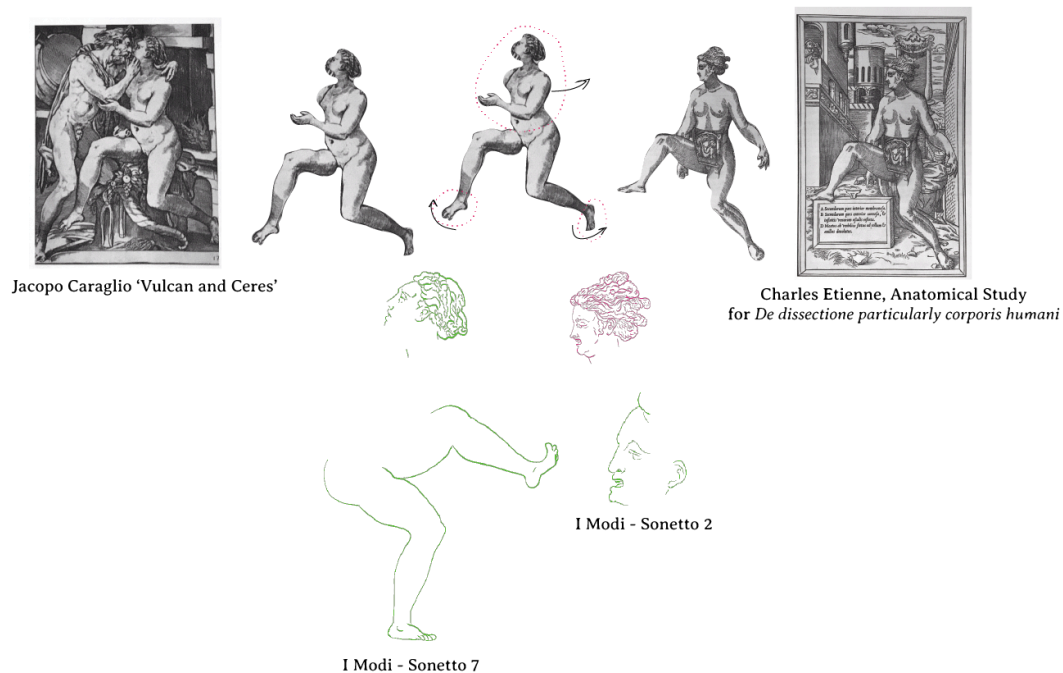
Fig. 5 — Comparison of Loves of the Gods, I Modi and Etienne's Anatomical Study. Original plates courtesy of Istituto Nazionale della Grafica and Getty Research Institute, comparison and graphics by AJ Bravo

We can now turn to the I Modi section of this chapter, where we will be looking at how pornographic images eventually landed in an anatomy treaty — strengthening the argument for the connection between the medical gaze and pornography. One of the most infamous examples of pornographic censorship must be the case of I Modi, a series of sixteen pornographic engravings produced by the former workshop of Raphael — in particular, by his engraver Marcantonio Raimondi after illustrations of Raphael's pupil and successor, Giulio Romano (Talvacchia, 2001). This was done in the print workshop that Raphael had established with Il Baviera, who was the manager. The first edition of the I Modi was published in 1524 by Raimondi, who was convicted by pope Clement VII as a result. After this, Pietro Aretino composed sixteen sonnets to accompany the sixteen engravings and they were again published in 1527. Whilst unfortunately no copies of these

editions remain, the I Modi were so innovative (Talvacchia, 2001) that they have inspired plenty of contemporary and later versions and interpretations.

Renaissance Art Historian Bette Talvacchia produced a groundbreaking analysis of the historical and social importance of the I Modi in 2001, where she also discusses some of the works inspired by the I Modi. Perhaps the most famous is 'The Loves of the Gods', a series of engravings produced by Jacopo Caraglio (1500-1565) which featured several gods and goddesses in erotic poses and which, more importantly, lifted the positions almost directly from the I Modi (Talvacchia, 2001). We will look at how this clever strategy allowed Caraglio to escape the censorship that landed Raimondi in jail in Chapter 4, but first let's look at the unlikely way in which the I Modi, via 'The Loves of the Gods', inspired a series of scientific illustrations.

In her book, Talvacchia points out that of the many appropriations and homages to 'The Loves of the Gods' one of the most unusual is 'De dissections parties corpora's humani', written by Charles Estienne and published in Paris in 1545. Estienne had studied classics at the University of Padua, and was now a medical doctor — according to Talvacchia, this was the perfect combination that made it possible for him to produce such a treaty: 'His reuse of the figures commissioned by Baviera, transformed from mythological personages into anatomical specimens, places his medical illustrations in the sequence of responses to the possibilities of sexual representation initiated by I Modi' (Talvacchia, 2001, p. 161). Talvacchia proposes that in the 16th century, there was a more fluid relationship between what we would now classify as scientific and artistic interests in the body: these two views are brought together in the Estienne woodcuts. She also argues that the relationship with the Loves and, by artistic genealogy, with the I Modi, was

not casual inspiration but an attempt to tie his artistic work with this other tradition/artistic genealogy: 'his art figures travelled with all of their genre's conceptual baggage and carried it to enrich the visual text' (Talvacchia, 2001, p. 163).

It is important to note that the borrowing from the Loves occurs in Book 3 of Estienne's work, and that is the section devoted to the female reproductive system. Here, Talvacchia identifies that nine out of the ten subjects in the woodcuts have been lifted from the Caraglio engravings: 'The systematic and blatant exploitation of a source in mythologised erotic material fused with the dissection of the female reproductive system is so wilful, and so strongly signalled within the book's structure, that it indicates a coherent purpose on the part of the ideator' (Talvacchia, 2001, p. 164). Talvacchia goes on to argue that by separating the female biology stylistically, Estienne is marking its 'otherness' — and that by framing the female reproductive system through erotic artwork, Estienne is reinforcing the association between biological sexual functions and contemporary socio-cultural notions of sexuality. This is specially important to understand because it is through such efforts that the 'medical gaze' as defined above is not just created but established: Estienne's book states in its introduction that 'its purpose [i]s the discovery of truth found on observation', refusing to acknowledge the author's (and the reader's) socio-cultural bias that is shown in the choice of framing and positioning of the female figures in Book 3.

Talvacchia's proposed process of transformation from the figures in the Loves to the figures in Estienne's woodcuts presumes that it was just the Loves that were used as a reference. Her theory is that Estienne and his artist team chose the most explicit poses in the Loves (meaning, the female figures that were more frontal and whose legs were open),

then copied them in counter direction, altered the elements that were necessary (such as removing the arms that would occlude the view of the body) and finally, they were placed onto the woodcut, where they would finally be printed in the same direction as the original figures. As I've shown in the figure attached which is concerned with the woodcut lifted from Caraglio's 'Vulcan and Ceres', this would mean decoupling the female figure from the male figure, changing the position of the arms, the direction of the torso and the feet, and then placing the figure in its new surroundings. Additionally, Talvacchia proposes that it was then that the 'dissected' area would be removed from the woodcut and a new woodcut, featuring the dissected area, cut to size would be fit flush in the available space. As I have shown in the figure above, even though some parts have not been exactly copied, similar preoccupations betray that the artists could've used the I Modi as references, such as the similarities in the treatment of the hair and the profile.

Talvacchia herself traces the origins of Caraglio's 'Vulcan and Ceres' to Giulio Romano's sketch of Apollo and Hyacinth, which partakes in the Renaissance tradition of utilising intertwined legs to signify sexual intercourse (Talvacchia, 2001, p. 129), as well as a print commissioned by Raimondi of Jupiter and Semele showing a similar position. This would be sufficient to prove the genealogy descending from the I Modi to Estienne's work. But I have additionally highlighted elements from the I Modi that appear directly in this one of Estienne's woodcuts. I am not necessarily proposing that Estienne or his team of artists would have had access directly to the Sonetti Lussuriosi, but features such as the open mouth, very similar to the one found in the second Sonetto (which seems slightly out of place in a lone female figure supposed to be showcasing her inner anatomical workings) as well as the angle of the legs found in the Sonetto number seven further

cement this 'artistic baggage' and stylistic genealogy that Estienne wanted his images to have.

Finally, Talvacchia dispels the notion that these woodcuts may have been first commissioned for erotic uses — which is evident by looking at Figure 2.3, since the angle of the feet have been changed in order to fit the plaque with the text (Talvacchia, 2001, p. 165). This plaque is always integrated with the figure, which precludes the woodcuts from having had any other original intention.

Fig. 6 — One of Charles Estienne's woodcuts for *La dissectione des parties du corps humain diuisee en trois liures,* 1546. St Andrews copy at TypFP.B46CE

Before we move on to think about the aesthetic implications of all of these decisions, let's look at another of Estienne's woodcuts, for it contains not only a very particular decision but may also reinforce the relationship between the I Modi and Anatomical Venuses. In this case, the woodcut repurposes Caraglio's 'Jupiter and Diana'. While the female figure retains elements such as the gesture of her right hand, her head is

now tilted with her eyes closed (Talvacchia, 2001, p. 165). This is a common feature of the Estienne woodcuts that is made particularly apparent by this comparison: the eyelids of the female figures are redrawn to be partially or totally closed, which in this case removes 'the original's confrontational glare' (Talvacchia, 2001, p. 165). Now, the reader may peruse her anatomy laid bare without having to confront her own gaze. According to Talvacchia, 'the scientific subject legitimises the representation of unwrapped female sexual parts, while the unconscious state of the figures renders observation of them more dominating and pleasurable' (Talvacchia, 2001, p. 66). And: 'their placement in luxurious bedroom interiors underscore the sumptuous elements of the visual experience and cancel the connection of these figures to cadavers' (Talvacchia, 2001, p. 167). Talvacchia argues that this functions as a similarly 'anaesthetising' device to Caraglio's choice of presenting his Loves as part of the mythological tradition: Estienne's female figures inhabit a domain between life and death, which is equally as remote as the 'mythological realm from which their prototypes are taken' (Talvacchia, 2001, p. 167).

In Estienne's dissected female bodies we find a number of elements that help shape the 'medical gaze', and that also continue furthering the reach of the pornographic programme devised for the I Modi. These figures are, as we have shown, lifted from Caraglio's Loves, which are in turn inspired by the I Modi and other pornographic drawings and engravings made in the circle of Raimondi and Romano. They were carefully chosen not only for their explicit qualities but for their pornographic/erotic qualities as well as their artistic baggage. Estienne wanted his book to become part of this particular tradition of engravings. Talvacchia argues that the contemporary notion of getting closer to the truth by observing nature and using art and theory to temper said

knowledge played a part in this decision: the observation would come from the dissected part of the woodcut, while the art would help temper said observation by providing a particular and stylised environment. But there is one particular change that wasn't strictly necessary to make these figures work for Estienne's purposes: the lowering (or complete removal) of the figures' gaze. Technically, the woodcuts would have worked as well if the figures were returning the gaze[50] to the spectator, but Estienne and his team of artists make the decision to further detache the figure from its relationship with the spectator by making their figures close their eyes or lower their gaze.

As we will later see in our analysis of the I Modi, the confronting gaze of the female figures was probably one of the main reasons (besides the lack of mythological 'cloaking') why I Modi faced such censorship, and Talvacchia herself gives ample evidence of why the established view of the sexual hierarchy would have had enormous trouble reconciling the female's active gaze (or active attitudes). Here is an interesting point regarding the returning gaze[51] and objectification: while it is much harder to deny the subjectivity of whomever is depicted in an image (moving or otherwise) when they're

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[50] According to Michael Fried, Manet's appropriated the returning gaze from a Raphael/Raimondi print for his 'Dejeneur sur l'herbe' and later on used it to great effect in his 'Olympia'. (Fried, 1996)

[51] The returning of the gaze is a common feature in contemporary pornography. Nowadays it is very common for pornography audiences to praise a content creator when they can 'hold their gaze' and return the gaze to the camera. The returning of the gaze to the spectator is used in many paintings throughout history as a device through which the gaze of the audience can enter and exit the picture, therefore 'catching' them in an active observational loop. To me, this suggests that the return of the gaze makes the audience feel closer, perhaps more 'included' in their experience of the artwork.

returning the gaze of the looker, this does not necessarily mean that their subjectivity can't be disregarded. While Nussbaum (1995) proposed 'denial of subjectivity' as one of the hallmark seven features of objectification, Langton (2009) suggests that there need not be any denial because the looker could choose to disregard the subjectivity — recognising that the subject has their own views and feelings, but choosing to disregard them for their viewing pleasure.

While I am certain that this is at least part of the reason why Estienne and his team chose to close the eyes of the figures, I am more interested in examining the aesthetic effect of this choice in the immediate reading of the image, as well as in the formation of the 'medical gaze'[52]. Therefore, the removal of the returning gaze removes the audience from this 'closeness', and in this particular case, allows the audience to enter a hierarchy of authority regarding the figures in the woodcuts. This continues to cement the (often colonial) elements of the 'medical gaze': it reinforces this sense of hierarchy and authority by reaffirming the position of the figures as 'others', 'things' to be looked at instead of potential (or imagined) subjects to be interacted with. The way that these scientific illustrations and manuals created and distributed knowledge about feminine bodies was through this process of othering.

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[52] The returning of the gaze is a common feature in contemporary pornography. Nowadays it is very common for pornography audiences to praise a content creator when they can 'hold their gaze' and return the gaze to the camera. The returning of the gaze to the spectator is used in many paintings throughout history as a device through which the gaze of the audience can enter and exit the picture, therefore 'catching' them in an active observational loop. To me, this suggests that the return of the gaze makes the audience feel closer, perhaps more 'included' in their experience of the artwork.

Estienne's choice to use pornographic illustrations as the basis for his female reproductive anatomy woodcuts cements the relationship between voyeurism and the 'medical gaze', and it furthers the ability of the 'medical gaze' to cloak itself in objectivity by distancing its audience from its figures. It provides the reader with a non-confrontational aesthetic experience which commodifies the access to the female body and reinforces the hierarchical relationship between (male, active) doctor and (female, passive) patient. There is a philosophical connection in Estienne's work between dissection and the search for truth (Talvacchia, 2001, p. 181) — further allowing the 'medical gaze' to avoid any scrutiny (and a lot of the censorship that pornography faces).

Estienne's volume was such a success that it was immediately reissued in French — but fears about the 'use' of such volumes by 'a presumptive audience of lewd disposition' (Talvacchia, 2001, p. 186) would continue to abound around medical publications well into the 17th century and beyond, often prompting any descriptions of the reproductive organs being printed in Latin as opposed to the rest of the text, which would often be printed in vernacular languages. Talking about sexuality or reproductive matters (which, let's remember, are two distinct subjects) in vernacular tongues would have made said discussions too available to those audiences that couldn't access them through the 'medical gaze', therefore making this knowledge dangerous to them – for it could lead to lewd behaviour. This is the exact mechanism that the 'medical gaze' uses not only to extract lewd pleasure from 'scientific' knowledge and experiments, but also to become a tool of oppression against those who it is observing:

In Estienne's De dissectione, the violation of mythology begets the realm of science. But is this realm any freer of the arbitrary constructs that its methodology claimed to disdain? In Estienne's anatomies, representational violence was acted upon female bodies taken from a mythological context, and thus inscribed on a vivid tradition that naturalised specific attitudes about the category 'female'. [...] The implications of this procedure still resound in contemporary cultural structures, so that an unravelling of the eroticism-mythology-medicine triad, so deftly woven in the imagery of the Renaissance, reveals patterns that lurk within the fabric of our own discourses of sexuality, and that are worth pondering. (Talvacchia, 2001, p. 187)

What Talvacchia points to so deftly is the way in which objectification is embedded in the productions of these texts and illustrations, which are extremely successful in othering their subjects and rendering them as a mere hodge-podge of biological elements available to study and dissect, instead of presenting them as subjects in their own right. And while I won't go as far as to pretend that the I Modi was a foundational work of sex-positive feminism, it did not present its subjects ready to be consumed and dissected by the all-knowing medical gaze.

Fat, queer hookers: menace to polite society

In this section I will be looking at some of the possible reasons behind the specific censorship challenges that people who embody fatness, blackness and queerness face, particularly in combination with a sex working identity. This censorship is notable

because when looking at the content produced by sex workers and adult content creators who sit at this intersection, their content is routinely censored by social media platforms (as discussed in detail in Chapter 3). I propose that this is because their bodies and content are very often seen as less elegant, more explicit and demeaning than content that features thin, white bodies. Firstly, I will explore the relationship between desire, fatness and blackness and how white beauty is configured through the texts of Da'Shaun L. Harrison and Cat Pausé. Then, I will briefly go through the investigations of Dr. Carolina Are into social media censorship faced by sex-work and sex-work adjacent creators. Finally, I will focus on the relationship between elegance and beauty, which I propose sits at the intersection of colonialism and capitalism as an effective tool that dictates who should access power through desirability. My main claim is that black, queer and fat bodies that monetise their sexuality are a complicated paradox in capitalism because of their distance to currencies of desirability that are more closely connected with whiteness (such as thinness or purity), and that this is the main reason behind the heightened censorship that they face in social media. As a result of that, we miss out on interesting and innovative artwork and they miss out on the opportunity to work in better conditions. This is an important part of the narrative presented in this chapter, as it brings the aforementioned historical 'medical-gaze' and objectification of femme/female bodies into the realities that marginalised bodies and creators suffer today.

> To be Black and fat is to always live as Dead, and 'health' ensures that. As opposed to one's literal and physical state of being dead, Death signifies that one – particularly, the Black fat- walks as Dead, talks as Dead, lives and breathes

through Death, and that is one is ontologically always already socially Dead.
(Harrison and Laymon, p. 433)

In 'Belly of The Beast' Da'Shaun L. Harrison proposes that the (Black) fat is not just othered, outside of the spectrum of normality and acceptability, but that the fat is actually, ontologically[53] Dead. The idea of the fat being ontologically Dead presupposes first and foremost the fat is beyond any form of redemption unless the fat goes through a process of rebirth where the fatness is left behind and the fat body gains a new life (a new meaning) as a normal, thin body. This 'death at origin' or 'death by default' state poses many challenges for fat people: lesser access to healthcare, basic necessities, or human compassion (Pausé, 2014). After all, if one's body is socially constructed as already dead[54], that means their needs and wants will never be prioritised (perhaps even considered). Unless the fat overcomes its ontological dead state by transforming into a completely

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[53] Harrison uses 'ontologically dead' throughout the text to mean that someone is treated in social contexts as if they're already dead. They are referring to, for example, how the medical industrial complex deals with fat Black people: by refusing treatment as long as they are fat (pushing weight loss diets instead of asking for blood tests or other forms of screening). A thin person would be screened for their symptoms, but a fat (Black) person is treated as if their fatness (and Blackness) means they are already dead, and the only way to be treated (to be 'healthy') is to stop being fat (Black) = dead. Since this is their preferred term, I have opted to continue using it throughout the chapter, even though this may not be the exact way in which philosophy scholars may use it.

[54] 'Said again: to be Black and fat is to always live as Dead, and 'health' ensures that. As opposed to one's literal and physical state of being dead, Death signifies that one — particularly, the Black fat — walks as Dead, talks as Dead, lives and breathes through Death, and that one is ontologically always already socially Dead.' (Harrison, 2021, p. 36)

different body (through weight loss, as mentioned above), they will be socially disregarded. While this may appear to be a bold theory for those not involved in abolitionist politics, the day-to-day experience of (black) fat folks as well as phenomenons such as the war on obesity, diet culture and social obsession with the constant pursuit of an unattainable physique underline how valid and accurate Harrison's theory is.

While keeping this ontological deadness in mind, let's look now at the politics of Beauty and desirability. Something to note here is that I have kept the capitalisation of certain words (Black, Dead, Desire) the same as while discussing Harrison's contributions. This is to differentiate the non-capitalised words from the capitalised ones which should be read in the context of their work and this discussion. Not understanding Beauty and Desirability as (inherent) traits that someone (or something) might have, but understanding them as social currencies that, depending on certain traits and other social currencies that someone (or something) might already have (assigned) to them, allow for different social positionings: 'Desire is about much more than being desired; it is about one's ability to always already be positioned as the very embodiment of the thing(s) that make(s) one Desire/able' (Harrison and Laymon, p. 13). This ability is both given and pursued: if one is white, thin, and from an upper class background, one has 'given' characteristics that help said positioning. On the other hand, one is expected and encouraged to pursue either these 'desirable' characteristics or characteristics in their vicinity.

An excellent example of this that showcases how Beauty and Desirability are heavily steeped into white supremacy is the Kibbe body types and colour analysis. These are two fashion styling systems, the first which analyses and categorises body types while

the second analyses skin, hair and eye colour. The Kibbe body system was proposed by stylist David Kibbe in the 1980s and divides women into 13 body types according to their proportions. Colour analysis, interestingly, can be traced all the way back to the 18th Century in chemist Michael Chevreul's (1786-1889) work analysing the properties of different colours when they were put together. This links it back to the same historical period in which the medical gaze was born, and this is even more of a stark coincidence since the whole idea behind most colour analysis systems is to find a series of colours that highlight desirable qualities in skin tone and hair colour – finding colours that neutralise red or olive overtones, for example. Although there is not one single colour analysis system, they started becoming popular in the mid 19th century, where magazines like Godey's would print out advice on what colours would suit blonde or brunette women, for example. Finally, in the first half of the 20th century cosmetics companies started using colour analysis as a way to sell makeup products by recommending different lipsticks depending on the colour of the eyes or the hair of the customer.

The promise of both systems is to deliver a set of dressing and styling guidelines that will enhance the users' features and make them more attractive and elegant. All the commercial analysis's of body types that I have encountered are rooted in, or show affinities with, phrenology[55]. Besides its connections with phrenology, which is a direct inheritance of Bernier's system of racial classification mentioned in the previous sections, the Kibbe body type systems associates thin, elongated bodies with elegance, and focuses on 'balancing out' undesirable characteristics that are often associated with black body

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[55]An off-shoot of eugenics which analyses the human bone structure and adjudicates personality traits based on arbitrary characteristics present in these structures

types, such as bigger bottoms or protruding bellies. For more information on how thinness and whiteness are linked, please see the previous section on Sarah Baartman as well as the last chapter of Sabrina String's 'Fearing the Black Body' (2007). The Kibbe body type system is mainly applied to thin women, and additionally, classifies curvaceous women as 'Romantic' – furthering the association between fat women and hyper-feminisation: 'As a fat 'woman' it often feels like androgyny (which was the thing I most identified with) is something denied to you. Androgyny is always viewed as something white, skinny and flat chested, of which I was non (I had a 38H chest). And then, in contrast, fat women must be feminine – in makeup, etc.- to be celebrated and desirable.' (Interviewee quoted in Harrison and Laymon, p. 95)

Philosophical aesthetics has generally paid little attention to the link between aesthetic judgements and bodily oppression. One of the philosophers[56] who has done and continues to do work regarding bodily oppression is Sherri Irvin. 'Resisting Body Oppression' (Irvin, 2007) is an invaluable source of interesting arguments and of supporting evidence where Irvin has gathered together several studies that demonstrate a general bias in western society towards 'attractive' people and where she demonstrates how that bias has horrible consequences to those who haven't won the genetic lottery of being white, thin and attractive: 'from the moment of birth, attractive people (with a few exceptions) accrue positive social capital in families, schools, and workplaces, while unattractive people pay a very substantial penalty that may involve less positive parental

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[56] A. W. Eaton has also contributed to the discussion with her 'Taste in Bodies and Fat Oppression', which not only summarises fatism and its causes but proposes interesting strategies to combat it (A.W. Eaton, 2016).

attention, less support from teachers, less recognition for their qualifications, less help when they need it, more punishment, and so forth. ' (Irvin, 2017, p. 5). She argues that attractiveness forms a similar category to gender and race in that it produces judgements that severely affect people's access to the resources they need (Irvin, 2017). It is this 'accruing of social capital' that Irvin so clearly demonstrates that Harrison refers to throughout 'Belly of the Beast'.

Within the idea of attractiveness, I would like to pay attention to one particular aspect: elegance. Elegance is defined as 'the quality of being graceful and attractive in appearance or behaviour' by the Cambridge dictionary. My reason for focusing on elegance particularly is that it is one of the defining factors of whorearchy[57]. Elegance is both a selling point employed by many high-end sex workers in order to differentiate themselves from other providers, but it is also a strategy that upholders of the whorearchy may employ to distance themselves from the stigma associated with their profession. The reason why elegance works this way is because elegance allows those who can employ it to appear closer to whiteness and purity. Elegant providers do not service many clients every day, so they are more pure and exclusive. Elegant providers are not gaudy in appearance and can be taken out to dinner in exclusive restaurants, so the nature of their relationship with their clients can be occluded in public, placing both the client and the provider closer to white respectability.

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[57] A hierarchy of oppression internal to sex workers where, traditionally, the sex workers with the biggest exposure to clients (street workers, brothel workers and escorts) are considered the lowest and strippers, cam girls and Dominatrixes are considered the pinnacle.

The promise of elegance is itself rooted in classism (and in fatphobia and white supremacy[58]). According to the Cambridge Dictionary definition of elegance, being graceful is associated with being able to move with grace: this kind of movement is the hallmark of a thin, healthy body that has been groomed since birth to move in a way that is aesthetically pleasing to the western mind. This body must have been born in an environment where there were enough resources to devote to this kind of training. As Irvin demonstrates in her paper, attractive children have access to more and better resources from the get go (Irvin, 2007). Obviously, children born into higher economic privilege also have better access to resources that will keep them healthy and to an environment that can train their bodies into elegance. And since 'it has been widely observed that in a majority White society with a history of White supremacy, standards of beauty are racialized White' (Irvin, 2007, p. 4), and it is widely acknowledged that due to chattel slavery and colonialism, non-white people have generally less access to economic resources, it must be concluded that access to elegance is rather restricted. And because it is restricted, accessing it is an indicator of proximity to whiteness and privilege. Elegance is something that upper class people (women in particular) must do or exude (apparently) effortlessly; a naturally inherent characteristic of the 'well-bred' folks that do not need to 'call attention to themselves' in order to be appreciated.

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[58] For an excellent historiography of fatphobia as developed through white supremacy, please see 'Fearing the Black Body', particularly chapter 4, 'The Birth of the Ascetic Aesthetic' where Sabrina Strings traces thinness as a desirable marker of white privilege (particularly associated with the raise of philosophy as a discipline in the continent) since the 18th century until the early 20th century. While it may be tempting to think of the alternative bodily aesthetics proposed by the likes of Botero, this was not reflective of the dominant desirable body-type.

Bawdiness and loudness are typically characteristics that are socially associated with black and fat bodies (Fordham, 1993), and therefore, embodying them comes at the price of some social currency. If one has plenty of social currency otherwise (one is young, thin, rich, white or a mixture of them) one may be able to afford embodying them. On the other hand, if one does not have a lot of social currency, one may be heavily punished if embodying those characteristics: think of the black angry woman stereotype and how it shapes the everyday interactions of black folks.

'For this reason, when talking about Desire, I employ language like Desire/ability politics, libidinal economy, and Desire Capital. More directly, they each speak to the structure and metaphysics of Desire, Beauty, Prettiness and Ugliness as things to be traded and saved as with any other economy. (Harrison and Laymon, p. 13) Harrison underlines here how the characteristics that make up Desirability (such as Beauty or Ugliness) are, basically, chips in a trading economy. Studies have shown that people who are perceived as attractive are higher earners and often have better social skills (Goldman & Lewis, 1977), which of course means access to more social currency. Being perceived as more attractive is desirable in a capitalistic system because it affords access to more (and better) opportunities (see Hosoda, Stone-Romero, and Coats, 2003 for workplace opportunities & Mazzella and Feingold 1994; Leventhal and Krate 1977 for sentence applications after trials). This access has different implications depending on what other characteristics the person in question embodies: if they're an escort, being perceived as fuckable is at least as important as being perceived as attractive.

Fuckability, attractiveness and desirability are not fixed states, either. One can make oneself more or less fuckable, attractive or desirable – to a certain degree. A fat person can not turn into a thin person, but they can employ strategies (such as feminization, mentioned above) to be perceived as more acceptable and desirable and therefore have access to some more social currency. This does not mean that they cease to be oppressed for being fat. That line of thinking shows a complete disregard for the work it takes to make oneself attractive through hyperfemininity. The fact that the only avenue available for fat people to access more social currency is femininity and not androgyny or masculinity, and that may affect the people employing said avenue, as we can see collected in Harrison's work. Often, queer fat people have to trade and negotiate with aspects of their embodiment and identity. As discussed above, desirable androgyny is not often afforded to fat people. If fat people want to be openly queer and androgynously desirable, they will be expected to embody some sort of hyper femininity – no matter whether they feel aligned with it or not. Because fat queer people have such little social currency (of which they will have even less if they are black, sex workers, migrants, or disabled), and social currency is necessary in order to access better living conditions (such as better healthcare (Puhl and Brownell, 2001), better employment (Gortmaker et al. 1993), better housing), fat queer people are often in this bind that puts their gender expression and acceptable performance of gender at odds with one another.

Moreover, just because fat people can make themselves 'fuckable', it doesn't mean that they will have the same positioning regarding social currencies that their thin counterparts have access to:

Make no mistake: fuckability as Desire/ability does not mean that all bodies deemed fuckable are humanized, nor does it mean that every person who has sex with the Black fat sees them as living beings deserving of care. And it is often for this reason that fat subjects live with Insecurities. Being fuckable is determined by someone other than ourselves, and therefore it is completely about whether or not others locate desire in you. This desire does not have to come with an interrogated politic. It could very well be a fetish, predicated on the desire to only see fat people as sexual objects incapable of being more. (Harrison and Laymon, p. 19)

Navigating the intersection of fuckability, desirability and fetishization is extremely complicated, particularly for queer fat sex workers of colour, but also still for any fat sex worker. Returning to the idea of fat being ontologically socially Dead – it may help to frame this as a particular type of necrophilia. I am not aiming to kink-shame anyone's fantasies, but I want to propose that unwarranted and abusive fetishisation happens when the agency of the fetishised party is irrelevant and not taken into account by the fetishising party. Here I use fuckability as Harrison does, something that is 'completely about whether or not others locate desire in you', irrespective of one's own desires and agency. If the fat is ontologically socially Dead, the fat has no agency and can not consent to any sexual acts. The person who fetishises the fuckable fat doesn't need to think about the fat's agency, because the fat is ontologically socially Dead and therefore incapable of having any of it. The person who fetishises the fuckable fat locates the desire as a univocal force from them to the fat, one that doesn't require the fat's consent, response or consideration for their bodily autonomy and agency. The fuckable fat is

condemned to fulfil the position of the corpse in a necrophiliac fantasy. Another way of looking at it would be through Nussbaum's and Langton's set of conditions for objectification (Nussbaum, 1995; Langton, 2009), but I think the concept of the socially Dead aspect is a particularly interesting one because of how it links with pathologization and the medical gaze.

On the other hand, as we've described before, Desirability is the ability to position oneself closer to those characteristics that may render (more) social currency. Fetishisation can be understood as the reduction of a person to those characteristics that appear sexually attractive to the person (or people) fetishising them. These terms all inhabit close quarters, and there is a fluency between them – one can be desired and fetishised, fuckable and desirable at the same time, by different people or even by the same person, at different points in time. They are intersecting and complicated concepts that are predicated on not just one's understanding of oneself, but other's understanding of one's characteristics and agency.

Looking at how identities intersect, it is particularly interesting to note how fatness and queerness appear to be inextricably linked, particularly from the point of view of Desire/ability politics: 'Fat people are often forced into a 'closet" through diet culture, specifically, in the same way that people who are deemed or self identify as- sexually deviant often are. Diet culture imprisons fat bodies [...] As Strings stated, it is not about health but rather the repulsiveness assigned to fatness by others. For this reason, fat liberation is an abolitionist affair, abolition is a queer affair, queerness is a fat affair. Liberation for each of them is linked.' (Harrison and Laymon, p. 43) Other authors, such as Cat Pausé, elaborate on the concept of the fat closet further. Fatness, like Queerness in

Ahmed's writing, is a place that is inhabited besides a bodily characteristic. Fat bodies are expected to be exercised, starved, polished and punished into a more acceptable 'shape'. All of this shows how fatness and queerness are intimately linked. For the purposes of my thesis, this link (which is made even more obvious by the particular types of censorship that fat and queer bodies face, examples of which will be provided below and in Chapter 4) is relevant: art that features fat, queer bodies is often thought of as pornographic because of the fat/morbid/death continuum (Eaton, 2016) that has been showcased thus far.

Harrison argues that the fat existence is partially predicated in the repulsion that normative society and its members are expected to feel and express towards it – this is also true for queer existence. It is possible to argue that queer people are supposed to be as repulsive as fat people, because both existences are not productive (enough) for a capitalistic society. In 'The Political Economy of Heteronormativity', Duc Hien Nguyen argues that since the success of capitalism is rooted in heteronormative politics, (gendered labour division, nuclear family, etc), queer emancipation requires an overhaul of this political structure. Both queer and fat existences can not neatly fit into the boxed expectations of a nuclear, white family because they are not productive to that system: queer bodies may not produce new children (new future workers) (Nguyen, 2021), while fat bodies may pose a threat to the fat loss and beauty industries (Eaton, 2016). This warrants their rejection by the systems that they're embedded in, and as Harrison points out, means they share a political struggle. While the rejection of some aspects of queerness doesn't render that much currency anymore, the rejection of most aspects of fatness will still render some form of social currency to those that align themselves with it:

the mother that gets her children to lose their 'chubby weight', the personal trainer that pushes their fat clients to the limit to 'get results', or the government campaigns that fight 'the obesity epidemic'. Aligning themselves with this type of rejection also works for queer people who are trying to gain social currency (Nguyen, 2021), which is exemplified in the rampant fatphobia present in many queer communities. Interestingly, it seems that if one can not gain access to the social currency rendered from positioning oneself closer to desirable characteristics, one can gain access to some social currency by performing this kind of repulsion.

Social currency appears in many forms, for example, community and audience access. There is no place where this is clearer (or more easily measured) than on Social Media. Social Media algorithms tend to favour very particular types of content – those that feature white, thin, able-bodied creators. While sex workers (and sex-work adjacent creators, such as pole dancers, aerialists, dancers...) face increasing censorship, usually in the form of shadow-banning, so do fat creators. The Adult Performers Actors Guild claims that Instagram uses an algorithm that detects whether an image features more than 60% of skin (Richman, 2019), which is somewhat consistent with Monea's findings in 'The Internet Closet', although a Meta spokesperson has contested this. If this were true, which seems a somewhat likely explanation as to why so many images of fat bodies are automatically censored, that would be an incredibly fatphobic policy. Unfortunately, due to Meta's particularly opaque policies, it is unlikely that we will find out anytime soon. Fat people have more skin. If we compare two pictures of a thin person and a fat person in a swimsuit, it's likely that the fat person will be showing more skin – simply because there is more of it. These kinds of policies automatically mark bigger bodies as subject to

censorship: 'The same content can be seen on a fat person and a skinny person, but on a fat person it is deemed pornographic, and on a skinny person it is allowed.' (Carina Shero as quoted in Richman, 2019)

Platforms often claim that the decisions taken regarding content regulation, as well as the design of the policies that they put in place, are made with the protection of those who are vulnerable in mind:

> We want Instagram to be a place where people can express themselves, but we also have a responsibility to keep people safe. We try to write policies that adequately balance freedom of expression and safety, but doing this for a community of a billion people from all corners of the world will always be challenging. That's why we are constantly re-evaluating our policies and working with experts to ensure we are in the right place,' the spokesperson said. (Krishnan, 2021)

Using the idea of protecting the vulnerable in order to justify 'public health' (or public order, in this case) measures that effectively censor those who have a dissident identity (such as queer or fat people) is nothing new. As will be discussed in Chapter 4, there are plenty of historical examples to choose from, and Britain has a long judicial history where the protection of women and children has been used as an excuse for censorship and violence against marginalised groups. We can see that platforms such as Meta and their subsidiaries (Facebook and Instagram) carry on with this legacy of suppression.

Additionally, many users who are part of marginalised, vulnerable communities don't feel particularly protected by these policies:

> The problem with Instagram is that engagement increases through obvious responses, reports, things like that. And people love to attack people in marginalized communities and marginalized bodies. There are not enough safety precautions for protecting the accounts that are not creating content that goes against guidelines, but that might receive more hate and more reports due to that content, (Krishnan, 2021)

Anna Konstantopoulos, the fat blogger interviewed by Krishnan above, clearly feels that even though they may do their best to follow the guidelines (who are supposedly in place to keep those bullied safe, amongst other things), this is insufficient. This experience is echoed by many other members of similarly marginalised groups. Carolina Are often reports in her Twitter that, while her content continues to be shadowbanned on Instagram and Tiktok, men who leave lewd comments on her posts never seem to be affected by any kind of content suppression techniques (see Fig. x). The systems in place to govern these public/private spaces are not just clearly lacking in terms of safety, but due to how they continue to perpetuate sexist, fatphobic and racist systems, ensure that the bullying for those reasons continues to exist.
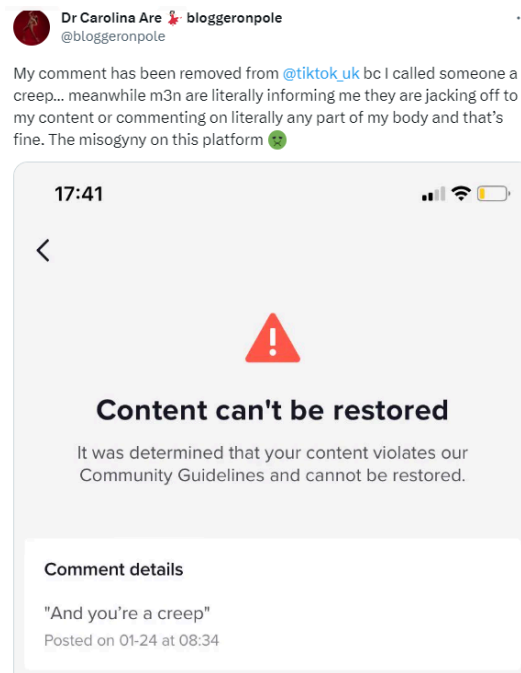
Fig. 7 — Courtesy of Carolina Are

But does Meta's apparent puritanism and fatphobia extend to other platforms, or are they contained to the Valley? Back in 2019, NetzPolitik uncovered that TikTok had been shadowbanning[59] disabled and disfigured users 'in order to protect them'. This is particularly worrisome considering that Ugly Laws[60] were in place in several countries up until the later half of the XXth century.

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[59] The practice of limiting the reach of an account via algorithmic means in order to softly censor it.

[60] Ugly Laws, also known as 'unsightly beggar ordinances' at the time, were laws that targeted poor and disabled people in several cities in the United States from 1867-1974. A good example is the San Francisco law of 1867 which made it illegal for anyone 'who is diseased, maimed, mutilated or deformed in a nay way, so as to be an unsightly or disgusting object, to expose himself or herself to public view' (Schweik, 2010, p. 291).

In the guidelines TikTok wrote for how to suppress these accounts, which were obtained by NetzPolitik, staffers were instructed to target users 'susceptible to bullying or harassment based on their physical or mental condition,' including those with 'facial disfigurement, autism, Down syndrome, disabled people, or people with some facial problems.' They also restricted users who had rainbow flags in their bios or described themselves as LGBTQ+. 'The list also includes users who are simply fat and self-confident,' NetzPolitik reported. (Silva, 2019)

While TikTok may have justified these actions as a way to curb the bullying that these users may (or may have not) suffered, the direct result of their actions was in fact curbing the access of these users to their platform and the audience that they had built on it. This ban also applied to fat users, since they would fall under the category of being 'harassed due to their physical condition'. The fact that Social Media companies feel the only way to deal with fat bodies and otherness is to summarily sweep it under the rug speaks of a wider climate of censorship and oppression. It also demonstrates very clearly how fat and queer liberation are inextricably linked to abolitionism and dismantling white supremacy – a point that many black writers, including Angela Davis, Harrison and Strings have been making for a long time.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has been divided into two parts. Initially, I focused on how kinky and queer identities are intertwined, and afterwards I looked at the relationship between pornography, colonialism and the medical gaze. In the first part, we looked at how kink and queer identities find solace, community and growth in and through pornographic and BDSM practices, including looking at the productive potential of violence and at pornography as a communal experience. In the second part, we followed the steps of colonialism through the Foucauldian medical gaze in the medicalisation of fat, femme and queer coded bodies. It is important to understand that although at first these two aspects may seem separate, they are connected through the colonial continuum of colonial othering that queer and fat bodies suffer, which has been made clear in the last section of the second part of this chapter.

Moving forward, and with this understanding of history and of the artistic and productive potential of BDSM and pornographic experiences in mind, I will be starting the practice-based research part of this journey. The gaze (whether queer, medical or colonial) has been central to this chapter, and engaging with its lack of neutrality will be part of the artistic execution in the next chapter. In order to meaningfully engage with the findings of this chapter through my artistic research, I will need to tackle questions of identity and how (making) pornography may reflect or affirm it.. I will also need to grapple with objectification, contextualised by the findings about fetishisation of othered bodies in this chapter. I will journey my artistic process and think through artistic practice — particularly, finding out more about the aesthetic potential of pornographic creation.

Chapter 3 — Practising Pornography: an Artist's Journey

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will explore the possibility that making pornography is, in and of itself, an aesthetic process. I will do so by exploring first the haptic qualities of paint through the work of Laura Marks, Riegl and Worringer. Then, I will look at how the creative processes differ when it comes to painting and making pornography. In order to do this, I will use Margaret Boden's definition of P Creativity as well as my extensive experience as a painter and as a pornographic creator.

Afterwards, I will take a closer look at some of my own pornographic paintings produced as part of the research for this thesis, analysing their creation process as well as their final outcomes as images themselves. I will pay particular attention to the Cloche series and pushing the limits of explicit imagery through objects and my series of Square Paintings as pornographic self-portraiture.

Then I will look at how the I Modi could sit at the core of a 'pornographic image programme' that made its way into the halls of the Fontainebleau Palace by tracing the works of not only Raimondi but some of his collaborators, particularly Caraglio. Here I will pay special attention to the relationship between representations of the body and state propaganda, as well as looking at how this 'pornographic programme' evolved in order to avoid the harsh censorship faced by the I Modi.

3.2 Making pornography — An aesthetic process?

We covered in the first chapter the many reasons why pornography may not be considered art: its lack of aesthetic interest, the lack of (or excessive transparency) or its immediacy, amongst others. Throughout the next sections with the use of practice-based research I aim to demonstrate that pornography is not necessarily transparent, lacking in aesthetic interest, or immediate. I also aim to demonstrate that the process of making pornography is not inherently different from the process of making any other type of art. This includes looking at Tzapir's theory of pornography as using the tools of acting but not being truthfully a type of acting, and looking at Ashley's insight into the performance of authenticity in pornography. Finally I examine two series of paintings created for this research as well as the exhibition put together for it, and look at some of the responses generated from the audience.

Visual Haptics — the tactile possibilities of paint

In the following section I will look at Laura Mark's work as it pertains to haptics and seek to establish whether her haptic critique can be used as a starting point to think about the haptic qualities of the materiality of oil paint, including in its application.

If every object and event is irreducible in its materiality, then part of learning to touch it is to come to love its particularity, its strangeness, its precious and inimitable place in the world. I don't believe in the alterity or ultimate unknowability of other things, people, and times. We all live on the same surface,

the same skin. If others are unfathomable, it is because it takes an infinite number of folds to really reach them. (Marks, 2002, p. 12)

Laura Marks writes that the haptic is about 'touching, not mastering' (Marks, 2002, p. 12) — haptic perception suggests an attentive kind of embodied experience and engagement with a space, a moment, and even a work of art. The term haptic can be traced back to Alois Riegl (Alois Riegl, 1985, p. 22) and Wilhelm Worringer (Wilhelm Worringer, 1997, p. 41). For Riegl, who worked with textiles for a very long time during his career, the optical was the long-distance vision while the haptic was the close-up or 'tactile' vision. For Worringer, the optic deals with things in the depth of space, while the haptic deals with flat surfaces. The reason why Marks' work is so compelling and relevant to analyse both my own practice and other pornographic artefacts is because she aims to 'restore a flow between the haptic and the optical' (Marks, 2002, p. 13). Interestingly she does this through understanding that vision is a material and embodied sense, as opposed to understanding it through the post-European Enlightenment rationality which tends to frame it as a disembodied one. She calls herself a 'haptic critic', that is, a critic that seeks a closer (close-up) relationship with the work, a mimetic relationship with it that navigates the tension between our cultural tendency towards symbolic distance and sensuous closeness — this she associates with Peirce's Firstness and Thirdness[61] (Buchler and Peirce, 1956). Peirce's firstness would be associated with the sensuous closeness, while his

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[61] 'The first is that whose being is simply in itself, not referring to anything nor lying behind anything. The second is that which is what it is by force of something to which it is second. The third is that which is what it is owing to things between which it mediates and which it brings into relation to each other.' (Peirce, 1958, p.CP 2.356)

thirdness would be reflected in said tendency towards symbolic distance — that which 'mediates' between the object and us and which 'brings it into relation with one another' (Buchler and Peirce, 1956). This embodied experience of art is crucial for my understanding of my own creative process, but also for an aesthetic analysis of the pornographic making/watching/seeing experience.

Deleuze says that 'aesthetics suffers from a wrenching duality. On one hand, it designates the theory of sensibility as the form of possible experience; on the other hand, it designates the theory of art as the reflection of real experience' (Deleuze, Boundas, Lester, & Stivale, 1990, p. 260) I agree with Marks that there is no need for this painful break: haptics offer a welcome way to both navigate the liminal space between possible and real experience. Additionally, they layer them so we can experience through possibility and reality at the same time: 'Haptic criticism is an aesthetics in the sense that it finds reason to hope for the future in, and not despite, the material and sensuous world.' (Marks, 2002, p. 16) As a painter it is impossible to run away from the materiality of paint — it would be like asking a potter to walk away from the touch, density and weight of clay. As a painter one's experience of the paint tends to be mediated by a brush (particularly true if one is working with oil and pigments such as cadmium, which are toxic and should not be touched) as opposed to the more literally 'hands on' approach of a potter. However, the weight, unctuosity, density and opacity of the paint are still haptic qualities. The brush becomes an extension of the fingers, but it is not just 'another' finger — it has flexible or stiff bristles, it's differently flexible, more precise than a finger. The application of paint is not just about the materiality of the pigment. Although in terms of physical colour mixing this is very much about the material qualities of the pigments and

how they affect one another. It is also about the materiality of the solution in which the pigment is suspended. Titanium white and lead white do not look the same, even if applied on top of the same colour and with a similar technique, because the nature of the pigments used is wildly different. But even the same white paint, applied on top of the same colour, with a different technique will look different. When white paint is piled up for a highlight — a particular technique used often to create the effect of glistening eyeballs — the materiality of the pigment, the solution and the amount of it are all affecting our experience of said highlight. The experience of applying the paint is also deeply affected by these material aspects — it is not the same thing to paint a quick underlayer with thin paint than to apply a lush thick stroke of paint. It is also not the same thing to paint a thin layer of glazes, where subtle tonal and reflective changes are taking place. The experience of creating a painting is affected by many, many other factors (such as the psychological and physical state of the painter, the time of the day, the goal of the painting session) but the materiality of the paint and how this is mediated by the brush are factors that can be thought of in aesthetic terms, and in particular, through visual haptics.

Of course, this is just regarding the painting process, but what about the more traditional recipient of the aesthetic analysis, the viewing process? Is this also affected by the materiality of the paint? Art critics customarily write about the lushness of certain paint applications, rivers of ink have been written about Pollock's dripping of paint or about Freud's thick white strokes — so there is room to argue that the materiality of paint seems to be at least somewhat relevant to the aesthetic experience of the viewer. On top of that, 'good paintings', particularly those which represent human flesh, are praised for

evoking haptic feelings, their ability to invoke the tactile characteristics of the soft skin that is depicted on the canvas. Certain landscape paintings can evoke olfactory experiences, as well. The ability to encourage, provoke or inspire haptic feelings in the audience seems to be part of a desirable aesthetic experience.

For Marks there is a relationship between haptics and the erotic. She defines the erotic as 'the ability to oscillate between near and far […], the ability to move between control and relinquishing, between being giver and receiver, […] to have your sense of self, your self-control, taken away and restored — and to do the same for another person' (Marks, 2002, p. 16). When Riegl talks about haptic vs. optic perception there is a sense of needing to come closer to the images, to rush towards them to experience the surface: 'To perceive them the eye has to move a little from the Nahsicht: not too far away, so that the uninterrupted tactile[62] connection of the parts are no longer visible (Fernsicht), but rather to the middle between Nahsicht and Fernsicht; we may call it Normalsicht' (Riegl, 1985, p. 25). If the erotic is the ability to oscillate between near and far, and a haptic relationship means an embodied rushing to experience the surface, the erotic would utilise the tension between haptics and optics in order to explore those liminal spaces and tensions. For Marks, haptic criticism uses 'erotic faculties' to bring the experience back to the body ('reembody', in her words) in a departure from scholarly rigour that is also a bid to accept that there is no ideal answer to the questions posed by aesthetic experiences: 'it does not incorporate its observations into judgments conjugated with 'is', but tries to be always open to 'and' of a new idea' (Marks, 2002, p. 17). It's an invitation to be opened up to new experiences, experiences that take us so close to our own bodies that our self-sufficiency

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[62] Haptisch in the original, the translation chose to use tactile instead of haptic.

might be temporarily destroyed (Marks, 2002, p. 16). This is interestingly similar to the idea of the orgasm as a 'little death' (petite mort). During an orgasmic experience we become overwhelmed and overtaken by extreme embodiment through physical sensation, and it can be argued that this equals a small ego death (in the Jungian sense): we are all body and all feeling, and for a brief moment, we lose all self-sufficiency by rendering ourselves to this experience of extreme embodiment.

Haptic perception is slightly different from haptic critique, as it combines proprioception as well as kinesthesia and tactile functions (Marks, 2002, p. 22), with the eyes functioning as a kind of tactile organ. It is a deeply embodied process because more of the body is involved than when it comes to optical visuality. Marks warns, however, that most processes involve some degree of both optical as well as haptic visuality. According to her, this 'hapticness' is not just a matter of the viewer's perception, but it can also be present in the work itself if this offers what she calls 'haptic images': 'haptic images do not invite identification with a figure so much as they encourage a bodily relationship between the viewer and the image' (Marks, 2002, p. 3). Again, we find here that this is a game of relationships — between haptic and optic visuality, between work and audience, between mind and body. Marks mostly examines audiovisual works, particularly avant-garde cinematography and alternative film, but her framework is perfectly applicable to still images. Additionally, considering that I am often working from film stills in order to create my pornographic paintings, this is doubly appropriate. It raises questions about whether there is a haptic transference happening, and about how the different mediums offer different haptic visualities: 'this denial of depth vision and multiplication of surface, in the electronic texture of video, has a quality of visual

eroticism that is different from the mastery associated with optical visuality.' (Marks, 2002, p. 4) Is it possible to combine the mastery required of depicting something in a way that inspires optical visuality while harnessing the haptic erotic properties of bringing the viewer's attention to the materiality and surface of the work itself? This is one of the questions at the core of my artistic practice — one that can only be open-ended because of the nature of the relationship between creator, work and viewer. As a creator, I have some control over my work, and it is through the exercise of this control that I propose that the viewer engages with my piece in a particular way (or ways). While I can certainly encourage this particular mode of engagement, I also recognize that ultimately, I have no control over the haptic and optic visual processes of the viewer. As a creator, I engage my materials in hopes of inspiring (or perhaps, manipulating) those processes in a particular way — my work intends to bring about a certain state or response in the viewer.

However, like in any interpersonal relationship, I can only exert so much control over someone else's perception of myself and my work. The viewer perceives the work and in doing that, adds something to the experience. Their perception will be affected by their own personal experience of the work and of their own life. While I believe that identification is one of the crucial ways in which the viewer relates to and experiences the image, there is also a relationship to the design aspect of the image. Lant offers an interesting avenue for the analysis of figurative painting in regards to this relationship: 'Riegl's understanding of the relation of viewer to art work is not derived from his or her identification with a represented human figure, but rather operates at the level of design' (Lant, 1995, p. 64). Colour, shape and their arrangements will inspire different haptic and optic responses depending on the historical and cultural environment of both the work

and the viewer — our experience of a Byzantine mosaic is informed not just by the (relative) strangeness of the garments the figures are wearing, but by the design choices such as the golden background, thick outlines, enlargement of the eyes... And these elements will encourage a different visual response for different people: think of someone who is deeply familiar with romanesque Spanish artwork because it was present in their church versus someone who has never seen a golden background anywhere except in the background of Disney Princess merchandise. Both golden backgrounds are used as a way to reify the figures, but they offer vastly different haptic experiences and therefore affect future haptic and optic visuality in different ways.

Creativity and the creative process: painting porn vs. painting other things

The goal of this section is to assess whether there is any meaningful difference between painting pornography and painting non-pornography. Through this section I will be looking at the role of creativity in painting so that I may assess whether it is also present when painting pornography. After this, I assess the three possible differences between painting pornography and painting other things: difference in the subject matter, in the perception and in the intention. I will be drawing from theories of Graham Wallas' to contextualise the role of creativity in the artistic process, and then using Margaret Boden's definitions of creativity as a framework to think through my own creative process. Through this I wish to respond to the claim that pornography is unoriginal because it is based on repetition.

In 'The Art of Thought' (1926) Graham Wallas outlines four stages of the creative process, from the psychological point of view: preparation, incubation, illumination and verification. This is a simplification, albeit one I find helpful to describe my practice. Preparation would include the lengthy process of apprenticeship, or the acquisition of particular skills in order to fulfil a particular project, to the point where the agent (or artist) is ready to tackle a task in this particular domain. Then would come incubation, where the agent diverts their attention from the creative task (whether because they want to or because they are distracted by other factors). At this stage, unconscious, associative work is happening. This is followed by illumination, when the agent becomes aware of ideas or inspirations that have occurred during the incubation process (we could even say that the ideas have traversed from the unconscious to the conscious mind). Finally, during confirmation, these ideas or inspirations are evaluated and improved upon.

Whilst Wallas outlines these states as a linear progression, artists may often find that they overlap and develop more complex relationships between them, often working in a cyclical manner. Combinational creativity is the first type of creativity mentioned by Margaret Boden: 'making unfamiliar combinations of familiar ideas' (Boden, 2003, p. 3). This type of creativity requires substantial repetition and recycling of ideas, which seems to run counter to two broadly held assumptions about the artistic process: one, that something can only be described as original if it has never been done before (originality is assumed to be a desired outcome of creativity); and two, that art should be (at least somewhat) original.

I am not particularly interested in discussing whether originality is possible, since that debate is well out of the scope of my research. However, assuming that it is, is it a defining aspect of the creative process? If we attend to Margaret Boden's definitions of historical and psychological creativity we can find a rather neat solution to this issue. Psychological creativity is only possible if someone has an idea that they haven't had before (P-creativity), whereas historical creativity must fulfil that condition and the additional one of the idea never having occurred to anyone else in human history (H-creativity). The degree of originality required to declare something H-creative is extremely high for Boden, and weaker context-specific or historic alternatives could easily be formulated. Boden distinguishes three further types of creativity: combinational (mentioned above), exploratory and transformational. It is this latter one that I am most interested in because it implies that the mind is changed by the originality of the creative idea — the mind that did not have that idea before is not the same mind that had the idea: 'The third type of creativity similarly involves the conceptual space, but instead of exploring within an existing space, transformational creativity transforms that space.' (Boden, 1998, p. 384).

As an aside, I propose a relationship between combinatorial/combinational creativity and transformational creativity. If we accept that combinatorial play is an essential feature of productive thought, the creative mind plays with different elements until this play fundamentally changes the mind and the creative idea is generated. It is self-generated because the mind that has generated it could not have generated it before it had been generated, pointing to a symbiotic relationship between play and transformation. This may not be immediately obvious, but this example should help

illustrate it. When drawing something new our brain uses our previously existing library of shapes to try and commit it to paper. Through attentively looking at the new relationships between shapes in front of us (the reference) and attempting to draw them (through combining the already existing shapes and relationships in our brain) we reconfigure our understanding of shapes and relationships, and that is a transformational process. The next time that we attempt to draw another new subject, these newly learnt shapes and relationships will now be part of our existing library of shapes and relationships. This is why drawing from life gets easier the more one does it.

As an artist and a painter, I often wonder about painting as a creative process. The process I undergo to create a painting is such that by the time that I get to the canvas a lot of incognitas have been resolved: I know the composition and the symbology, I have shot my reference pictures, analysed what colours I should probably use, chosen my support and size... Which begs the question of whether my painting is a creative process at all. Am I just 'crafting' the painted version of my idea? Are my brush-strokes, my colour mixing, my layering all a post-product of creativity? Has all creative process been exhausted by the time I reach the canvas?

Painting, like drawing, is to me the process of understanding shapes, colours and form. The more I paint something, the more I understand its appearance (and in a more metaphysical way, its nature). This increased understanding of the appearance of an object/subject is a transformative process: my brain is not the same brain before and after painting each stroke. It may seem far-fetched to make this affirmation, so let me elaborate. Painting, particularly when it comes to colours, is a game of comparison, proximity and correlation. Every colour that is added to a painting depends on its neighbours to produce

a particular effect — purple shadows will look grey near orange surfaces because they are opposite each other on the optical mixing spectrum. Highly saturated colours will look less saturated when placed against other highly saturated colours, and colours with average saturation will look extremely bright when placed against low-saturated ones. Additionally, and in particular when it comes to oil painting, the consistency of the paint also exists in a complicated interdependent relationship with the rest of the paint — think about how glazing layers transform the colours underneath and near them. Different mediums and paint consistencies change how light bounces off the surface of the paint, and therefore affect how light bounces off the rest of the painted surface.

It follows that each application of paint to a canvas changes two things, then: one, my understanding of whatever it is that I am painting and my understanding of the evolving image of the canvas in and of itself. My understanding of what I am painting changes because I am forced to look deeper at the subject of painting. If I am painting a glass bottle, the first pass will give me a good understanding of its general shape. The second pass will force me to look at how the translucency of the glass works and what kind of visual information it allows to transpire. The third pass will make me focus on the way the glass reflects the ambient and direct light around it, and so on and so forth. My understanding of the evolving image on the canvas will change because with every application of paint I am changing the balance of the internal relationships between the already existing brush strokes. Thanks to my training, I may be able to predict how a colour should look near another, but I must go through the cycle of incubation, illumination and confirmation with every brush stroke. First, I look at the image that I am painting while I am completing another area of brushstrokes (incubation). Then, the

correct colour will suggest itself (illumination). Finally, I will place it on the canvas and confirm whether it was the appropriate colour or whether it needs to be changed (confirmation).

This is a deeply embodied type of creativity, very different from my conceptualisation process, but as I've demonstrated, it still fulfils the criteria of a creative process. It leaves some unanswered questions, such as whether it is possible to understand a subject so well that there is no more 'creativity' left in the process of painting it, or whether one's training can be so perfect that one is able to predict how every brush stroke will land and therefore removing the creative aspect from that process. In the latter case, I think it could be argued that the creative criteria of self-generating agent of psychological change can still be fulfilled, since predicting something and seeing it materialise (or in this case, materialising it) have different perceptual impacts on the mind — the mind would still change as the image evolves in front of it.

Understanding now the way that transformational and combinational creativity can work in the painting process, the following question then arises: is there a fundamental difference in painting pornography and painting something else? One might think that painting is painting, it doesn't really matter what — one may enjoy certain subjects, surfaces or textures more than others, but at the end of the day the process of painting an apple, a hand or an erect penis is (surprisingly?) similar. However, in order to answer this question from a philosophical point of view, we must first determine what kind of differences are there between pornography and 'something else', and how these differences may affect the painting process. It could be a matter of difference in the subject, difference in the perception of it, or difference in the intention.

Difference in the subject would refer to a fundamental difference between a pornographic subject and other subjects: how is an erect penis different from, let's say, a banana? The penis will usually offer a richer texture on the surface, as well as more reflective differences (the skin near the urethra will usually be slightly moist, there may be sweat present near the pelvis, and differences in moist/wetness mean differences in the reflectivity of the surface). However, if the banana is wet or full of brown spots, it will also offer textural and reflective differences. Each subject will have its unique characteristics (where would the fun in painting be if everything looked the same?), but an erect penis is no more fundamentally different from a banana than an apple is — each subject has a unique set of characteristics, including texture, reflectivity, colours, mass, etc., and this is still true of pornographic subjects.

Difference in the perception is a slightly more complicated issue because it is concerned with the psychology of the artist who is painting, and their reaction to this perceptual difference. If an artist feels that pornographic subjects are something shameful to look at, their ability to paint them will be affected by this perception. If an artist feels that pornographic subjects are exactly the same as every other subject, this perception will be irrelevant to their execution of the painting. If an artist feels that pornographic subjects are something that should be cherished and celebrated, that will also affect their painting process. However, this could be argued on any subject — some people don't feel comfortable painting religious figures, the naked body or vegetables. The psychological effects of certain subjects on the artist are extremely personal and no truthful general

statements can be issued about their nature. But there is no inherent characteristic of pornographic subjects that makes them be perceived differently.

Finally, we must look at the difference in the intention. Here we may also want to talk about purpose, which brings us back to Mag Uidhir's (2019) manner specific and manner inspecific debate. According to Mag Uidhir's definition of pornography, if something is pornography its purpose is manner inspecific whilst if something is art, its purpose is manner specific. Also, one purpose can not be both manner specific and manner inspecific. Different artists will have different purposes for different works. For example, my portrait studies seldom seek to bring about any state in the audience, but my pornographic paintings certainly do. The purpose of my portrait studies is often manner inspecific: my purpose is to explore the technical process and the nature of the subject, not in bringing about a certain state in a particular way. What I mean here is not that I am interested in a manner of execution, but that I am interested in going through that process in order to achieve a deeper understanding of the subject that I'm painting. In these studies, I am trying to bring about a state of understanding through whichever means possible, whereas the purpose of my pornographic paintings is manner specific: I am interested in making the audience feel a certain way, and I want to do this through a set of specific strategies. But creativity and artistry are messy processes, and sometimes I start a painting with no specific purpose and finish it with a very clear goal in mind — this possibility, amongst others, is not recognised by Mag Uidhir's definition.

Let's look at three scenarios: (i) painting a sexually explicit picture with a pornographic intention, (ii) painting a non-sexually explicit picture with a pornographic intention, and (iii) painting a sexually explicit image with a non-pornographic intention.

By pornographic intention in this case I mean the intention to make the audience feel like they are looking at pornography. This may not necessarily seek to arouse or titillate them, although it may seek to arouse or titillate some of them. An excellent example of (iii) would be Jenny Saville and her self-portraits — they are very often explicit, and some people might find them erotic, empowering or salacious, but the intent behind them is not pornographic. This intent affects Saville's painting process, and I imagine that were she to paint with a pornographic intent, it would result in a different painting process. For (ii), we can look at Joyce Lee's illustrations of scissoring hands — they are not a pornographic subject in the traditional sense, but the intention is very clearly pornographic (or at the very least, erotic and/or titillating). Finally, for (i), we can look at my own Square Painting series, which depicts pornographic subjects with pornographic intent.

Fig. 8 – Closed Contact #10, Jenny Saville, 1995 — 1996

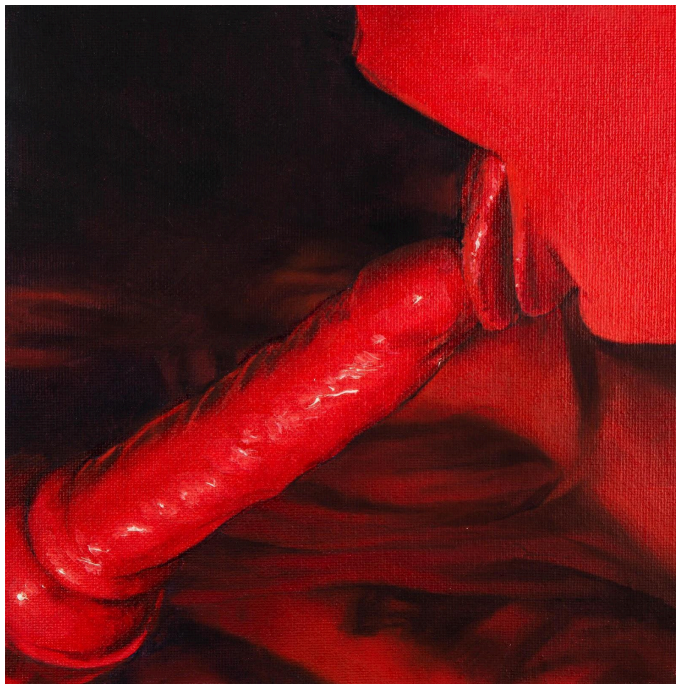Fig. 9 — Loverboy 2, Joyce Lee, 2022

Fig. 10 and 11 – Red Quickies I and Desputi, AJ Bravo, 2022-2023

I can not truthfully speak of Saville's or Lee's process, but I can analyse and speak about my own processes — and in particular, I can speak of the difference in painting the Cloche series and the Red Quickies Painting series. The Cloche series falls under (ii), non-sexually explicit images painted with pornographic intention: it depicts used sex toys suspended inside glass cloches. For the sake of making as clear an argument as possible, let's compare the process of painting Desputi, which depicts a ball-gag (the least 'explicit' of all the objects used), and the process of painting Red Quickies I, which depicts oral sex. My intention in both cases is to create a pornographic work of art, a work of art that makes the audience feel like they are looking at pornography, irrespective of whether they are sexually aroused by it or not, although some of them may be. Even though I was seeking the creation of a pornographic artwork in both cases, the processes look markedly different. In the case of Desputi we are looking at a more layered painting, where excruciating attention to detail has been paid, the layers of paint have been applied in a thinner, more delicate way, and a more traditional approach to the construction of the painting has been used (with an underpainting and a glazing layer). On the other hand, the Red Quickies Painting series is all painted alla-prima (one layer), paying special attention to the material possibilities of thicker paint application. Same intention, different application depending on the subject, then? Not really. The different application comes not from the difference in subjects, but from the very manner specific way in which I seek to bring about a particular state in the audience: for the Cloche series, I am looking to scandalise, to shock the audience (a cruel, haptic 'opening up' of their mental space) into a state of arousal. On the other hand, for the Red Quickies Paintings series, I am looking to seduce and attract the audience into a state of arousal. They are both

pornographic intentions, but the manner in which I seek to bring about those states is different and therefore, I must employ a different process.

With this being said, here is where I find the difference: it's the (type of) manner specificity of the intention and not the nature of the intention itself that makes the difference. I use different processes for the same (pornographic) intention, but I have also used similar processes to these in the past in order to create paintings with different (non-pornographic) intentions. The nature of the intention, of the purpose of the painting, will affect the process of creating it, but pornographic intentions do not require a specific type of process that is staggeringly different from those used to create paintings with other intentions and purposes.

Creativity and the creative process: Filming Pornography

After exploring the ins and outs of painting (pornography), it would be remiss not to similarly explore the process of filming pornography. Considering that not only do I do both, but some of my painted work is based off of references taken from my filmed work, comparing them also makes sense. Before we dive into the philosophical analysis however, we must first understand what filming pornography entails. Filming pornography is not something that many people are familiar with. First, we will look at what filming pornography entails generally, and then I will look at my own pornographic filming process and the differences between filming alone and filming with other actors. Finally, in the next section, I will compare these processes to the process of painting and I will aim to answer questions such as whether filming pornography is a creative

endeavour, what kind of creative process takes place when it comes to performing in front of a camera, and how this differs (or not) from the process of painting.

There are three main stages when it comes to the creation of any film, whether it is pornographic or not: scripting, filming, and editing. Scripting entails coming up with the idea (whether it's a narrative project or not), creating the storyboard, sourcing the outfits, the location, the talent, and all in all, doing whatever may be necessary in order to ensure that everything is ready for the next stage, filming. When it comes to filming, one must take into account all the technical aspects that occur 'behind the scenes' as well as the directing, the acting, etc. Finally, editing — this includes tagging and marking all the footage, sourcing any additional sound if it hasn't been sourced already, editing the footage, adding vfx[63] if necessary and rendering the final product. Not all of these steps will happen in all filming productions, but this is a rough but adequate account of the amount of effort that making any film entails. Now, when it comes to the particulars of filming pornography, other things will be added to the list: ensuring that all performers are properly tested, discussing their boundaries with them ahead of time, any physical preparation the performers may have to go through before filming (whether this is shaving body hair or preparing for an anal scene, for example)... Labour standards are rather inconsistent across the pornography industry[64], and particularly inconsistent when it comes to more informal workers (such as collaborations filmed between independent

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[63] VFX stands for special effects, such as green screen backgrounds, superimposed pictures, etc.

[64] For more on the labour conditions of the sex industry in general and pornography in particular, see Berg, H. (2021). *Porn Work*. UNC Press Books.

producers), so not all of these may always be present in every pornographic production (Berg, 2014).

There are two very distinct types when it comes to independent pornographic production — that is, production that is not dependent on external producers and/or studios. This kind of production is behind most of the OnlyFans-style pornographic films and content, whether they're stills, short films (up to 2 minutes) or longer-form films (usually, between 10m and 30m, although full-feature 1 and 2 hour films are also made). The difference between the two types of filming is whether one is filming alone or with other people. This doesn't just refer to whether there is more than one person in front of the camera: this refers to whether the person performing is also filming themselves or not. A lot of independent filming occurs with just one person in the room, and that person must both perform and take care of the filming equipment, which of course entails its own kind of challenges. Now, a lot of promotional work surrounding the sale of pornographic content will require hiring a photographer to produce stills, whether one usually films alone or not. Many actresses are often hired to work for bigger independent productions and then film alone for their own self-owned business. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to pornographic creation, obviously.

We turn our attention now to the difference between filming alone and filming with other people. When filming with other people the performer doesn't need to be so aware of the technical aspects of the filming itself, which leaves more room to concentrate on the performance itself. Additionally, if the performer is in front of the camera with other performers, they don't need to perform alone — they can feed back on someone else's performance. If the chemistry between both performers is good, this is excellent

news — but it's not so excellent if the two performers are not very compatible. However, it is the hallmark of a good performer to be able to 'make it work' whether the chemistry is there or not. After all, this is acting and performance, and there is an expectation that the performers will be able to carry the scene. On the other hand, if the performer is filming completely alone (or even if they're filming with someone else but also manning the equipment at the same time, a weird middle-of-the-road case which is very common when it comes to couples who film together, for example), they have to carry the performance whilst being aware of the technical aspect of filming. They will also have to take care of the filming equipment in between takes, start and stop the filming, set up the camera and the lighting... and then jump into 'performance mode' as soon as the tape is rolling. This is its own type of challenge, since the creative flow pertaining to performing and the creative flow pertaining to light, filming and sound constantly interrupt one another. On the other hand, there is no one to annoy if the performer needs to do an extraordinary number of takes (except the performer themselves), and there is much less space for 'performance anxiety'. However, the performer also can not feedback off the energy of anyone else and must carry the scene on their own.

As a brief aside, it is interesting to reflect on the question posed by Tzachi Zamir: is pornography (sometimes) a form of acting? (Zamir p. 76) and his answer, which is that while pornography may share 'the borrowed trappings' (ibid., p. 77) of acting it does not employ acting and it is not a performing art (ibid., p. 77). The main issue that Zamir identifies seems to be that makers of pornography are always facing the choice between two competing values: aesthetic value (authenticity, commitment, originality, inventiveness) and pornographic value (the ability to arouse the audience), and since they

are making pornography, they will always err on the side of pornographic value. Additionally, the argument is made that pornographic and aesthetic values clash: aesthetic values, if given too much importance, will impact on the pornographic value of the film (going so far as to give the example of a 'too well acted' pornographic film, and claiming that it would make the experience bizarre to watch). Therefore, we have an impossible situation where porn actors couldn't even act if they wanted, because the need to produce a product of pornographic value prevents the aesthetic values of acting from even existing. As someone with a relatively wide experience of pornographic performance, including live pornographic shows, I find several of Zamir's assumptions quite puzzling. I think a very easy way to start moving away from the idea that aesthetic values clash with pornographic values (as described by Zamir) is to refer back to Vex Ashley's paper on authenticity and artifice in the porn industry (Ashley, 2016), where Ashley points out how much the landscape of pornography has been changing in regards to who is owning and how they are using the means of production, and more importantly to this argument, how important the assumption of authenticity is for large swathes of the pornographic audience. Moreover, I can attest through my own experience as a pornographic creator that centering aesthetic values in my practice has not hurt the pornographic value of my output: paying attention to how my body moves, to whether the shapes that it creates are aesthetically pleasant, whether my tone of voice is delivering what is needed and feeding back and being aware of the other performers' voices, etc. have been integral to raising the pornographic value of my artistic production.

Besides the actual filming, most independent performers will also take care of the scripting themselves — this means that not only will they come up with the idea of what to film, but come up with the dialogue, the angles to film from, the location, wardrobe, make-up... When it comes to editing, some performers enjoy editing their own work, whilst others prefer to outsource this task to video editors. These editors are sometimes non-adult film editors but a lot of independent performers will also edit other performer's videos. There are obviously different 'types' of editing: sometimes editing means colour grading, sound-editing and making sure that the scenes occur in an appropriately rhythmic fashion (such as in a vanilla pornographic production), but other types of pornography require more extensive post-production and even VFX — a number of Femdom clips that are filmed by the performers themselves require extensive editing, specially those filmed with a green screen for hypnotic fetishes, vore fetishes, findom fetishes that require the insertion of a timer or something else on one side of the screen, for example.

When it comes to my own productions, I differentiate between the process of filming alone, and filming with other people. I do all my scripting and editing myself because that allows me more creative control, but also because hiring someone else to edit my filmed material would eat into my already marginal profits. Firstly we will consider what happens in the first scenario, filming alone. I will come up with a list of outfits, fetishes or ideas — these are the 'content containers' that will determine what happens in the clip. This provides me with a jumping point from which I can perform without having to worry about writing a tight script, which cuts down the production time (I don't need to write the script and I don't need to learn the lines or the choreography). Then, I will

source the location (somewhere in my house or in a friends' house if we're doing a filming day) and any props (sex toys, BDSM implements, etc.) that are needed for the filming. I will have a checklist of the scenes that need to be filmed, with details on the outfits, lighting setup, etc. This is all prep-work and will not be happening on the day in which I'm filming. It's easy to identify the incubation and illumination phases in this process, since this is a highly conceptual phase.

On the day in which I am filming, I will start the day by physically preparing for the scenes, which usually means showering, shaving, exfoliating and preparing my skin as best as I can for the camera. I will then set up for the scene, including setting up my lights, my tripod and camera, putting up the list of scenes somewhere I can see, laying out my outfits, etc. Then, I will go and apply any body and face makeup that is necessary, and get dressed for the first scene. Up to this point, the process has been a mixture of administrative and creative albeit technical work: setting up lights and applying my makeup are very creative tasks, while laying out outfits is more of an administrative one. When I finally get in front of the camera and get it rolling, I must make an effort in order to recruit as much creative energy as I can. I will often leave the camera rolling and then cut up the scenes because it allows me to enter the performing creative flow much more than having to get up and stop the roll and then restart it. Unfortunately, this means that I may review the footage to find out that the lighting was not as good as I was hoping, or that I was not as centred on the frame as I was expecting, both of which will hinder any future performing flows that I must enter into that day. In any case, once I am rolling, since I am already intimately familiar with the scene (because I loosely scripted it before), I will settle in a comfortable flow and perform the scene one or two times.

The first time is more of a 'training' step, where I am finding the limits of the scene, the movements that my body needs to go through and the inflections in my voice. By the second or third time, however, I am fully embedded in the illumination aspect of the creative flow: I know what I am doing, how I am doing it, and I allow myself to be changed by this process (something which doesn't happen as much during the first tentative filming). I establish a firm feedback loop with the camera, which I find necessary in order to perform adequately — this is something that I find true no matter whether I am modelling or filming for pornographic or other types of content. Particularly when I am filming Femdom content, I want to entrance the camera lens, because that is where my audience will be and that is what I need to do for them. I also am interested not just in making my audience aroused, but in arousing them in an extremely specific manner: my audience has concrete expectations about how they desire to be aroused, and it is important for the kind of relationship that is being built with the audience that I not only meet but exceed those expectations. What I mean by this is that the audience and me have an unspoken agreement about the manner of arousal that we're going to be dealing with in this particular piece of content (offered by way of the title and tags of the video), and that what I am interested in doing is working within the boundaries of this type of arousal, push against those limits (the expectations of the audience) in order to create a more compelling experience for (or perhaps, with) them. In order to achieve this, I must be extremely 'manner specific' in my performance — it is the only way that I have been able to produce a performance that I am satisfied with. This shows how Mag Uidhir's definition of pornography as 'manner inspecific' (Christy Mag Uidhir, 2009) is misguided.

It would also trump Levinson's argument (Levinson 2005) that all pornographic content is meant to be completely transparent. It is particularly obvious that this is not the case in BDSM pornography, where the use of opaque psychological layers is part of the agreement between audience and creator. This may be as simple as teasing the audience with how much of the creator's body is going to be revealed, or as complicated as a multi-layered conditioning erotic hypnosis video where many images are being shown to the audience, cues are being introduced through repetition and hypnotic language, etc. But this is also true of even the most vanilla and mainstream pornography produced by independent creators: the audience is not just buying into a mechanical reproduction of a mechanical act, they're buying into the story build around it, as it is the semi-opaque layers and assumptions and games that are played by the creator with the audience that make the pornographic content compelling and interesting and arousing.

I must, however, also allow myself to be overcome by the flow, to sink deeply into that state, for my performance to be powerful enough. I usually don't watch my clips until it's time to edit them — getting out of the 'performer' mode and into 'editor' mode would be too much. Since I usually film three or four clips back to back when I am filming by myself, I need to retain as much of that creative flow as possible, and having to change my outfit and reposition my lights and camera in between scenes is already a big enough distraction — although they are creative processes on their own right, they are not the same creative process.

Once I am finished with the filming and the editing day comes around, I will start by reviewing all my footage, cutting it up into manageable chunks and marking and noting it. The type of clip that I film on my own doesn't tend to require a lot of creative

editing in terms of how the scenes are cut and laid out, and I am not as mindful of the rhythm as I am with other types of films — this is mainly because I sell these clips cheaper and my audience seems to enjoy a less laboured editing style[65]. Now, if we follow on with Levinson's aforementioned argument, it could seem that the audience is not interested in the editing style, they just care about the content they're being shown. However, the kind of audience that enjoys this less laboured editing style tends to react very badly once their favourite content creators start creating more 'professional looking' footage — because this editorial style betrays their fantasy that the creator is doing this 'for fun' (i.e. in an amateur capacity). The editing and filming styles of pornographic content are incredibly relevant to these audiences. Going back to my editing process, this is the time at which if I need to add any VFX, it would be done — this will all have been noted in the previous phase. When it comes to this type of editing, it is firmly set in the 'confirmation' phase of the creative process, but it can act as an 'incubating' phase in the back of my mind for future clips or other types of editing.

Moving onto the second type of filming, filming with others, I will distinguish two further sub-types: filming with someone else behind the camera, and filming with someone else in front of the camera. The second process is very similar to the one described above, except that I focus my attention and engagement on the other performers. I tend to be the person dealing with the lights and the camera, although thankfully, the presence of other people on set means that they can help me choose better

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[65] For more on the idea of authenticity as stemming from an unedited style, please see Ashley, V. (2016). Porn – artifice – performance – and the problem of authenticity. *Porn Studies*, [online] 3(2), pp.187–190. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/23268743.2016.1184481., which is also discussed later in this section

angles and change the light as I'm looking at the camera, which makes these technical steps much easier and quicker — the frustration is much lower which makes the process more enjoyable. The fact that the process is more enjoyable is relevant because frustration can be a huge hindrance to getting into a creative flow, and particularly to the 'illumination' state.

Once everything is set up, and I am performing with my colleague(s), I will shift my focus to them and enter into a 'incubation'/'illumination' loop where there are instances of 'confirmation' that happen particularly when the interaction and the feedback 'feel' right — if I am filming a BDSM scene with a colleague playing the submissive role, I get my 'confirmation' from their reaction to my creative input during the scene, and adjust accordingly. This process is slightly different when I am alone in front of the camera but there is someone else behind it. This kind of setup allows me to enter into a much more 'purely performative' state and focus much more on this kind of creativity. This is further highlighted by the fact that I will often only film one set of scenes (one outfit for one clip/film) when I am working with someone else behind the camera. Even though I will still do the scripting myself, I will often have discussions about the storyboarding and light set up with my collaborator. This makes for a richer final product, generally speaking. By the time we reach the filming day, we both know what we are looking to create: we are familiar with the type of lighting, the general script, and the intention behind this piece of film. Even though I still have to do my hair and makeup, once I am filming I can fully engage with the creative performing flow.

The feedback flow with my collaborator means that I can receive suggestions about how to move in order to better the image, for example. It also means that, since they are going through their own creative flow, when new ideas occur to them, we can test them out — their 'illumination' becomes my 'incubation', which in turn prompts even more 'illuminations' for myself. I personally enjoy this type of filming the most — not because I don't like being behind the camera, but because being able to dedicate this type of focus to my performance allows me to sink deeper into it — which always results in a better end product. When it comes to editing in either of these scenarios, I will often send drafts to my collaborator or ask for their input. After labelling and pre-cutting the scenes, much more attention is paid to colour grading and the rhythm of the scenes — there are more cuts, more angle changes, and I can truly enter a fuller 'editing flow', with a complete 'incubation/illumination/confirmation' cycle present during most of the time that I spend editing. This works similarly when I am editing stills or photographs.

Filming vs Painting: differences and commonalities in pornographic processes

How does this compare to the process of painting, in terms of creativity? I would say that the scripting stage is extremely similar to the conceptualisation stage for a painting: having the ideas, gathering the resources, etc — it is easy to see how both of them are creative endeavours. The performing and filming stages are very similar to painting 'alla prima'[66]: there is a certain embodied interest in the material aspects of the

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[66] 'Alla prima', which translates literally to 'at the first attempt', is a wet-in-wet technique executed in one sitting without coming back over it or adding glazes. Also known as direct painting.

practice that is surprisingly similar, as well as the need to 'sink' into a flow. They are not the same thing, however: I find filming to be a much more embodied practice than painting, which is not surprising considering that it involves more of my body and my presence.

Editing on the other hand is very similar to indirect painting[67] — it is a (more) technical exercise that can be less of a haptic and more of a visual experience. It is also slightly more difficult to pinpoint how cutting, slicing and putting scenes together is self-generating and brings about psychological changes. Going back to the haptic aspect of video editing, there is certainly one aspect where this becomes a haptic experience for me, and that is the rhythm. I am speaking here of visual rhythm, not necessarily the rhythm of the sounds, although they are certainly an aspect of it. But there is a certain tactile aspect when it comes to choosing how the video is spliced together that I find is there even for the simplest type of video editing. The overlap of the textures in the moving images, the way in which we make choices and react differently to the different possible overlaps feels very much like a haptic experience to me. However, particularly when it comes to the more involved type of editing, it is undeniable that the way that two scenes intersect (and when I make them intersect) changes the way that I look at and feel about the film that I am working on. It is also undeniable that the more pornography I edit, the more ideas about making pornography occur to me. This indicates that there is an 'incubation/illumination' loop happening, even if I can not quite decide at which point it does.

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[67]Traditional approach to painting where one paints in thin layers.

There is no question to me that while there are different degrees of haptic and visual engagement happening during the different parts of the process of pornographic creation, all of them require engaging with the creative process and flow. I have so far demonstrated that the four stages of creativity are present in all the phases of pornographic creation, and I have also indicated how the different stages fulfil the conditions set up earlier for defining creativity (as a self-generating agent of psychological change). This does not mean that making pornography can not be difficult, frustrating, complicated or sometimes, extremely boring. But I have also found that creating art, of any kind, can be difficult, frustrating, complicated and extremely boring. Sexuality is a central aspect of pornography, but the existence of sexuality and sexual activity at the heart of pornography doesn't seem to be a defining aspect of whether creativity is engaged in its creation — it does, however, affect how said creativity is engaged. If it didn't, any kind of filming or creating would just be the same as anything else, and that is simply untrue. While I have not attended to how contextual and cultural aspects affect the creative process, I do not wish to pretend that they do not exist.

How pornography performers and makers feel about pornography is a fundamental aspect of their craft, and can certainly affect the way in which they connect to their creativity, but that does not make them more or less creative. The way their environment feels about sex, sex work and pornography will have a tremendous effect in their 'incubation' phases, for example. Other factors, such as the type of clips that sell better, the difficulties of managing the administrative side of the business, creative burnout or financial difficulties will also affect their creative output, but do not take away

from the fact that when they are creating porn, they are engaging in a creative process — irrespective of how original or unoriginal the scene they are creating is.

To pretend that pornography is not creative because it often repeats tropes would be to pretend that Murillo's Virgin Annunciations are not the result of his creative process because they repeat the same pose, symbology and were painted by the same person. This is not a discussion about the aesthetic merits of those paintings or those films, but a discussion about the necessary creative process that must be engaged in order to produce those paintings and those films. Creativity is engaged in the pornographic creation process even if the output seems to be repetitive to certain audiences — this is true even if the performer chooses to not fully engage with the 'artistic' aspect of it. There are many reasons for this, such as burnout, low pay, or dislike for the work. Still, in order to produce the work, engaging their creativity is a necessary condition.

3.3 My Pornographic Practice — Painting

Self-portraits and self-pornographization

Part of my practice is deeply rooted in self-portraiture. This responds not only to the most obvious reason (that I am the most readily available model to myself), but also to my interest in self-perception, bodily issues and the creation of my own image. I have always had a deep interest in curating the way that my image is perceived (first and foremost by myself, then by the rest of the world), and this extends to my artistic practice. Additionally, as a sex worker, I've had to curate parts of my image to satisfy particular demands in particular markets — which has been an exercise filled with both fun and despair at different points of my life, sometimes at the same time. My relationship with my image is complicated and layered, and I delight in exploring it. When I take reference pictures, or tape myself, I am performing. I may be performing something that is desirable to men, or not so much — but most times I am performing something that is desirable to myself. I portray myself as a desiring subject as opposed to an object of desire, and I believe that in order to do this I must have as much creative control of the shot as possible. I will not always be the only person 'behind' the camera, because it is impractical to shoot certain things on a timer and with no one to check on your lighting setup. But I am always the art director when it comes to self-portraiture.

Kenneth Clark makes an interesting distinction between the naked ('deprived of our clothes [...], implies some embarrassment') and the nude: 'the vague image it projects into the mind is not of a huddled and defenceless body, but of a balanced, prosperous and confident body: the body re-formed' (Kenneth, 1956, p. 3). Lynda Nead picks up on the way in which the female nude (erotic) is thusly differentiated from the female naked

(pornographic) that 'the female body – natural, unstructured – represents something that is outside the proper field of art and aesthetic judgement; but artistic style, pictorial form, contains and regulates the body and renders it an object of beauty, suitable for art and aesthetic judgement.' (Nead, 2002. pp 38). Nead does clarify that these roles are not bound to the gender of the artist. So, within this traditional framework, if I am making an art work featuring my own body, this would qualify as a containment and regulation of said body. Now, it is true that I go through several layers of what I call 'curation' of the elements in a picture or a film to arrive to my desired final work: I start by choosing the allegorical or literal elements that must be in it, the inspiration behind it, the message, and then I arrange those elements around myself to fit the vision in my mind. As I've discussed before, I am interested in creating a more or less readable image that offers several layers to the audience, so finding ways to design, compose and curate these elements (which include my body, my likeness, and my presence) is part of the process. But I don't see this aesthetic process as a process of containment, where I make myself smaller so that the audience will feel less threatened by my 'natural body', any more than I see wearing a corset as a backward nod to misogynistic hyperfemininity.

In the same way that sometimes I choose to wear custom-made stays and corsets because they work so much better for my body than modern bras, do not dig into my skin and provide me with the breast support that I so desperately need, I choose to expose different parts of myself to the camera, with different clothes and different light to fulfil a particular purpose. It is not feasible for me to present the aesthetic experience that I desire to the audience without curating my own body. I don't inhabit a body that allows me to disregard my physical experience easily, and that carries on to my work. Curating

my own image doesn't mean making myself fit into an easily consumable mould. It means using all the strategies and devices that I have at my disposal to create a layered experience that features aspects of my body. No piece of art will be able to translate the complexity, immensity and corporeality of my body — but that's not going to stop me from trying.

When I chose to portray myself using devices such as pornographic framing, like in the work that I produce featuring my vagina being penetrated by a number of objects, the interest is in the compositional features that occur when flesh collides with objects, the textural aspects of liquid slurring over skin, and other 'aesthetic' concerns. It is a playful exploration that I hope will lead to a pornographic iconography of 'beaver shots'. I don't think many people will find it profoundly erotic, or perhaps even moderately arousing — they are perhaps verging too much on the grotesque, the repetition and the explicit to be able to titillate most viewers. But that doesn't mean that I am not still aiming to arouse my target audience, at the same time that I propose a challenge to them — as we have discussed before, both art and pornography can have more than one purpose at the same time.

I think explicitness as a pornographic device is extremely challenging to many audiences. It is far easier to eroticise an image of a coy femme, to fill it with our own fantasies and preconceptions, than it is to eroticise an image of a femme masturbating. There is nowhere to hide our preconceptions, and these images still have immense shock value. But it is also a celebration of pleasure — whether pretended or real, since performance is an integral part of any kind of modelling or acting. I aspire my

self-portraits to be both arousing, layered and slightly menacing, in the way that horror and pornography seem to mingle. My practice explores how self-pornographization can expose the challenging relationship between the immediacy of our bodies, sex, and a certain fear of death and the unknown works because I believe that it is a toolkit uniquely suited to the task, not because I am trying to appease some undeclared male audience — even when I am trying to pay my bills.

Pornography, sanitization and bodily fluids: 'The Cloche' process

'The Cloche' is a series of still lifes that depicts sex toys under a glass cloche. This series started with a sketch, 'Floating Still Life I'. This picture shows a floating red buttplug in a glass cloche with a wooden base.
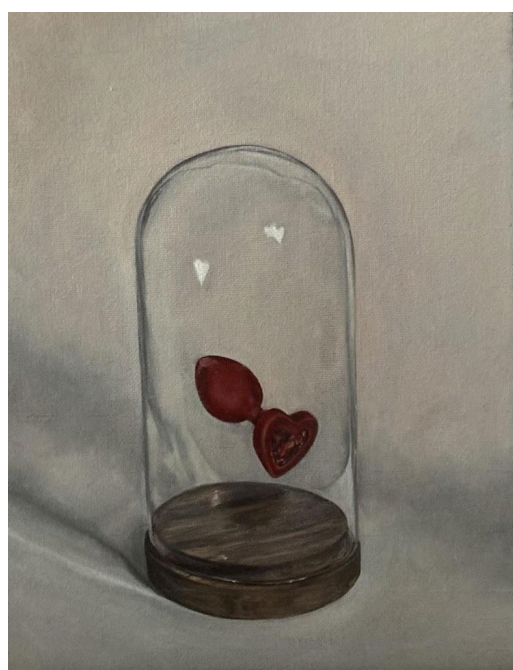

Fig. 12 – Floating Still Life I, 2022, Oil on Canvas, 21 x 30.5cm

The idea behind this series was to explore the relationship between elegance and sharpness (as an aesthetic visual experience, the delight or interest that is experienced when edges are rendered in a particularly pleasing way), as well as the idea of 'explicitness' through sex toys. There is an obvious dislocation between the object itself, which purpose is to occupy body cavities of the most intimate order and should perhaps be wrapped in velvet, satin, or some other sensual (or at least cosy) material, and the aseptic, almost laboratory-like environment of the cloche. This dislocation is often used in sex-toy-related marketing efforts, which seek to sanitise their products — see, for example, [this Satisfyer advertisement](#) or the [Tenga GEO presentation video.](#) The Tenga video does show lubricant and teases at how the product would be used, which doesn't really happen in the Satsifyer advertisement. This highlights the differences in how sex toys are advertised to different audiences (male for the Tenga, female for the Satisfyer, which is fairly cis-centred). However, they both still offer a fully sanitised version of its intended usage, with no bodily fluids on sight and a cold, bright and white environment surrounding the object.

In the case of 'Floating Object I', this dislocation is further highlighted by the surrealism of an object floating in space — the sex toy defies gravity, occupying a space often reserved for objects of worship or religious relics. The choice of a cloche (which is heavily associated with the age of enlightenment, vanitas, and other aspects closely tied together to 'men of science', cabinets of curiosities and the aesthetics of western objectivity) allows the object to be isolated and contained from the environment. It may be compared to a religious object, it is contained and does not represent any threat to the audience. I intended for the composition to be at the same time reminiscent and

completely opposite of a relic: the case is completely transparent (whereas in a relic it would be heavily ornamented) and the object occupies the centre of the image. The red colour of the buttplug is set off against a colder, white background. The intention was to elevate the buttplug to a holy object, floating between heaven and earth.

However, once this sketch was finished, I was not satisfied with the impression it produced: even though the sex toy itself had been rendered realistically, it was somehow not explicit enough. Contained in the cloche, the object was no longer a titillating threat, just an interesting curiosity — which in a way suggests that the sterile/sterilising gaze so often used in science and academia can render powerful subjects into merely interesting baubles. Thus, it was not a sufficiently pornographic exploration of the topic: I needed to produce work that pushed the boundaries of the viewer further.

This first sketch was too 'sterile' and too comfortable to fulfil its purpose. How could I turn these objects into something that communicated the explicitness of their use in a more direct way to the audience, whilst still maintaining elements like the cloche and the detachment from the bodily cavities that would have hosted them? Since this series was already related to the language of advertisement, I turned to image semiotics to find an answer to that question: I am hoping that by including the 'signs' of sex the boundaries of the viewer will be pushed further (the 'sign' being be the lubricant, the blood, the excrements, and other bodily fluids, and the 'referred' would be the act of sexual intercourse in which the object was used). The images will still contain no genitalia, to keep them away from some widely accepted definitions of pornography, but in using these more obvious metonymic signs it is my hope that viewers will consider them as pornographic. They are still images of an object inside a cloche (the butt-plug, a jelly

rampant rabbit and a ball gag), just displaying traces of their use. By removing the body and the situation from the image, but retaining the metonymic sign that directly indicates the existence of embodied sexual pleasure, I invite the viewer to question definitions of pornography that establish explicitness as a prerequisite (Bovens, 1998). Additionally, it helps explore the hypothesis of whether pornography is the work or image that pushes the boundaries of the public's comfort levels.

The finished Cloche series, shown below, is the result of this reflection. I believe it shows a definite step-up in the use of bodily fluids and pushing the images into far less comfortable grounds, upping the shock factor and firmly placing them in the realm of pornography. Initially, I thought that the lack of bodies in this series would reveal something interesting, but what I ended up discovering was an interesting relationship between edge treatment, haptics and distance. This is consistent with Pierce's firstness and thirdness. It was imperative to pay close attention to all edges in order to accurately render both the glass and the subjects inside of it, an exercise which lead me to reflect on how edge treatment impacts our immediate understanding of distance through which I can only describe as a haptic experience — the more we seem to be able to delineate an object (edges), the more we find that object believable. These images were meant to be explicit and believable and this was achieved through haptic experience in the form of edge treatment, not through immediacy or transparency. These images require the audience to stop and absorb them, to engage in observation in order to absorb the details. They are semiotically designed to avoid transparency.

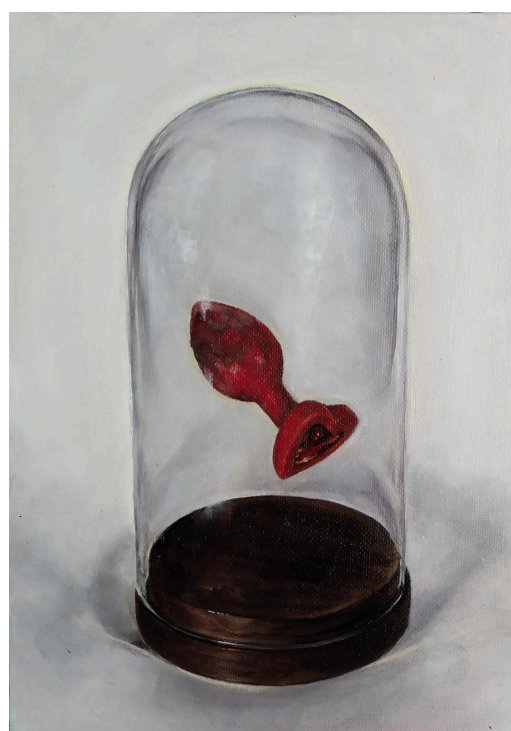Fig. 13 – Desputi, 2023. Oil on Linen Board. 27 x 19 x 0.5 cm

Fig. 14 – Fimus, 2023. Oil on Linen Board. 27 x 19 x 0.5 cm

Fig. 15 – Sanguis, 2023. Oil on Linen Board. 27 x 19 x 0.5 cm

Technique, distance and the image crafting process

There are three techniques that I have used as part of my practice-based research: oil painting, photography and videography. I use oil paints because they are the material of the masters, first and foremost. From a purely technical point of view, it is also the material that offers me the best chance at achieving naturalism[68] and in particular, realistic skin and fluids. I use photography because it's an easy way to produce references that I can revisit later. Additionally, I can also sell the pictures of myself to pay for my

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[68]I use naturalism here in the sense that 'it implies an emphasis on the accurate representation of nature, including man and his works, especially as to their visible appearance and observable behaviour' (Munro, 1960, p. 133)

expenses whilst dedicating time to the PhD. On top of that, it is one of the mediums more often associated with pornography as a genre, with some indicating that this is due to photography's apparent transparency (Levinson 2005). Similarly to photography, I use videography because of its associations with pornography and also because it allows me to pay for some of my expenses while engaging in this research. It may seem crude to mention money in this context, but it has been a crucial aspect of my lived experience and of my artistic practice. It is also at the heart of artistic practice itself: without patrons or clients, artists can not support themselves (unless they come from a privileged background or have a spouse that can support them). To pretend that there can be a separation between the need to afford one's own creative endeavours and one's own artistic practice is naive at best, and deliberately obtuse at worst. Given the intersection between my artistic practice and sex work, it is simply impossible to ignore.

Naturalism is my visual language of choice. I define naturalism as a painting style that is concerned with a certain degree of likeness to the original subject or reference. There are several reasons for this, but perhaps the most obvious is that I am not interested in abstraction when it comes to pornography: I aim to embrace the 'explicitness' that seems inherent to the category itself. This is consistent with certain definitions of pornography: (1) made with the intention to arouse its audience sexually, (2) by prescribing attention to its sexually explicit representational content (e.g. Maes 2012, p. 32). I want to revel in the aesthetic experience of the crevices, the textures and the contrasts not only as a viewer, but more importantly, as a painter. I find the process of painting certain textures to be an enthralling one, where all of my attention is taken by the layering of paint and colours in order to conjure this particularly juicy illusion.

When it comes to the semiotic aspect of these images, I seek to examine the limits of using a pictorial language reminiscent of XVIIIth-XIXth century European art in my images and offer multiple layers to the image reader. I am concerned with creating beautiful images: if I can create a beautiful enough image, will the audience spend enough time with the piece to decipher it, even if the subject makes them uncomfortable? These additional layers of meaning become part of an internal/external game that the audience is invited to join. I also aim to put pornography at the same level as other great works of art that have used this language.

Further to this aspect, I aim to include classical references as part of my practice-based research. Using classic compositions, well-known works of art (such as Zurbaran's Agnus Dei) or even art categories (like the Vanitas, a type of still-life that explores the fleeting nature of life and how it intersects with death) I seek to explore pornography. Perhaps one of my intentions in doing so is to legitimise the subject, but I also seek the beauty in what some people might consider grotesque subjects. If we treated pornography with as much care and attention as we treat still-lives, would it be less disgusting to the wider public? This goes in both directions. It is not only a matter of the artist carefully curating an image, a work or an experience, and displaying it in a meaningful way. The audience as well must be willing to explore it with the same focus and level of attention that one dedicates to, say, a Rachel Ruysch still life. Despite this, I do not intend to 'rehabilitate' pornography or to turn everything into some kind of white-washed erotica: I merely want to show pornography as beautifully as I believe it can be.

In doing so, I also aim to investigate what I call the 'pornographic gaze': the unique way in which sex workers create images for the sex market and/or for artistic purposes. I aim to explore whether it's gender-specific (do femme sex workers and masc sex workers create images/works differently?), market-specific (do they tailor their images differently depending on their audiences?) and its characteristics (how can one identify the pornographic gaze?) and its aesthetic possibilities. In my lived experience, the sex-worker identity can be as strong as the gender identity.

Historically, the term 'pornographic gaze' has often been attributed to men (esp. rappers) who objectify women and femme-presenting people[69]. However, I am interested in examining the way that sex workers look at our/themselves, and the way we/they craft images. Mainstream markets such as lingerie photography and other types of product marketing (as well as fashion) often co-opt sex workers' ideas and pieces of work, so this pornographic gaze is obviously of great interest to the public. Thus, one might wonder, why is it not recognised as a site of image production in its own right? This is a question of particular interest to me now that a lot of the images produced by sex workers have already been sanitised to comply with social media standards: if these brands are not further sanitising the images for wider social consumption, is the only difference in value between their images and the sex-worker produced images the fact that it is a sex worker who made them?

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[69] For more on this usage of the terms see Hunter, M. and Soto, K. (2009). Women of Color in Hip Hop: The Pornographic Gaze. *Race, Gender & Class*, [online] 16(1/2), pp.170–191. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/41658866.

There is an obvious intention on my part to reclaim the term 'pornographic gaze' for the sex-working community, in the same way that terms like 'queer' or 'dyke' have been reclaimed. Once again, my aim is not so much to 'sanitise' this gaze, or to represent it in a way that makes it more palatable to a middle-class, academic audience. I merely seek to investigate it, establish some potential common characteristics, and finally, explore my own contributions to it. This gaze seems deeply rooted in the photographic and videographic languages, although I do find the idea of historical sex workers using paintings and other previous forms of art[70] to further their image full of potential. However, it is the intersection between these mediums and the ability to be both photographer/videographer and model that I believe alchemises all the elements necessary to create the pornographic gaze as I understand it. This is one of the reasons why I choose to use myself as a model, as I believe this to be a fundamental aspect of this gaze. It is also one of the reasons why I endeavoured to use repetition as a creative tool, since it is a characteristic of industrial mediums such as photography, videography, and is often used as the reason why pornography can not be art.

Square Paintings: Analysis of a series

The Square Paintings series were developed for the purposes of artistic research for this thesis. I wanted to engage myself in a series of repetitive painting tasks, hoping that I would discover something about the relationship between repetition and artistic production. The idea was to look through the commercial pornography that I had shot

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[70] Such as the courtesans mentioned by Aretino, or those appearing in Raphael and Titians paintings.

earlier that year and then find a number of images that would work as small, square paintings. I wanted all these images to be extremely sexually explicit and obvious, and if possible, focusing on the genital areas. The only cases in which this is slightly different are the ones featuring the feet and the mouth, but they still fulfil the sexually explicit criteria via the introduction of a sex toy being used in an obscene manner.

There are many ways to define objectification: degrading a person to the mere status of object, depicting them with complete disregard to what makes them that particular and unique person, etc. Nussbaum identifies seven features of objectification as they follow:

1. *instrumentality*: the treatment of a person as a tool for the objectifier's purposes;

2. *denial of autonomy*: the treatment of a person as lacking in autonomy and self-determination;

3. *inertness*: the treatment of a person as lacking in agency, and perhaps also in activity;

4. *fungibility*: the treatment of a person as interchangeable with other objects;

5. *violability*: the treatment of a person as lacking in boundary-integrity;

6. *ownership*: the treatment of a person as something that is owned by another (can be bought or sold);

7.   *denial of subjectivity*: the treatment of a person as something whose experiences and feelings (if any) need not be taken into account.

There is an underlying idea, I believe, that objectification is a forced passivication — that is, it's turning a subject (an active actor) into an object (a passive item). Nussbaum makes this obvious when she outlines the seven features of objectification, particularly through the denial of autonomy, denial of subjectivity and inertness (Nussbaum, 1995, p. 257). When it comes to art, this is further enforced by the western divide between creator and muse, painter and model, filmmaker and actor/actress. The model/actress/sex worker curtails the subversion of her own body by turning herself into a submissive object and offering this to the painter (Nead, 2001).

This necessarily means that if the model had any agency, they would need to give it up in the creative process (as per Nussbaum, through denial of autonomy and instrumentality). Perhaps more jarringly, it means that the creation of what are considered great works of art is a purely individual process, stemming from the mind of the painter, where the model is merely a tool[71] — with no more agency in this whole process than a brush or a pigment may have. It is what the painter considers beautiful, sensual, containable, objectifiable what will make it into the canvas. It would also mean that, through my reference shooting process, I was denying my own autonomy and subjectivity.

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[71] For more on the model as artist and creator in her own right, see Debaene, A. (2021). The Art Model as Performer. *Aesthetic Investigations,* [online] 5(1), pp.7–27. doi:https://doi.org/10.58519/aesthinv.v5i1.11772.

Self-objectification is a good attempt at potentially explaining some of this. Defined as when people view themselves as objects for use instead of as human beings (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997), it is commonly quoted by Nordic Model advocates as a reason why online sex workers exploit themselves[72]. Both men and women can be affected by this, but it's obviously more prevalent amongst women due to the patriarchal environment that we are currently experiencing. While I understand how useful this concept is to discuss body image issues, I am not sure its application is quite that straightforward to art — or to pornography.

Neither art nor pornography are necessarily concerned with portraying (standardised) sexual attractiveness, and standardised sexual attractiveness is a necessary concern for self-objectification as defined by Fredrickson and Roberts. This may be a controversial idea, particularly when it comes to pornography, so let me clarify. Pornography is concerned with arousing a particular audience and exploring sexuality, and that audience may not necessarily be sexually attracted to mainstream standards of beauty. The argument may still be made that bodies in pornography are at worst being objectified, and at best, objectifying themselves. This is usually where the idea of fetishisation comes in: if art and pornography are not portraying sexual objects of desire for the general public, they must be portraying sexual objects of desire for someone. Thus, the fat bodies in pornography are a fetish niche and those women are (negatively)

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[72] For a critique of the Nordic Model that acknowledges the voices of sex workers see Escobar, A. (2021). *In Defense of Sex Work Decriminalization: A Case Against the Nordic Model* (Thesis). Georgia State University. Retrieved from https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/philosophy_theses/305/

objectifying themselves. As long as self-objectification is understood in a uniquely negative light, this is the only way in which 'undesirable' characteristics can be understood to be portrayed — as negatively objectified subservient bodies. This ties together with the colonial ideas of otherness and fatness explored in Chapter 2, but also with the pornographization of fat and queer bodies that will be explored in Chapter 4.

Once we take the idea of free, empowering labour choices under capitalism out of the equation, let's examine this: if I am making my own pornography (whether it is to make a living, for fun, or for both), am I objectifying myself? And moreover, if this objectification is occurring, am I diminishing my status as a person when I engage in this behaviour? Why must objectification be always a sum negative not only for the objectified person but for anyone who looks like them? Am I objectifying myself when I paint my vagina but Jenny Saville isn't because she chooses to portray hers through what some people consider gruesome angles? Is she also objectifying herself, denying her own autonomy? Surely, considering the language of her paintings, she can hardly be denying her own subjectivity. I propose that perhaps, thinking of objectification as a framing device, a tool, allows for richer discussions around the nature and effects of images.

The Red Squares series uses all reference material from the same photoshoot, which was shot with red and green light and a mirror. This photoshoot did relatively well commercially as pornography, and the images produced were really interesting: abstract yet obvious. I wanted to explore this very intense colour palette and contrast through paint, and I restricted myself to one a-la-prima session for each of them which raised the difficulty of dealing with complementary colours (since, if mixed, the pigments neutralise one another which would lead to the loss of saturation that made the original material so

visually arresting). I also wanted to take advantage of the abstraction of the shapes and limited colour palette to play with the amount (volume) of paint applied on the canvas — evoking a lusciousness and hinting at the sexiness of the painting process itself.

Square Paintings gave me the chance to take the previous experiment even further: now I wasn't just interested in how the volume of paint in the canvas could evoke obscenity, but I also wanted to see how explicit beaver shots would look if I worked with a realistic colour palette. Could I push the image to a realm of subjugating contrasts and textures or, borrowing from Levinson, would the transparency of the image prove to be entirely too overwhelming for this aesthetic experience to occur?
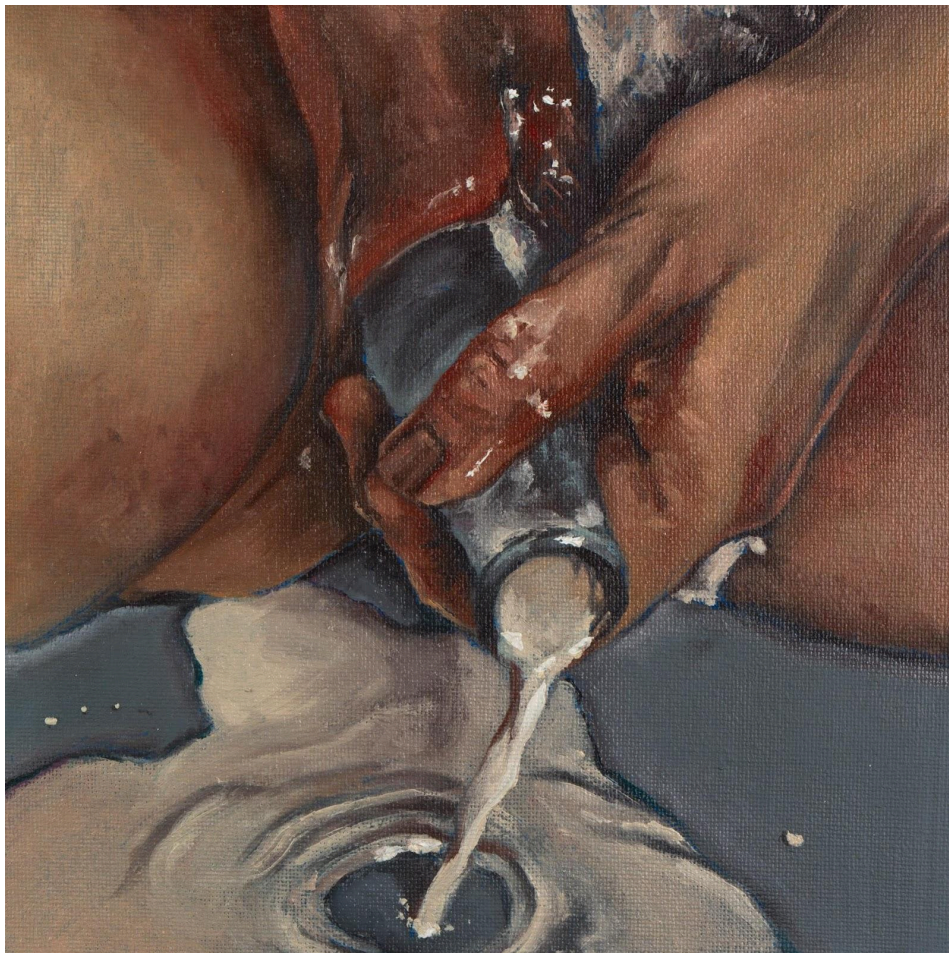

Fig. 16 – Quickie I, 2022, Oil on Canvas Panel, 20 x 20 cm

This painting shows a bottle of milk being held by a hand and coming out of a vagina, and milk being poured from the bottle itself. This is what I would consider the queerest image of the series, in terms of sheer content: the idea of a man made, phallic object pouring with white liquid from a vagina speaks to me of the long-standing tradition of homemade transvestite[73] pornography. The use of warm tones against a naples-yellow skin contrasts with the almost line-like use of the blue, in what aimed to be an approach to a more illustrative approach to the image.

One of the most interesting aspects about the stylistic choices I made for this painting is that a certain intention from the original photoshoot was carried through into the painting itself. From the point of view of my creative process this means that a particular creative state (or inspiration, if we prefer) occurred in the creation of the reference material (which was originally intended to be sold online, not to be made into a painting) that then re-occurred during the creation of the actual painting. When I was originally shooting this, my intention was to create something comic-al (that is, both funny and referencing a particular pin-up comic-book aesthetic). I wanted to borrow some of the exaggerated elements of some Hentai tropes that have made their way also into western pornographic comics, which is what led me to copious amounts of white liquid being used in an innovative way. And when it came to painting it I started deviating quite soon from the slightly more polished and cool-toned choices I had made for the

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[73] Using the term transvestite here because that is how those folks referred to themselves at that moment in history (1930-1970). This term encompasses a different identity than what trans folk encompasses, although there is some overlap.

other Square 2 paintings. This comic-ness required bolder application, an almost posterised way of thinking about colour relationships, and a warmer colour palette. Instead of trying to render the milk lusciously, to make it feel like it was dripping, I opted for a more iconic interpretation of the reference material. Here, repetition layered on itself to produce a distinctly different result, one that walked away from the language of naturalism/photorealism, but still produced a shocking and pornographic image.

This is an interesting image to look at through Nussbaum's objectification list. There is no denial of autonomy (I staged the shoot and I made all the decisions behind it), no intentness (I am the active agent and the picture shows this), no fungibility (I am not interchangeable with other objects, although it could be argued that the bottle of milk is interchangeable with other objects), no ownership (there is no visual evidence that I can be bought or sold), or denial of subjectivity (since I am the mind behind the image, I can attest to taking my feelings and experiences into account). However, instrumentality and violability are slightly more complicated. Let's assess violability first: the treatment of a person as lacking in boundary-integrity. I can imagine the argument being made that my willingness to portray myself in such a situation is a violation of my own boundaries — however, I can attest that staging this photoshoot, enacting it and painting do not go against my own integrity or boundaries. Finally, let's look at instrumentality. It can be argued I used myself for my own purposes. However, this was not done in a way to negate my status as a person, or to lower myself into the status of an object. I agree that this is an objectifying painting, but I negate that said objectification is a negative aspect. This image is not made with the object of pleasing an audience of men, but with the object of interrogating the relationship between transvestite self-made pornography, the queer

identity, the use of fluids in animated pornography and fetishization. This, I believe, answers the question of whether objectification can be something other than a net negative.
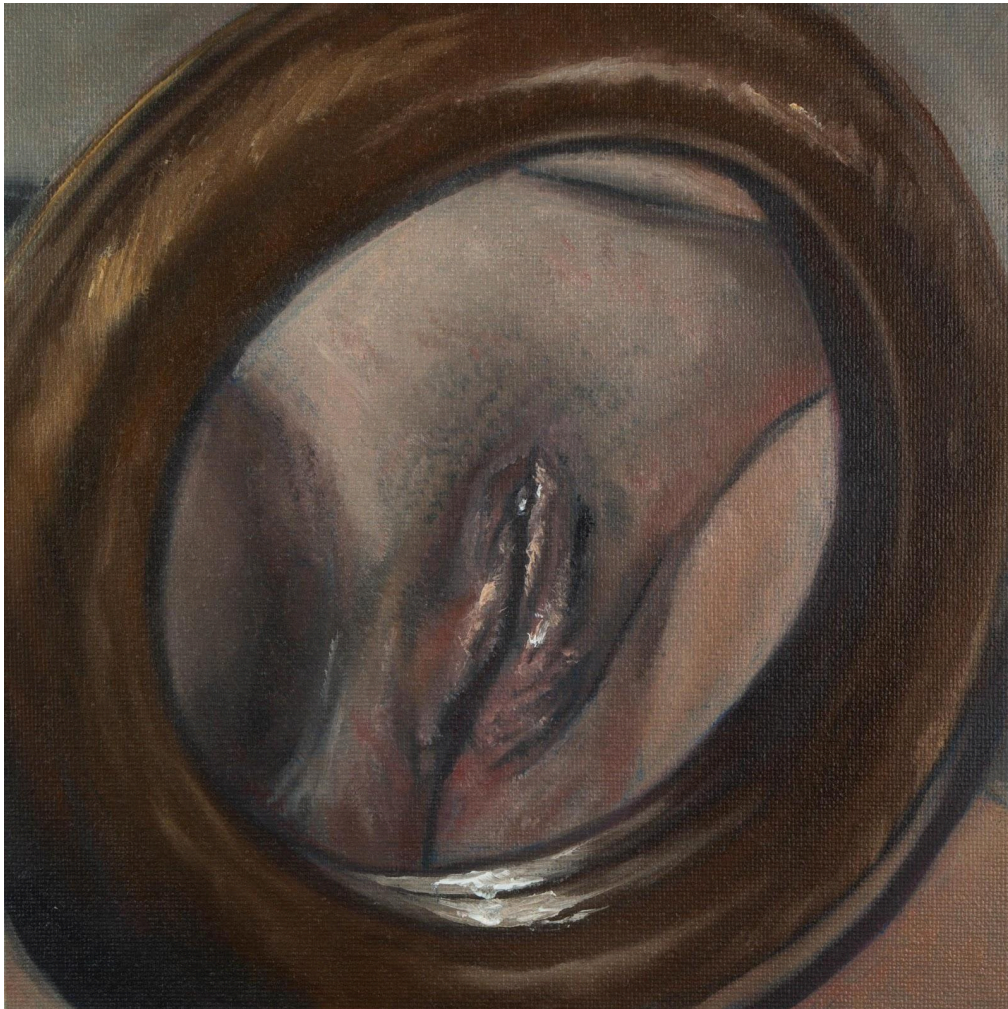
Fig. 17 – Quickie IV, 2023, Oil on Canvas Board, 20x20cm

This was the one Square painting that didn't use a photographic reference that was made with commercial pornographic intent, and was instead shot with the purpose of turning it into a painting. And while it is a very obvious and fairly explicit 'beaver shot', there are several complex layers present in the image. Semiotically, it carries from the reference material the fact that this is shot in an antique mirror, which affects the depth of

field and crispness of the image itself. Mirrors and vaginas have a long history together[74], a symbological connection that was important to expand on through this small study. Another example of repetition producing an interesting result, and this time it is in a way three-fold: the original image is shot through a mirror (of a mirror, since it was a reflex camera) and then painted. Even though that is an image thrice repeated, each iteration has offered a different layer until they've all come together as an art piece in the final painting.

I chose a colour palette akin to the colder tones of Flemish paintings because it was a study for a flemish-style still-life. However, I was curious to see how (or whether) this would affect the shock-value of the image itself, whether the cold tones would act as yet another layer that would facilitate the audience looking at the subject through a more distant lens. In terms of the application of paint, I was really interested in pushing the mixture of titanium and lead white with naples yellow in order to produce a creamy, pale skin that could then pick up on the underlying blue and green tones that I had laid down beforehand.

Finally, regarding the composition, I feel that this is a rather intimate, self-contained piece. With the obvious ellipse containing the beaver shot in a square frame comes also a certain feeling of safety. Again, the aforementioned layers and distance. However, thanks to the slight distortion of the mirror frame provided by the perspective, as well as due to the piling of lead white for the highlights, there is still a

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[74] Most people with a vagina will have to use a mirror to look at their genitals in detail, which is what I am referring to. Gay Talese mentions feminist workshops that used mirrors in this way in 'Thy neighbor's wife' (Talese, 1981, p. 506).

certain unctuosity and tactile feeling in it. I consider this image a prime example of the 'pornographic gaze' mentioned before. The use of mirrors as a framing device is nothing new, but it has been present through my image-creating practice for as long as I have been a sex worker and is deeply linked to that aspect of it.

Fig. 18 – Red Quickies I, 2023, Oil on Canvas Board, 20x20cm

It would only be fair to start this analysis by admitting that this is both the first painting in the square series as well as my favourite out of all of them. This is mainly due to the contrast between the crisp and the soft applications, which make the phallic form and the tongue particularly 'juicy'.

All of the red paintings in the square series had the same goal: playing between abstraction and explicit realism. I did this in an effort to explore Levinson's claim that pornography seeks to be as transparent as possible. I wasn't necessarily interested in proving or disproving the claim itself, but in exploring how much of that perceived transparency I could retain whilst working with a very limited colour palette and reference materials that lent themselves very easily to be interpreted through (at least a certain amount of) abstraction. There are other red paintings that include genitalia and penetration, which usually would put them higher in the explicitness scale — but there is something about the bluntness of the diagonal composition and almost flatness of the main elements in this one that produces, I believe, the most pornographic image — but alas, not the most transparent.

Interestingly, I find that all of the Red Series' paintings produce images that are more titillating and exciting than those that were painted with a more realistic colour palette — a certain unctuosity in the application of the paint, a very haptic aspect that was present throughout their execution. Using a certain amount of abstraction (ie flattening the shapes through very strong lighting and limiting the colours to almost only a cadmium red light) makes the image feel more pornographic, and not less. Particularly in the case of this painting, the relationship between edges and the haptic experience shows up again: part of the pornographic experience of it is the contrast between the soft edges in the recessed background and the sharp edges of the lead white highlights on the main subject. The edge treatment of this main object also contributes to this experience. It is interesting to note that although this is not a completely opaque image, it is much less

transparent than some of the other square paintings in both series. However, these other images have less pornographic potential, they are less titillating. This negates the direct transparency-pornography relationship that Bovens proposes, although it does shed light on the aesthetic pornographic experience.
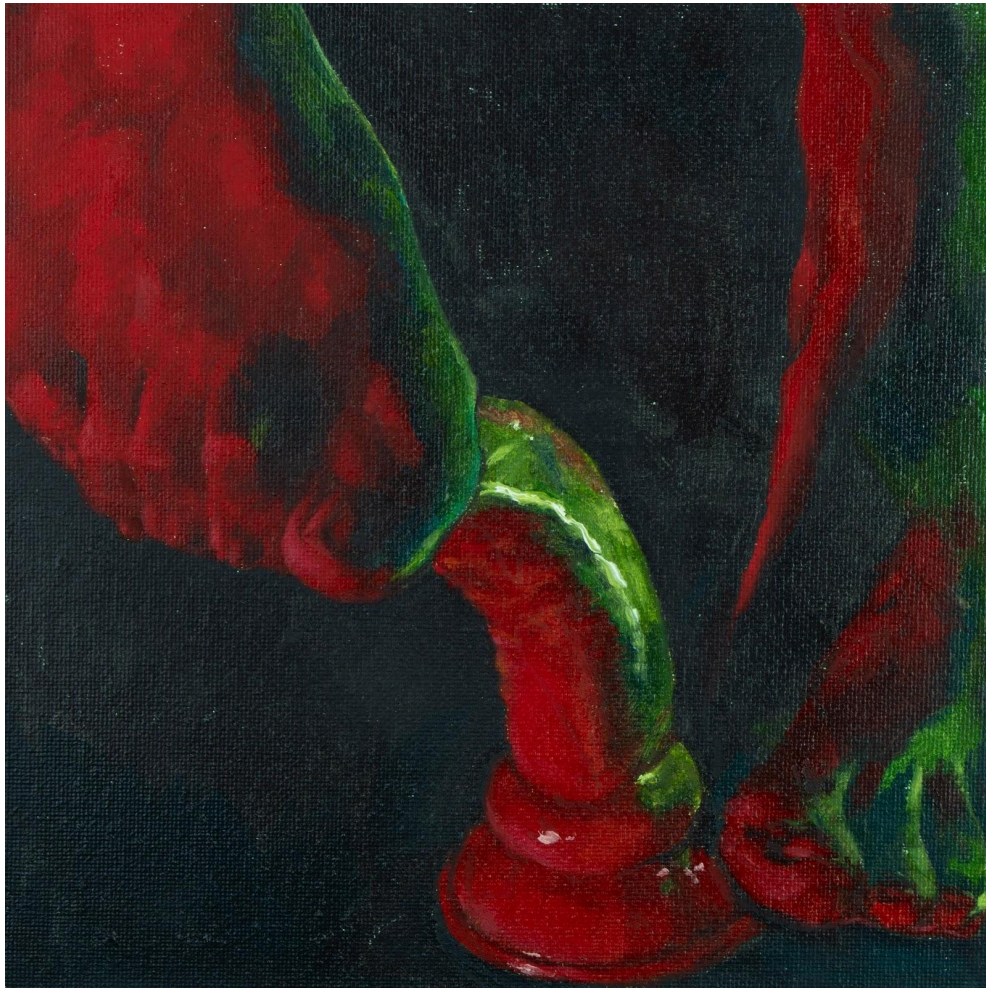
Fig. 19 – Red Quickies IV, 2023, Oil on Canvas Board, 20x20cm

One of the reasons why I chose this subject matter (so much that two of the paintings in the red series feature feet) was that I felt it was only incredibly explicit and arousing to a certain particular audience, whilst being just 'racy' or perhaps even looking silly to anyone who is not remotely interested in fetish, bizarre or BDSM imagery. This felt very playful to me, because it meant that on top of working through the

aforementioned weight of the paint and really leaning into the abstract qualities of the colour palette, I was now playing within a realm that felt slightly surrealistic, where the audience could find themselves confronted by a pornographic image... or not.

That potential of the image not being read as pornography opened up a space where I felt I could immediately push the contrast further, look for more interesting intersecting shapes, and at the same time, focus on the anatomical details that make feet very erotic, titillating and interesting. It might have been because at this point I had painted my vagina so many times that any other anatomical part was an interesting challenge, but I have always found hands and feet to be delightful to paint. The particular intention behind this shot and its BDSM/femdom bias meant that I had to be able to portray the feet as both delicate and powerful, and of course, full of the erotic and pornographic potential that resides in the grey area between the performance of femininity and abject violence. In order to do this, I really leaned into the contrast between green and red light and the vast areas of shadow that emerge in between them.

Whilst working on this series I have also gained a sort of embodied understanding of gazing at my anatomy, an intimate knowledge of what it feels to look at me. Pornographic exploration of our own bodies is neither empowering nor decimating — I propose instead that it is up to each of us to determine what lies both over and under it. It has already been discussed that objectification does not need to be a net negative, but I believe that whether it is or not comes down to the deeply personal relationship between the person in the image and their reasons to be in it. Even when this is a relationship motivated by labour, objectification may still render a positive result. Furthermore, the 'pornographic gaze' as proposed in this chapter, requires objectification (moreover,

self-objectification) in order to be developed: sex workers use our bodies as object/subjects, and develop and deploy the 'pornographic gaze' to make sexually titillating images. They share a language with pornography and sometimes they are pornography. Not only sex workers use this gaze, the fact that self-objectification and an interest in creating sexually titillating images are requirements for it means that sex workers are uniquely positioned to create these images.

3.4 The Exhibition

Introduction

Concupiscencia[75] is an [online exhibition](#) featuring most of the work created as part of my practice-based research journey for this thesis. I debuted it during the Sex in Contemporary media conference, during which I also gave a companion paper. The exhibition included a survey for audiences to complete. The exhibition puts my work into context in a virtual space, which makes it accessible to everyone who has access to a compatible device and an internet connection, anywhere in the globe. It also allowed me to design a completely custom space to fit my artwork, and it allows the audience to get up-close and personal with all of the artwork on the walls. I would have never been able to hire a space this big for my artwork in London or to get this kind of footfall without significant investment, and the online exhibition as well as launching it during the conference allowed me to reach as many people as possible who may choose to complete the survey.

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[75] Concupiscence: sexual desire;lust. ardent, usually sensuous, longing.

Fig. 20 – Exhibition screenshots

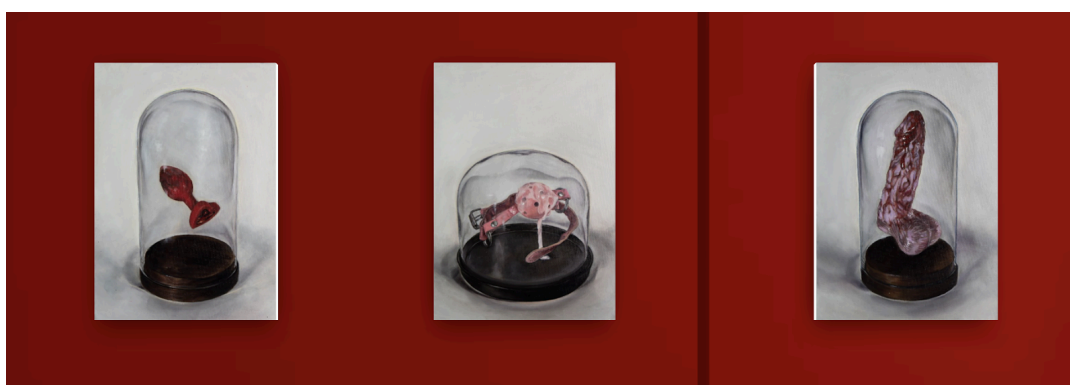## Works in the exhibition

Cloche Series

Fig. 21 – The Cloche Series

As mentioned before in this chapter, the Cloche series is a reflection of the intersection between the colonial medical gaze and semiotic indicators for David Bell's 'citizen pervert' (Bell, 1995). I wanted to explore the relationship between Icon and Index, but also utilise a signifier of the privacy that ends up being made public (Bell, 1995) and exploit its pornographic potential. The aim was to explore queerness, kink, fetishes and menstruation in an explicit, pornographic way, without including any anatomical subjects. Because I was not including any actual explicit genital images I had to push the images further in order to create this sense of discomfort: the signifiers needed a very strong relationship with the signified act. It wasn't enough to include just the objects themselves, they had to be covered in the traces of the acts they were signifying: faeces, blood and saliva. I wanted to also push against Levinson's idea of pornography being necessarily a transparent medium, which the use of semiotics allowed me to do rather successfully because of the natural opacity present in the relationship between signifier and signified.

Red Quickies

Fig. 22 – Red Quickies series

The Red Quickies were the first square painting series that I embarked on and my technical reasoning behind them was twofold, as well as the reason behind their name: I wanted a series of paintings that I could create quickly for the exhibition, and I wanted to use already shot pornographic material from my archives. I found this series of videos and photos that I had shot previously in the year to sell on a couple of online platforms, and I focused on finding the images that had the biggest potential for abstraction. My focus was on finding the relationships between shapes with this extremely limited palette of cadmium red, turquoise and lead white. I wanted my painting process to feel pornographic in and of itself. As opposed to the more carefully applied layers of paint in the Cloche series, for the Quickies I wanted big, bold shapes guiding the eyes into thick textures that made the most of the haptic qualities of paint. This series in particular,

because of the limited palette, was pushing the relationship between abstraction and realism further, as well as exploring the symbolic charge behind the use of neon-like red on a black background, which clearly speaks of sex work and seedy scenarios.

Quickies

Fig. 23 – Quickies series

The second series of quickies was much less focused on the idea of abstracting shapes through the use of colour, and more on offering extremely explicit snippets through the use of a more traditional skin-painting palette. This series features solely 'beaver shots', that is, extreme closeups of my genital area. Two of them were chosen from

a series of photographs and clips that I had previously created for selling purposes. It was important to me to explore this idea of mechanical reproduction and repurposing of material that I often find to be at the core of many kinds of content creation, including independent self-pornographers. Mechanical reproduction (which for the purpose of this, I separate from mechanical reproducibility) seems to sit at the core of pornographic practice: it is both part and parcel of photographic and videographer artworks. Additionally, as it was briefly touched upon during the 1st chapter, this industrial aspect of pornography is also one of the characteristics that is sometimes invoked upon to separate it from art. My intention was to explore the relationship between mechanical reproduction and using a traditional medium such as oil paints. The use of naples yellow and lead white lent a very particular milkyness to the skin, and painting alla prima resulted in a series of 'fresh' paintings, where one can see the brush marks and piling of paint to create reflections. They also represent a gradation of extremes, from more 'external' beaver shots until the last, most explicit and interesting one, which uses a bottle of milk as a penetration device[76]. All of them were painted in one session: the shots showing the outside of the vulva are more naturalistic than the latter ones (showing more of its inner parts and/or it being penetrated), which take much more advantage of the haptic qualities of the paint, simply because this is what the alla prima technique allowed me to do in one sitting.

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[76] Here I do not intend for the act of penetration to equate or imply the penetrated partner with submission or inaction. Whilst it is tempting to think of it in such simple terms, this idea doesn't hold true if we think of the physical realities of any penetration of any kind (whether anal, vaginal or oral, the penetrated person needs to actively work their muscles in order to aid the penetrative action). It is perfectly possible for the penetration device (whether a penis attached to a human being, a phallic object, a limb, etc.) to stand perfectly still, which would then reverse the generally understood hierarchy of this word. A queer, sex-worker centric take on penetration makes this act centre the penetrated in an equitable way.
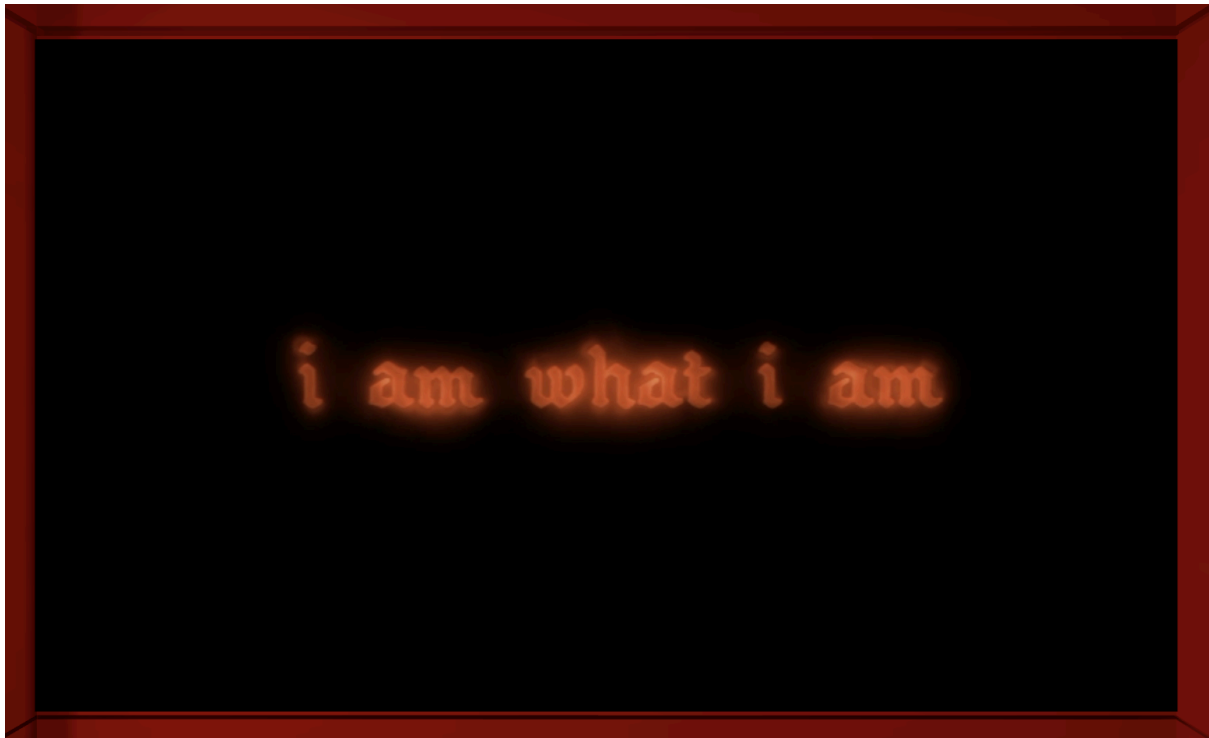
evoKations

Fig. 24 – evoKations

This piece of experimental audiovisual art is part of a larger series of works in progress. Based around the idea of the 72 Demons of the Goetia, a piece of jewish magic lore (Macgregor Mathers & Crowley, 2016), this particular video is a sketch of Asmodeus, one of the demons more often associated with lust and sexual relationships, which is the reason why I chose to include it in this exhibition. The piece combines non-explicit shots with some pseudo-explicit shots extracted from one of my pornographic clips where white liquid can be seen in my mouth, as well as stock video of different animals and textures. Additionally, overlaid on top there is a custom-made audio track using stock audio and generated sounds. The opening includes motion graphics that represent an opening ritual. The idea behind this piece was to evoke the feelings, smells, textures and sounds associated both with Asmodeus (according to several historical sources) and with

animalistic sex. It was the perfect piece to tie the exhibition together, since the sound plays throughout the space putting the rest of the pieces in conversation with one another.

Sculptures

Fig. 25 – Sculptures

Two 3D models of a real-life sculpture adorn the two columns in the space. These are based on the 3D scan of a hand-modelled impression of a vagina, one of them being penetrated by two fingers, where the fingers are cut as a geometric section in order to allow the viewer to see how the vagina curls and changes shape around it. The vagina is framed in an ornate baroque frame, and the whole sculpture is finished in a high-gloss white material. I sought to include at least one three-dimensional artwork in this

exhibition because I wanted to explore the difference between painting and modelling aroused genitals. Painting them turned out to be a slow, sometimes careful process, and after reading Mark's work about haptics, being able to touch the material seemed to be an important variable to include in my research. I was hoping to find an even more embodied making process, and to see whether a more tactile approach made any difference to my perception of it. Whilst using tools to model is very common I tend to use my hands in the first stages to give the first rough shapes. This made a significant difference in how I felt about the process: it was much more tactile (literally), and also more sensuous, almost morose. While it was much quicker to model it than to make any of the paintings, this haptic experience unmediated by the paintbrush made me experience the time spent with these shapes differently, almost in slow motion. I also wanted to give vaginal pleasure centre stage: in a lot of pornographic imagery where a vagina is penetrated, we can not see the physical reactions of the vagina itself because it is covered by the rest of the object or subject being used to penetrate it. But by cutting this object/subject into a geometric section, we can see the penetrative vagina pleasure in all of its glory.

A Victorian Pussy

Fig. 26 – A Victorian Pussy

The final work in the exhibition rests atop of a plinth in the middle of the virtual room, and it's both a 3D model of the actual, real-life book as well as a flip-through PDF that shows each of the pages in it. I found this old photo-album in my partner's studio, which he had rescued years prior. It was originally called 'A Victorian Posey', made in collaboration with the perfumer Penhaligon's and was meant to be a childhood album — the introduction talks about how the designer wanted to create something beautiful for her grown children to look at when they were older. Of course, between the title and the intended purpose, I could not resist the idea of subverting it. I took a selection of pornographic images that I had produced for sale during the last year and filed them in the album, and then I created a new cover where the word Posey was changed to Pussy — sealing the transformation of a family trinket into a celebration of debauchery.

Reaction to my work

There are two sources for my analysis of the reaction to the exhibition: one is the survey that I placed in the exhibition itself (see Appendix I), and the other are the various feedback I've received on different platforms and in person. This will be a qualitative analysis due to the sample size. Both in the survey and in person, people reported mixed feelings about the exhibition itself being a pornographic experience, with 66% of the respondents of the survey saying 'Maybe'. Two people with an art background and three sex workers said that it felt like a 'sexy' environment. One of them said that they thought it 'would feel more pornographic in person'. When it came to deciding which artworks were art, pornography, or both, there were some interesting responses. Overall, the sculpture work was not understood as pornography, but art. There was a clear divide regarding the Quickies vs. Red Quickies series in the survey: both were understood as pornography and art by some people (33%, in both cases), but the majority of people felt that the Red Quickies were pornographic (66%), whilst the Quickies were seen as art by the same amount of people (66%). Interestingly, no survey respondents felt that the cloche artworks felt like pornography — compared to people who have seen the artworks in person (albeit not in the context of the exhibition), all of whom find the Sanguis piece to be particularly pornographic.
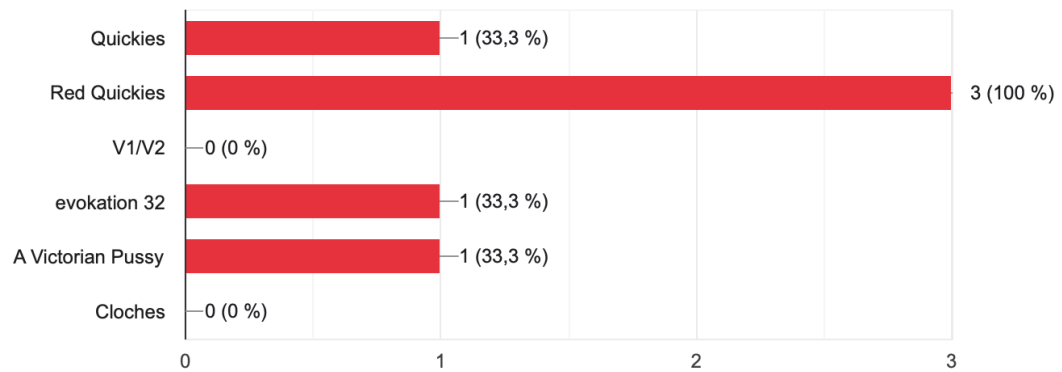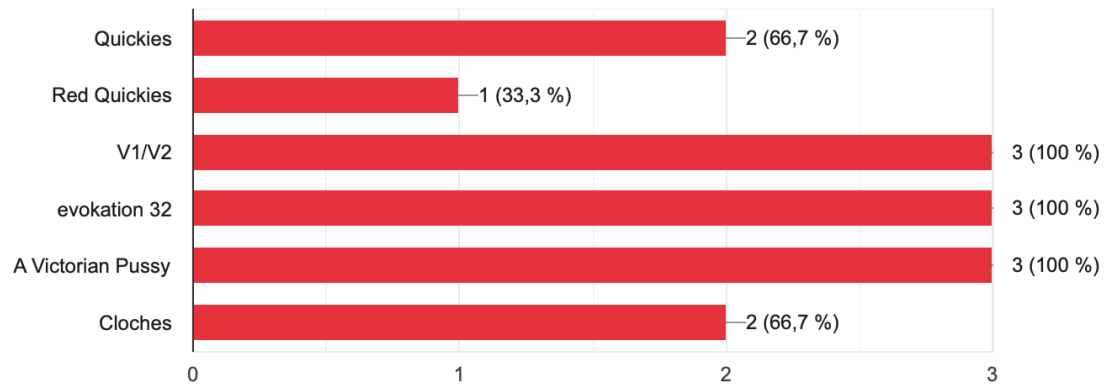
Fig. 27 and 28 – Survey answers to 'Please mark which series/artworks felt like art to you:' vs 'Please mark which series/artworks felt like pornography to you:'

An interesting aspect of the online exhibition that I would like to highlight is the opacity of the Internet as a medium itself. While the exhibition was created as an immersive and interactive 3D environment, the stark difference in responses to the Cloche artworks suggests that there is a definite difference in perception due to the intangibility of the medium of delivery. Perhaps this speaks of the need to examine the relationship between digital imaging of 2D painted images and our reading of them.

Participants in the survey were also asked which emotions they felt when looking around the exhibition. Not a single person was bored, which was to be expected, and the most common emotions were 'Curiosity' and 'Interest'. Other commonly felt emotions were 'Attraction', 'Beauty/Pleasure', and 'Engrossment'. I am particularly interested in the audience feeling 'Engrossment' at the same time as looking at (what they felt was) pornography, since this would in principle counter both Bovens' and Levinson's idea of pornography as a medium of immediacy and a medium that requires transparency and efficacy in its delivery. The ability of a piece to provoke engrossment whilst being transparent is, I think, debatable. Through a medium of immediacy, I would argue that provoking engrossment is rather difficult. It would counter my instincts as an artist to aim for immediacy and engrossment at the same time because they are rather opposing qualities. Of course, this was a very small sample size, but I do believe this is an avenue worth exploring. It is worth noting that no definitions were provided for these emotions (in the interest of keeping the survey short and easy).
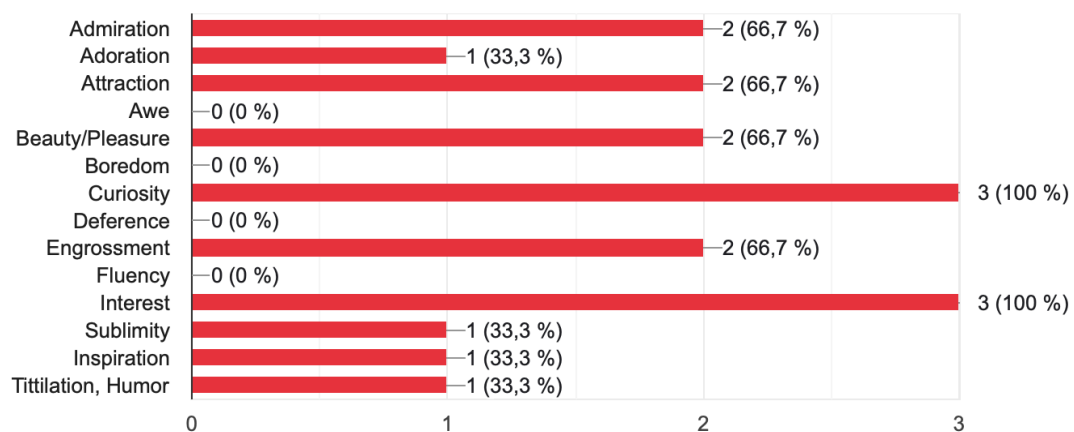

Fig. 29 – Survey answer recording feelings of aesthetic interest of the participants

I set up this exhibition in the hopes of putting my artwork in conversation with an audience. I felt that while I had a good grasp of the pornographic process, it would be helpful to know more about the other side of the equation: the experience of the audience. My research objectives were to determine what kind of aesthetic emotions my artwork inspired (if any), to understand better whether the medium of the artwork had any bearing on whether the audience categorised the artwork as pornography or as art, and whether the audience identified some artworks as both art and pornography.

The survey helped determine that people did experience some aesthetic emotions whilst visiting it, mainly Curiosity, Interest and Beauty/Pleasure. Some people also experienced Admiration, Sublimity, and Inspiration. The survey also shed light on whether people considered the pieces art or pornography, which was particularly interesting considering the differences in transparency and haptic qualities of the paintings. The Red Quickies scored higher than any other works in terms of pornographic content, which points to an interesting connection between haptics (highlighting the textures through the use of a contained palette) and a perception of pornography. This is consistent with my own findings during the painting of these series. Neither of the Cloches scored highly as pornography in this survey, which raises questions around whether the use of bodily fluids was a step too far, or whether they were too far removed as subjects. What it definitely rules out, however, is the idea that something needs to be manner inspecific in order to be pornography, since all of these artworks were made with manner specificity in mind.

Conclusion

Through painting these artworks, several themes kept emerging: repetition, usage of industrial means, the pornographic aesthetic experience, the pornographic exploration of our bodies, and manner specificity. Repetition and usage of industrial means were present from the very beginning because of the reference images, but reception also showed up in more subtle ways, such as repetitive brush strokes, using the same images under different lights, etc. More interesting though was the pornographic aesthetic experience and how it ties to the pornographic exploration of bodies. Through the use of the pornographic gaze as a framing device, the body is made into the site of pornographic exploration, through/against which a pornographic experience can be had. Bodies are obviously an important aspect of the pornographic experience, and it is difficult to create a pornographic experience without it.

At this point, one may argue that what makes my artworks art, and not just pornography, is the fact that they exceed their strictly pornographic function, expanding on it and delivering a pornographic artistic experience. This is a tempting argument to make, particularly because it could be hard to argue that every piece of pornography looks like art, or even intends to be art. I have two caveats: the first is that, similarly to the way that Maes argues against Mag Uidhir's definition of pornography, a work can have more than one function or intention. My artworks are technically competent and fulfil some parts of the western art canon whilst fulfilling a pornographic function, true. However, this does not negate the possibility for a work that is not technically competent or which steps outside of the western art canon to be both pornography and art. My artworks would not exist as they are without the hundreds, if not thousands, of extremely

explicit and not elegant sexual selfies that I have taken throughout my life, and that I have been consumed visually. There is space for artistic innovation even in the least "artistic" pornography, and the pornographic visual language is constantly evolving because of this.

Now that we are (intimately) familiar with my artwork and we have some good ideas on how the pornographic aesthetic experience may work for the artist, it is time to turn to a group of artists who had a very particular experience with pornography. I am, of course, talking of Raphael's workshop – who were responsible for the I Modi. And I am also speaking of the school of Fontainebleau, who carried on the pornographic iconographic programme developed in the I Modi. In the next section, we will look at the political strategies employed by those involved in the creation of the I Modi to avoid censorship and prison, and how their iconographic programme was carried on to Fontainebleau and how pornographic images were used as a tool of state propaganda on its walls. Finally, we will be looking at the relationship between I Modi and The Loves of the Gods - a progression in pornographic iconography that responded to censorship and reflects the strategies used to navigate today's online landscape by sex workers and artists alike.

3.5 – The pornographic programme of the I Modi

Authorship, censorship and respectability politics

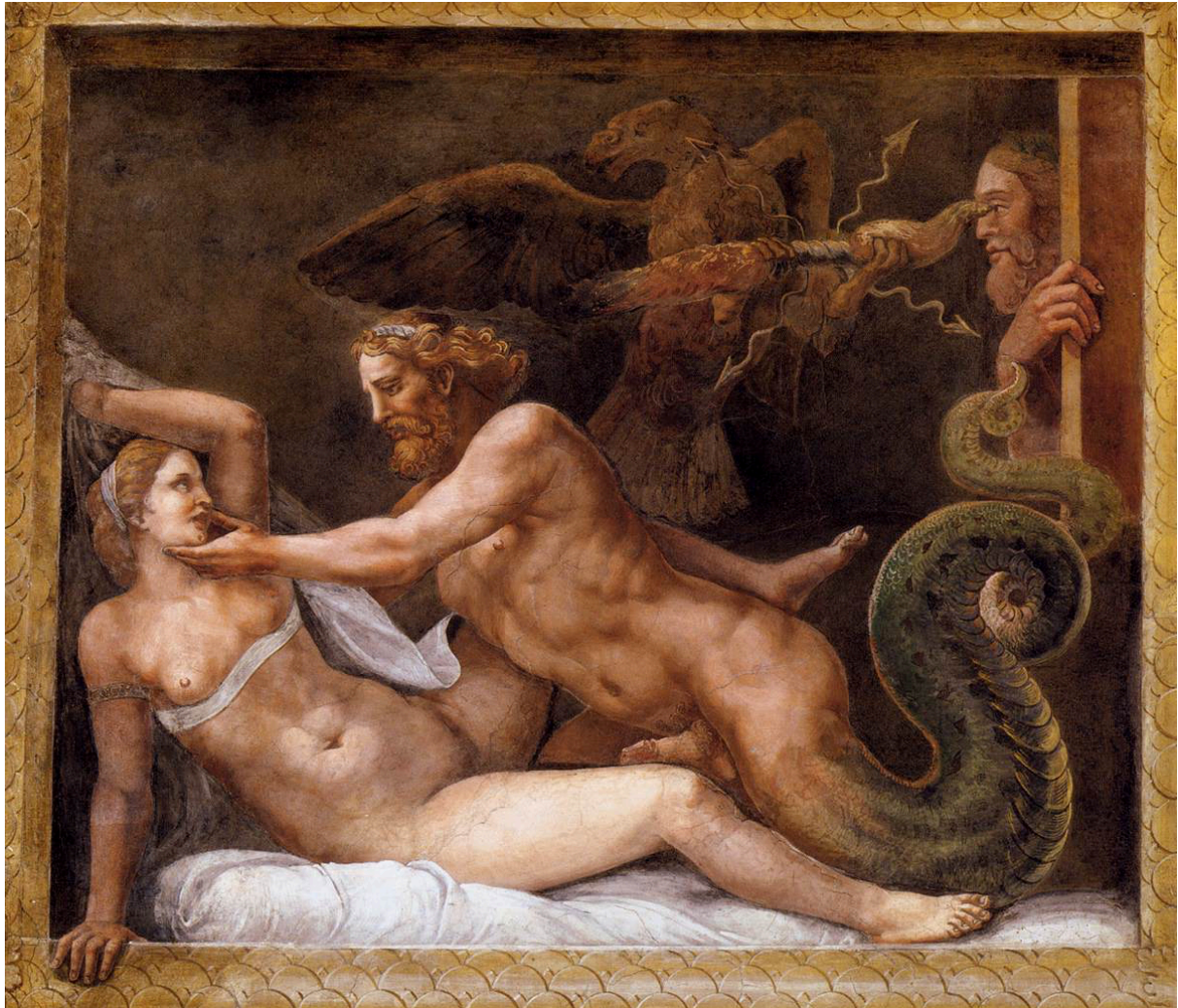Fig. 30 — Jupiter seducing Olympias, Giulio Romano, 1526-1528. Courtesy of Web Gallery of Art

Both Talvacchia and A.W. Eaton proposed that it was not necessarily the (pornographic) content of the illustrations in the I Modi what warranted the strong censorship and consequences that both the work and Raimondi suffered. The fact is that there are contemporary works that contain very explicit scenes, such as Romano's own

Jupiter seducing Olympias, one of the frescos he painted for the Palazzo Te in Mantua[77], which shows Jupiter's erect phallus and a reclining Olympias just about to be penetrated by him.

It is precisely the engraving of this fresco (made by Giovanni Batista Scultori) that Talvacchia uses to illustrate what she calls the 'Renaissance systems of differentiation between the licit and the outlawed' (Talvacchia, 1999, p. 94). While Romano's fresco may have been frowned upon by Gonzaga's mother, the very scrupulous Isabella d'Este (who went to great lengths in her use of respectability as a personal tool for propaganda), it was not censored. However, when the fresco jumps into a more accessible form, the print, Jupiter's erect phallus is suddenly nowhere to be seen:

> With a new medium, new rules came into force. The mythological story of insemination was permissible so long as the deity's all-too-human sexual organ was not displayed to the indiscriminate view of a large, and unselected, audience. (Talvacchia, 2001, p. 47)

But as we mentioned before, there was another layer to the 'offensiveness' of the I Modi: neither Romano nor Raimondi bothered with cloaking the scenes in pretend mythology. While the aforementioned Jupiter and Olympias cloaks a very explicit sex scene with literal allegories to a particular ancient myth, a very common strategy to depict not only pornographic themes, but portraits of mistresses (such as the Venus of Urbino, which is said to be a portrait of Cardinal Farnese's mistress) as well (Talvacchia,

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[77] Romano fled Rome at the same time that the scandal about the I Modi was breaking and Raimondi was put in jail. He would stay in Mantua until his death.

2001, pp. 46). But when this 'elevated and learned' attrezzo is removed, what remains are human figures engaging in sexual intercourse, or sex-work adjacent women being immortalised — neither of which was acceptable.

Thus, according to Talvacchia, the offence was double: the images did not pretend to be interpretations of mythological occurrences, far removed from real life, and they were made available to a large, indiscriminate audience. Surely enough, a later set of engravings named 'The Love of the Gods' successfully employed the strategy of mythology to escape censorship.

It is important to understand the difference between 'onesto' and 'disonesto' through the lens of both Talvacchia and also of Eaton's work. 'Disonesto' was an adjective used when 'specific kinds of sexual sinning were involved' (Talvacchia, 2001, p. 114). Talvacchia highlights the relationship between 'disonesto' and unnatural when it comes to sex. On the other side of this binary, there is the 'cortegiana onesta', a high-ranking sex worker who entertained gentlemen and clerics alike, and who, via this title, could claim some respectability for themselves. The 'onesto'/'disonesto' binary is applied to paintings in texts such as Vasari's[78] and Mattioli's (Talvacchia, 2001, p. 112).

It is using this binary device that Eaton introduces the idea the difference between the 'onesto' drawings and the 'disonesto' prints were deemed so partly because

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[78] As an example of the exercise of respectability politics, even at this point in history, in Vasari's biography of Romano there is no mention of the I Modi. It is in his biography of Raimondi where he mentions the I Modi as a 'misjudgment' of Romano's, effectively distancing the more respectable figure (Romano) from the scandal.

they travelled in opposite 'iconic circuits', which she borrows from historian Carlo Ginzburg:

What Ginzburg calls the 'public circuit' was widespread and socially undifferentiated: it included everyone, from the lowest ranks of society to the highest. The 'private circuit', by contrast, was highly circumscribed and socially elevated: among its constituents were royalty, lords, prelates, nobles, and sometimes merchants. (Eaton, 2018, p. 11)

She goes on to examine how frescos and prints further embody this binary: frescos have the weight of tradition and are unique occurrences (each of them has to be painted by hand), whereas prints were at this point a new medium and easily made in multiples. Prints were, simply put, much more accessible. Pornographic prints with no mythological cloaking thus presented an incredible threat to the established system of access to pornography — meaning that they should be deemed 'disonesto' and heavily censored. It is important to mention that Eaton maintains that using mythology was not merely a cloaking device, but an important device used to address an audience with 'cultural capital'.

It is at this point that respectability politics come into play. Coined in 1993 by professor Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, it is defined as a set of beliefs holding that conformity to prescribed mainstream standards of appearance and behaviour will protect a person who is part of a marginalised group, especially a Black person, from prejudices and systemic injustices. 'Whorearchy' works in a very similar way to the division between

'puttana' and 'cortigiana' that Eaton mentions in her text (Eaton, 2018): high-level escorts distinguish themselves from street and brothel workers using marketing tactics that make them more 'respectable'. They don't just offer sex, they offer a valuable, humane experience. They are deserving of more respect (i.e. not liable to the same legal and moral consequences) than other workers. The honest courtesan trope is alive and well in today's digital sex work world: escorts will often adopt online personas that appear to be sensitive to clients' needs and reputations, no matter what their personal opinions are on the matter.

I believe this, in a way, is mirrored in the differentiation between artist (Romano) and culprit (Raimondi), and in the binary of onesto/disonesto. The artist/escort creates a unique piece of work/bespoke experience that is only available to a select audience/clientele, whereas the printer/culprit/brothel/street worker creates a repeat piece of work/more generalised service that is available to a wider audience/clientele. It is also important to note that the pay per artwork/service is higher in the case of the artist/escort than in the case of the printer/brothel/street worker — irrespective of how much money they make at the end of the month.

There is also some element of respectability politics in the use of mythology as a pornographic device, one that is very similar to the way that some people will say that they don't enjoy 'mainstream pornography' because it's 'too crude'. Like Eaton indicates, being able to accurately read the image and enjoy the 'full experience' of the pornographic fresco requires the audience to have a deep understanding of mythology and a common literary background with the artist, whereas anyone with an interest in sex can enjoy something like I Modi, no mythological understanding needed. However, this

same enjoyment can be extracted from the pornographic fresco, and only someone with a particular knowledge of sex, the sexual politics of renaissance Italy and the customs of the bedroom would be able to accurately read the prints in the I Modi. Just because one set of cultural capital is more widely available than the other, that doesn't make said cultural capital more valuable than others.

Fontainebleau and the reabsorption into acceptability

The pornographic iconographic programme of the I Modi didn't just transform into the Love of the Gods or travel through engravings and prints — it also travelled through the circle of the Italian artists that would be at the centre of the school of Fontainebleau. In 1528, King Francis I of France brought architect Sebastiano Serlio and Rosso Fiorentino from Italy to create the Galerie Francois I. After delivering this project, and through Fiorentino, more italian artists arrived to create what would become a truly magnificent royal residence, and formed the school of Fontainebleau. I am concerned with three of its members: Francesco Primaticcio, Jacopo Caraglio and Benvenuto Cellini, all of whom were part of Raimondi and Raphael's circle in Rome, and who would have, more than likely, been aware of the graphic innovations proposed by the I Modi.

Jacopo Caraglio (c. 1500 — 1565) was the finest engraver and medal designer that the school of Fontainebleau had to offer. He was trained by Raimondi in his school of engraving, and Il Baviera introduced him to Rosso Fiorentino, who brokered his work to the Fontainebleau circle (even though Caraglio never actually went to Fontainebleau). He is, additionally, the engraver behind the Loves of the Gods produced in 1527, which we

will examine later. By all accounts, he was not just an engraver and frequently proposed compositions and contributed unique elements to his adaptations of the works.

Francesco Primaticcio (1504-1570) was one of Romano's assistants in Mantua, where he worked with him in the iconographic programme and frescos of the Palazzo Te (where, as we have mentioned, there is an abundance of erotic and pornographic frescoes by Romano). He is considered one of the leading artists of the Fontainebleau circle with Rosso Fiorentino, and lead the artistic team after Fiorentino's death in 1540 producing designs for painters and stuccators. He is the mastermind behind the Francois I salon at Fontainebleau, where we find two of his surviving frescos. One shows the marriage of Venus and Adonis, which bears a striking resemblance to Giulio Romano's work in the chamber of Psyche at the Palazzo Te (Guillaume Picon, Sander, & Mellor, 2015. pp 36-39). A more explicit example that suggests a threesome can be found in the King's Stair, where the medallion depicts Alexander and Campaspe in the Studio of Apelles. Another excellent example of his manierism and re-working of Romano's erotic style into a more subdued work would be his Minerva Carried to Heaven by the Graces, executed c. 1540 in red chalk with white highlights.
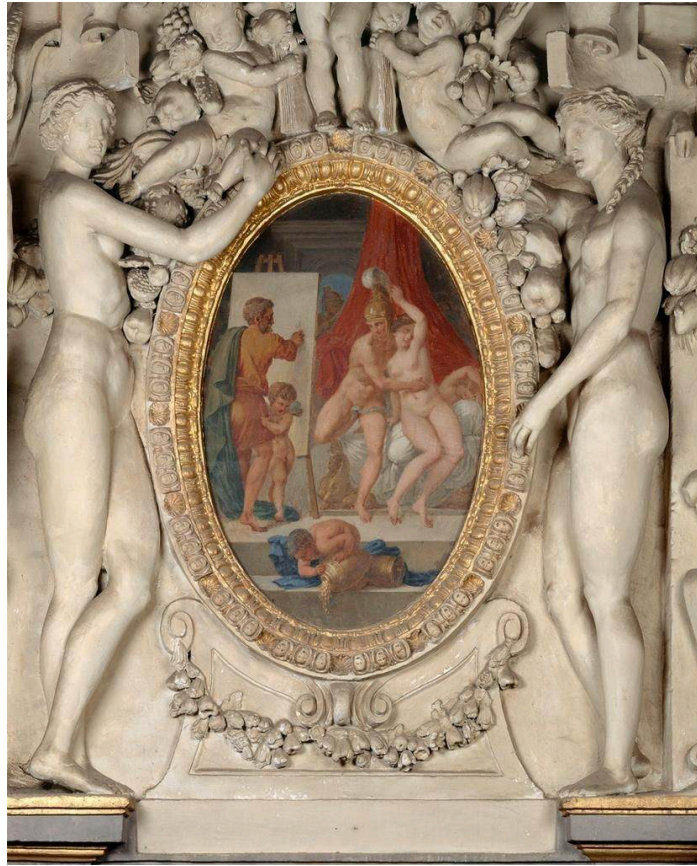
Fig. 31 — Alexander and Campaspe in the Studio of Apelles, Francesco Primaticcio, 1541-1544. Courtesy of World Gallery of Art.

Benvenuto Cellini (1500-1571) was a goldsmith and sculptor, and author of his own autobiography — which is revealing of his character as well as of how artists were treated at Fontainebleau. Part of the Romano circle in Rome, Cellini was an incredibly prolific artist. Amongst his works is his infamous salt cellar, a gold plated table sculpture produced for Francis I. The sculpture shows Terra e Mare (Earth and Sea), reclined and with their legs intertwined — a common Renaissance cue to suggest sexual intercourse. This salt cellar would then go on to inspire a design for twin salt and pepper holders drawn by Leonard Thiry, where the stem of the salt cellar features a heterosexual couple very reminiscent of the 15th and 16th positions of the I Modi. Here, a scrap of fabric climbs from the man's leg to her leg, and serves as a strong allusion to penetration —

Zorach claims that 'Erotic imagery that might appear excessive legitimated by the imperatives of nature' (Zorach, 2005. pp 97).

Fig. 32 — 'Terra e Mare' Salt Cellar, Benvenuto Cellini, 1543. Courtesy of Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna

Another example that pays testament to the iconographic programme initiated by the I Modi would be Fiorentino's detail from Punishment of Attis, were we once again see the familiar reclined figures with intertwined legs, but this time the torso of one of the figures is torsioned in a Raphael/Romano-esque fashion. And thus, the disruptive elements of the I Modi — explicit sexual scenes, wide availability and detachment from mythology — are reabsorbed into a more acceptable iconographic programme at Fontainebleau. Pornography is once again only available for the elite, half-covered by strategic clothing placement or substituted with intertwined legs, and cloaked in

mythology. Pornography has again gone back to be part of the iconographic programme on the walls, and more often than not it is subdued and even, like in the Farnesina[79], pushed to the margins and the floral decorations.

Perhaps one of the most explicit images of Fontainebleau is the Nymph Castrating a Satyr, which comes to us via an etching made by L. D. in 1544. In a way similar to contemporary castration fantasies, which are common in the Femdom scene (but which face intense online censorship and representations of which are illegal under UK law) Renaissance depictions of penile castration are full of erotic potential: this is evident in the story of Saturn. Sky-god and cannibalistic father, he is finally castrated by his children; his detached genitals give rise to the goddess Venus, who presides over sexual reproduction' (Zorach, 2005. pp 69). The print which occupies us makes castration even more obviously erotic because the penis is completely erect, and moreover, emphasised by the way that the nymph holds it. It is also interesting to note the torsion in the satyr's torso and the abandonment present in his figure, tied up and left to the nymph's devices.

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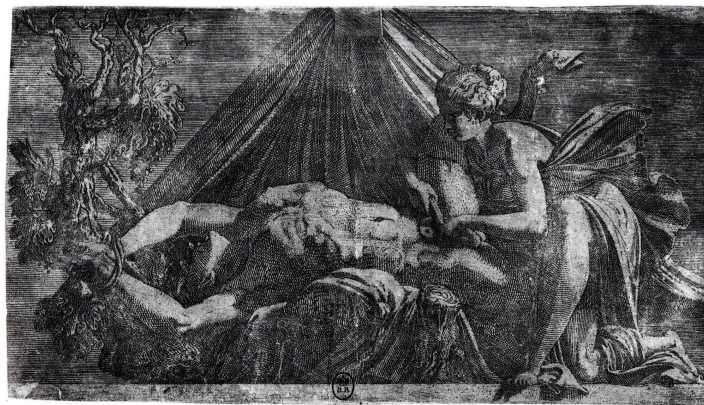
[79] The Villa Farnesina was built for the banker Agostino Chigi in Rome during the 16th century. Raphael's workshop was in charge of the fresco decorations, which were notably pornographic in nature.

In Fontainebleau's iconographic programme, mythology is not necessarily used to justify pornography; I would like to suggest that pornography is used as an iconographic vehicle to depict the France that Francis I envisioned. Subjects such as the fertility of the land are pornographisized in the figures of Natura or Cybele, and France's position as a conquering, colonising nation is reinforced in the many depictions of mythological rapes that can be found in the palace. By returning pornography to the walls and the margins, somehow pornography can be used as a narrative and framing device that helps develop a new iconography of French power.

From I Modi to the Loves of the Gods: Analysis of a pornographic iconographic programme

Multiple authors, including Talvacchia (Talvacchia, 2001, pp. 135–160) and Romano experts like Linda Wolk Simon (Romano et al., 2019) agree that there are several things that made the Loves of the Gods less threatening, and thus less risky, than the I Modi. This series of originally 20 engravings, according to Vasari, was commissioned by Il Baviera right after the sack of Rome in 1527. He originally commissioned Rosso Fiorentino (who would lead the programme at Fontainebleau) but most of the drawings would eventually be completed by Perino del Vaga. They would then be engraved by Caraglio (who, as we've mentioned before, was also an engraver for the school of Fontainebleau). It is likely that Il Baviera was seeking a similar profit to that found by the I Modi, but he was not willing to run the same risks that had landed Raimondi in jail the

first time around. This time, the engravings do not contain any erect penises, women are treated as submissive instead of as equals (and certainly, none of them are shown riding men, a deeply 'disonesto' posture that the Church found fearsome and unnatural), and perhaps more importantly, they use the mythological device as part of their staging. According to Talvacchia, there is enough evidence to suggest that this series was originally a Loves of Jupiter, since he is the figure most prominently featured, with 5 plates dedicated to him, that then Il Baviera decided to expand upon its initial success.

It is important to understand the economic situation that the workshop must have been facing both at the time of the I Modi and of the Loves of the Gods. When the I Modi are first released, not only has Raphael died, but so has Leo X. He was one of the most important patrons of the arts, commissioning not only Raphael's workshop but also other artists to make sumptuous works of art for himself and for the Catholic church. Sadly for artists all over Rome his successor, Adrian VI, did not feel quite the same way about art. He reportedly refused to finish paying Raphael's workshop for quite a big commission, which Romano had to fight him on. The workshop was, by all accounts, struggling to keep afloat and looking to find a way to make some money. This situation would have been similar after the sack of Rome, which left the whole city on its knees. It would make sense in both cases to find a way to sell more artwork for a cheaper price to a wider audience — enter prints, and in particular, pornographic prints.

We have lightly touched on how it is possible that the 'onesto'/'disonesto' binary and how I Modi's unwillingness to treat its subjects as mythological creatures may have been the main reason for its censorship, but we have not yet talked about one of the most interesting aspects of this iconographic programme: the women on top. Talvacchia

explains the Greco-Roman roots of this Renaissance attitude towards women having a hierarchical higher position (literally) in sexual couplings: 'Described as keles or equus in these earlier cultures, the configuration of a woman riding her man caused as much pejorative comment as it evoked licentious desire' (Talvacchia, 2001, pp. 122). She also references the classic story of Phyllis riding Aristotle, which was usually represented by Aristotle looking like a horse and allowing Phyllis to ride his back — which takes the joke out of the bedroom but also helps crystalise this idea of powerful women being dangerous for intelligent men who fall prey to their own sexual desires. The iconography of the sex worker is, I think, heavily underlying this and other similar stories. And the truth is that postures 10, 14 and 15 all contain a woman on top (although the one in posture 15 is not as much in control as the others are shown to be). Aretino's accompanying sonnets tend to emphasise the woman's agency in acting her own desires, except for the more explicitly female dominant posture 14, the only one where the only point of view in the text is that of a man — perhaps it was too much, even for the son of a sex worker, to give voice to such a sexually powerful woman. (Talvacchia, 2001, p. 115)

Fig. 34 — Posture 14, woodcut after Raimondi, c. 1550. Courtesy of Yale University Press.

The women in the I Modi are shown as far more than subjugated or subdued by their own desire, they are agents of their own sexuality. And we have reason to believe that at least a few of them are sex workers. Talvacchia suggests that according to contemporary teachings on morality such licentious sex acts could only be performed with sex workers as it would degrade one's own wife to act in this debauched way with them (Talvacchia, 2001, pp. 123). Following this, perhaps we could extend this courtesy to all of them. It is also interesting to observe plate 11, which contains an old woman peering from an open window. We see this woman again in Romano's The Lovers, now in the Hermitage, although in The Lovers it would appear that she is more of a procuress than she is an offended presence, which is what Aretino's sonnet makes her out to be. In any case, I submit that the women in the I Modi had the same sexual agency that sex workers would have had, and since presenting them as such landed Raimondi in hot water, Il Baviera did not want to make the same mistake twice.

Fig. 35 — The Lovers, Giulio Romano, 1524-1525. Courtesy of Hermitage Museum.

Now, if one were to talk to any adult content creator nowadays who sells their content online about how they decide what kind of content to make next, most of them would reply in a similar way: they would repeat what performed best last time. But on top of that, they also keep an eye on the Terms of Service of the platforms where they are hoping to sell the content. After all, why spend time, effort and money creating something that will be banned upon its review? I believe this is the same attitude that moved Il Baviera, Fiorentino, del Vaga and ultimately, Caraglio, to have a different take on the pornographic programme for the Loves of the Gods.

But before we examine what the Loves of the Gods does differently, we should look at and perhaps appreciate what it took from the I Modi: the torsion of the bodies and the ability to almost feel the thrusting motions in the anatomy. The torsion of the bodies is nothing new to Raphael's workshop, but if we can look past the woodcuts and peek at the original drawings behind the I Modi, we can see it reaches its maximum expression in the I Modi — not even the women turned around in the Farnesina hold a candle to postures 1, 2 or 7. The torsion in both male and female bodies in the I Modi is not just a show of exquisite and exciting draughtsmanship, but serves the purpose of almost animating the images in the page and showing us as much of the postures (not in a literal explicit sense, but in the sense of offering several angles at once) as possible. This attribute is definitely carried into the Loves of the Gods, were Herse and Aglaurus's bodies pay testament to the use of this anatomical device. As for how the composition and special care when drawing the anatomy makes the images seem alive, the multiplicity of triangles everywhere in the I Modi is made even more obvious by the woodcuts

(especially in position 4), but we can certainly find it in the Pluto and Proserpina plate, which if not a copy, is certainly inspired by the fourth position of the I Modi.

Fig. 36 — Posture 7, woodblock cut copy after Raimondi, c. 1555. Courtesy of Princeton University Press.

So how come the fourth position, where the woman in the sonnet is so full of lust and desire and the man is so meek, is turned into the rape of Proserpine? In the Love of the Gods plate, the woman is no longer grabbing the man's penis, nor is she playing as much of an active role. Pluto's penis is also hidden from view behind Proserpine's leg, while the torsion in her body makes the lips of her vulva visible. The figures are about to kiss, and although some scholars suggest that Proserpine's expression is one of resignation to her fate (Talvacchia, p. 189), I would suggest that perhaps it is one of sexual abandon. After all, and thanks to Nancy Friday's research, we now know that a lot of rape victims fantasize with rape scenarios where they are actually desiring the sexual contact, partially

as a coping mechanism (Friday, 2008) — I would like to allow Proserpine at least this kindness. Additionally, since her leg is occluding Pluto's penis and her hand from view, and since this is almost a carbon copy of the fourth position, perhaps she is holding onto her penis and we are just unable to see it — for that would be too much sexual agency to survive papal censorship, and we must remember the strong possibility of editorial decisions being made with making as much money as possible in mind.

Fig. 37 — Plutone et Proserpina, Loves of the Gods, Giovanni Jacopo Caraglio, after Rosso Fiorentino, 1515 — 1565. Courtesy of Rijksmuseum.

Comparing these two prints is a great way to highlight a particular difference between I Modi and the Loves of the Gods: their portrayal and interest in women's sexual agency. There is no question in the I Modi of the agency of the women portrayed in the prints, but the Love of the Gods makes it difficult, if not near impossible, to ascertain whether they have any. The women in the I Modi want to have sex, enjoy having sex, and are very clear about it: in Posture 7 the woman is grabbing the man's penis and directing it towards her vagina herself. This is not the way that the women portrayed in the Loves of the Gods act: the Plutone et Proserpina plate certainly eroticises what is commonly understood as a kidnapping and rape scene. We can't see whether Proserpina is grabbing Pluto's penis or whether she is pushing it away, but we can see Proserpina's face, full of erotic abandonment. These two prints could not be more different in their portrayal of sex, even if the posture they are both portraying is essentially the same.

It is not my intention to start a discussion on CNC[80], but the Loves of the Gods contains a number of scenes which feature it, and they always feature the woman/other being assaulted. This is a choice that reflects the dominance of 'onesto' sexuality, in direct contrast to the I Modi's 'disonesto' sexuality, where women are on top, have agency, and return the gaze. But we already know the price that Raimondi (and the workshop at large) had to pay for being so avant-garde, so is it really any wonder that we see the authors of this set of prints take this step back into sexual conservatism, potentially made in the effort of self-preservation? We see this exact same pattern occurring right now with

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[80] CNC stands for Consensual Non Consent, a type of BDSM/kink play where the parties pretend to partake in a rape/sexual assault scene, with the bottom often fighting against the top's advances. It also refers to the same type of scenes contained in pornography. For a primer on this and an interesting discussion on autonomy and pleasure-seeking, please see Section 2.2 in Parchev, O. (2025). BDSM and the Complexity of Consent: Navigating Inclusion and Exclusion. *Sexes*, 6(1), 4. https://doi.org/10.3390/sexes6010004

pornographic content creators online, where the increased censorship on pornographic content has led to more heterosexual, mainstream-looking and feeling pornography that uses more and more patriarchal elements in order to stay "on the safer side" (Chapter 4, pp. 313-323).

Let us look now at three 'new' elements that the Love of the Gods introduces in our pornographic iconography: homosexual couples, threesomes and the infamous 'beaver shot'. First, let's look at the Apollo and Hyacinth plate. Del Vaga could have based his drawing on a previous Romano drawing, Apollo and Cyparissus or Hyacinth. The figures are similar, with the younger man sitting on top of Apollo, while both of them keep their legs open. However, Romano's drawing includes Apollo's hand practically fondling the youth's genitals, and the figures are kissing. For del Vaga and Caraglio's version, they are no longer kissing or fondling each other (although the Cupid that makes eye contact with the audience could be fondling himself, occluded from view by Apollo's elbow), but the 'slung leg motif' (intertwined legs were often used as a stand-in for sexual intercourse in Renaissance erotica) is perhaps more strongly perceived here due to the absence of those more obvious elements.

Then, our two next elements are introduced in the same plate, featuring Mercury, Herse and Aglauros. Hermes has just barged into the room, while Herse has fallen onto the floor, and he holds her head in place looking at Aglauros' genitals, who is still asleep in bed in a (rather uncomfortable) posture of complete abandon that puts both her genitals and her bosom in display. The threesome is not new to Renaissance erotica, and it had been used before in the Farnesina and the Palazzo Te, but it is usually shown in a more demure way. As for the 'beaver shot', it is emphasised by Herses' inability to look

away, which also forces the audience to direct their gaze right there. The Love of the Gods don't show nearly as many erect penises as I Modi did, but we do see far more vulvas and vaginas on display, and in a much more 'open' (if not explicit) way than we did in the I Modi. It seems that as long as women are a passive subject of sex, how much of their genitals is on display doesn't make a set of prints more or less 'disonesto'.

Fig. 38 — Mercurio parla Glauros, Loves of the Gods, Giovanni Jacopo Caraglio, after Perino del Vaga, 1515 — 1565. Courtesy of the Rijksmuseum.

There is another Love of the Gods plate that borrows from position 4, and this time does show an erect penis being grabbed by the femme figure in the couple: Jupiter and Mnemosyne (see Fig. 41 & 42 in Chapter 4).. However, as Talvacchia points out (Talvacchia, 2001, pp. 147), this is part of the prints missing from Adam Bartsch's

description of the series — all of the ones missing seem to be more akin to the explicit couplings shown in the I Modi, and also possibly part of the first sequence of the Loves of Jupiter the Loves of the Gods could have been based on.

I propose that what we are seeing here is graphic innovation either at the service of or motivated by pornographic subjects. While it is true that elements like cupids and putti that make eye contact with the audience had long-been developed by Raphael's workshop for projects such as the Farnesina, I believe that both I Modi and the Love of the Gods are the culmination of an iconographic programme that probably started with the project of Cardinal Bibbiena's bathroom in the Vatican Palace, la Stufetta del Bibbiena — which according to contemporary and later accounts, was decorated with erotic and pornographic frescos. The I Modi proposed a number of postures, variations and iconographic associations (such as the women on top with weaker men, torsion of the bodies with debauched abandonment to carnal pleasures...) that were then toned down to avoid censorship in The Love of the Gods, and exported to France via Francis I's decoration programme in Fontainebleau. For a brief moment in time, pornography had made the jump from the walls to print, from the most elitist corners to a slightly wider public — but it also drove artistic innovation of its own. I don't think it's possible to imagine the beauty of Fontainebleau without looking at the Farnesina's erotic garlands, Psyche's room at the Palazzo Te and these engravings.

Fig. 39 – Vegetable pornography from the garlands of the Cupid and Psyche frescoes at Villa Farnesina.

Courtesy of Melissa from The World is My Museum

Conclusion

In this section I have run through the definitive impact that the programme present in the I Modi had not just in other engravings, but also in the iconographic programme present at Fontainebleau palace. This is not just an interesting historical tidbit, but also speaks of the possibilities of pornography to move its public, and its definitive interest for artists. Additionally, I have presented how artists started to react to the blatant censorship suffered by Raimondi in order to protect their best interests, something we will continue to look into in Chapter 4.

3.6 – Conclusion

When it comes to painting, it is apparent through my research that in order for the pornographic experience to be present, certain haptic qualities have to be present, and that these qualities have to be at least somewhat in accordance with the audience's expectation of a pornographic image. These haptic qualities need to relate to the expected pornographic qualities (juiciness through shine, for example), and accurate edge treatment is important in order to convey a sense of haptics because of the distance/touch relationship.

Through this chapter I have demonstrated not only the possibility of the 'pornographic gaze' as a particular type of gaze, but also the relationship between haptics and pornography, the need for manner specificity when it comes to pornography, how creativity is present in the pornographic creation process, and how pornography can contain a multitude of layers, both opaque and transparent. I have also talked about pornography as a tool for iconography, as well as about the transition from walls to prints, and back to walls again, in the case of the Fontainebleau section. In the next chapter, I will be looking at the legal history of censorship and the relationship between censorship and the suppression of dissident identities, and also at how artists employ different mechanisms to skirt around censorship, both in the past as well as today.

Chapter 4 — Obscenity and Online Censorship

4.1 Introduction

The relationship between pornography, censorship and dissident identities is the main concern of this fourth chapter. In order to better understand this, Chapter 4 is divided into four main sections: the first one explores the XXth century history of anti-queer applications of the law in Britain and its relationship to present queer struggles; the second one is a brief introduction to the current legal landscape of online censorship laws, from FOSTA/SESTA in the US to the Online Safety Act here in the UK, as well as a brief outline of the legal status of pornography in this country; the third section deals with the nature of algorithmic censorship and explores how online queer and kink communities and art have been affected by the legal landscape explored in the previous section; the fourth and final section focuses on the I Modi and how artists have used self-censorship in pornographic or erotic works to avoid state censorship.

Looking at the recent history of queer censorship in Britain is an important first step in determining the trajectory that has led to the Online Safety Act. It was also important to examine the possibility of finding some commonalities between the themes explored in Chapter 2 and the past and current legal status of queer and pornographic expressions in the country. I was able to do this thanks to the extensive material archived at the Bishopsgate Institute as part of their Queer, Bizarre and Leather archive. By looking

first at the Spanner case, a landmark ruling which defined the legal consequences of practising BDSM for queer folks, and then at the press clippings describing the legal ordeal that the director of 'Romans in Britain' was subjected to, the relationship between questions of citizenship and identity (and the legal consequences of them) is made clear. Looking at the reporting made by the English Collective of Prostitutes through the lenses of Fuss' (1989) and Bell's (1995) work made the current realities of this connection clear.

In order to be able to interpret the nuances of the current legal landscape it was important to introduce the different laws that have shaped the sex worker experience of the internet during the last few years, which is what the second section of this chapter aimed to do. It may seem odd to add the current legal status of pornography in the UK at the end of that section, since that is not strictly a piece of legislation intended to curtail sex workers' access to goods and services on the internet, but it is fundamental to establish the baseline of what the UK legal system considers acceptable — this will further highlight the kind of content that is considered 'dangerous', which may come as a surprise. With the current Pornography Review consultation, launched on January 11th 2024 and which will undoubtedly affect the application of the Online Safety Act, it was important to include this section here.

The third section is split into two themes, so to speak: the shaping and creation of algorithmic censorship and how it affects those with dissident identities. I use Alexander Monea's 'The Internet Closet' (2023), which is an excellent source of information that maps out how Google, Meta and other Silicon Valley giants shaped online communication and the social media landscape. Through it, the cis, white, hetero biassed nature of algorithmic censorship and its consequences for anyone with dissident

identities are laid bare. However, this section could not be complete without looking at what the real consequences of FOSTA/SESTA have been so far for sex workers, artists, and queer folks. Of particular interest is the work of Sophie Ladder, who keeps an up-to-date list of the kinds of pornographic content that are allowed on different platforms — reading this against the backdrop of the second section makes an excellent case against pornographic censorship, because it highlights a particular misogynistic censorship pattern that is common between the two.

The final section of this chapter takes the chance to look at the productive potential of censorship in action, and places it in the historical context of artists overcoming censorship by working within the limitations placed on their media in order to create stunning pieces of art, by comparing the ways in which the artists around the I Modi continued to create pornography and compare that to contemporary artists' techniques to avoid censorship today.

All in all, this fourth chapter is fundamental to understanding how pornographic censorship works at a social, institutional, financial and technological level, and the results of this for dissident artists and sex workers alike. Understanding the material conditions that lead to certain creative choices occurring (from self-censorship to producing more vanilla, cis-centric or even misogynistic pornographic content) is a very necessary step if we are to assess the artistic value or qualities of pornography. By the end of this chapter it will be clear that the type of pornographic censorship that is being discussed mainly results in producing less dissident pornography, not in producing less pornography overall. This also affects the ability of dissident pornography to be distributed, enjoyed, shared and consumed, which impacts the artistic growth of its

creators and their ability to have a positive impact on their audience (such as discussed in Chapter 2) through their pornographic creations. Because these environmental conditions are extremely particular to pornographic artworks and content, it is even more fundamental to have a good grasp of them if we are to examine pornography from an artistic standpoint. Additionally, understanding how this censorship operates at a technological and institutional level serves to further solidify the relationship between colonialism, anti-fatness/queerness and censorship as a public health strategy.

4.2 Censorship in Britain: A look at the XXth century

The Spanner case: the porous barrier between private and public life in Britain

Operation Spanner' was a police investigation into same-sex male sadomasochism across the United Kingdom in the late 1980s sparked by the Greater Manchester Police department acquiring a tape (codenamed KL7) that showed explicit S/M scenes. The investigation was led by the Obscene Publications Squad of the Metropolitan Police from 1987 to 1990. Approximately 100 gay and bisexual men were questioned during it, and the final report named 43 individuals of whom 16 were prosecuted for assault occasioning actual bodily harm, unlawful wounding and other offences related to consensual, private sadomasochistic sex sessions held in various locations between 1978 and 1987. The judgement of the House of Lords (R v Brown) ruled that consent was not a valid legal defence for actual bodily harm in Britain. Few cases in the history of Britain illustrate the loss of agency that the 'citizen pervert' may experience as the Spanner case does. Coined by David Bell, the 'citizen pervert' is someone who does not conform to normative sexual citizenship and is 'exactly on the slash of the public/private split, irreducible to either domain' (Bell, 2015). Bell claims that 'law's eruptions into the private begin a process of reducing or even erasing the private as a site of pleasure, rendering pleasure a public – and by that political – issue'.

But before we examine this any further, and for contextualisation purposes, let's look at what the tapes contained according to Roland Jaggard, one of the accused men:

During the investigation they confiscated numerous tapes . . . [which] depicted among other things: Beatings of buttocks, legs, cocks and balls with leather straps, canes, nettles etc. Hot wax being dripped onto genitals, torsos, legs etc. Play piercings of tits, scrotums, cock knobs, shafts, and foreskins. Genital application of heat (hair dryers) and cold (ice cubes). Genital bondage and manipulation etc, ball weights, safe electrical play (just adaptation for electrical sexual play, of the muscle toning gear used by health clubs). Scrotal stretching and pinning out with needles etc. Nipple and cock branding. (Jaggard, 2008)

It is important to note that none of the participants required medical treatment following the BDSM sessions taped, and that according to the participants, the sessions followed the SSC (safe, sane and consensual) protocol. It's also important to understand that most seasoned BDSM practitioners would not take part in a scene if they were not comfortable with their knowledge of the risks and safety protocols involved — this is especially true of Dominants. Additionally, even though some of the activities mentioned do fall under the 'hard play' spectrum, they are by no means the 'most extreme' forms of play that one can engage in. Despite these facts, the narrative of the 'snuff movies' (which the police department initially thought KL7 was) continued to be pushed by the police: 'Det Supt Michael Hames, head of Scotland Yard's Obscene Publications Squad, said after the trial that sadistic pornography was becoming more bizarre, more violent and more widespread. He issued a warning that it would eventually lead to a death being filmed. (Young, 1990)' (White, 2006).

At the heart of this matter are three things: violence, sex and prejudice. Violence, which is one of the core practices of BDSM, is often seen as harmful to private individuals by the law; BDSM as a sexual practice and the refusal of the House of Lords to acknowledge it as such; and homophobic and SM prejudice. According to Judge Rant, 'sex is no excuse for violence' (R v Brown [1993]). The Court of Appeal, to which the conviction of the 16 men was appealed, ruled that their right to privacy did not override the harm they had (consensually) caused one another. However, in February 1996 the Court of Appeal, 'overturned the conviction of a husband for branding his initials on the buttocks of his wife with her consent, declaring that 'consensual activity in the privacy of the matrimonial home was not a matter for criminal prosecution'' (White, 2006). Why did a heterosexual couple get away with their right to sexual privacy but 16 gay and bisexual men didn't? This is particularly striking if we consider that, in the case of the heterosexual couple, the branding of the buttocks was semi-permanent (if not completely permanent) whilst the injuries sustained by the convicted men were never permanent.

Joined with the idea of violence as a harmful activity, the idea of degrading the body/mind as harmful to the individual was also crystallised in this judgement: 'In my opinion sado-masochism is not only concerned with sex. Sado-masochism is also concerned with violence. The evidence discloses that the practices of the appellants were unpredictably dangerous and degrading to body and mind and were developed with increasing barbarity. . .' (Lord Templeman, R v Brown [1993] 2 All ER 75) Instead of considering the possibility of the degradation as an altered state that can lead to increased awareness of the self, enjoyment of one's own sexuality or general fun, the individuals partaking in these activities must be stopped by the State because they are irreversibly

harming themselves — which justifies their loss of citizenship privileges and the stepping in of the estate and the law.

And this is where things get interesting: in refusing the defence of consent (that the individuals shouldn't be judged because they were consenting to these acts), Judge Rant positioned the court as the one and only arbiter of acceptable sexual behaviour within society: 'much has been said about individual liberty and the rights people have to do what they want with their own bodies, but the courts must draw the line between what is acceptable in a civilised society and what is not. In this case, the practices clearly lie on the wrong side of that line.' (Young, 1990, p. 5) The Court of Appeal ruled that 'it was in the public interest to prosecute persons who had consented to acts of wounding performed for the victims' sexual pleasure, determined that the satisfying of sadomasochistic libido did not come within the category of good reason for causing bodily harm.' (White, 2006) Good reasons, according to the House of Lords, are religion and sport. So whilst a boxing match, or the injuries sustained by rugby players can be thought of as for the greater good, those sustained by individuals who are seeking their own pleasure must be considered assault.

As Adam Mars-Jones put it, these rulings 'set a precedent where we don't own our own bodies. Our bodies have been confiscated-to be leased back to us on certain conditions' (quoted in Kershaw, 1992: 10) And what may those certain conditions be? In the world of late-stage capitalism[81], after a pandemic that has crippled and killed so many

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[81]Popularised by Ernest Mandel in the early 70s and experiencing a new resurgence now, he defines it as: 'the society emerging out of the Second World War, which has as its dominant features the multinational corporation,

of us, it seems that carrying on producing labour for corporations is as 'good enough' as boxing, rugby or religion.

Migration, queerness & identity: questions of citizenship & personhood

The intersection between race, migration status, queerness and disability and sex work can be a very particular crossroads at the heart of late stage capitalism, as the interactions between these identities can lead to vastly different access abilities: a white migrant with an accent is very likely to experience less day-to-day barriers than a black citizen with 'no accent', but they may have less rights depending on their migration status when it comes to entering and leaving the country and facing the law. I am interested in exploring how these intersections work to articulate sex workers' and pornographers' personal and citizenship status.

In 'Essentially Speaking: Nature, Feminism and Difference' Diana Fuss asks 'What does it mean to be a citizen in a state which programmatically denies citizenship on the basis of sexual preference?' (Fuss, 1989, p.112) She refers to the frequent anti-migrant policies, forced quarantines and harmful responses from the health services of the UK, US and Australia (such as the introduction of records requests for HIV tests in Colorado during the 80s, which led to a drop of 600% in requests for them (Watney, 1997)) during the first decade of the AIDS crisis. However, this question translates perfectly to most of the western countries today if we swap people with AIDS for people

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globalised markets and labour, mass consumption, and the space of liquid multinational flows of capital' (Mandel, 1972)

who engage in any form of sex work, especially those who engage in full-service sex work. Queer people have managed to gain some more rights under some western states, but people who engage in sex for money (which could be its own kind of sexual preference) have only managed to partially succeed in decriminalising their own existence in Aotearoa (New Zealand) — where migrants still have a very hard time trading sex, given the constraints of the decriminalisation model applied thus far — and Belgium.

Meanwhile, migrants in the United States are still regularly deported if caught performing sex work, and raids to mainly migrant and trans sex working spaces are rather common both in the US, the UK and Europe. Some countries, such as Sweden, often place abolitionist expectations on the sex worker in order to allow them to access help and services ('with one respondent noting that the Unit had informed her that they would only assist her in acquiring a doctor's sick note if she ceased her sex selling for three months', Levy, J., & Jakobsson, P., 2014) and take their children away from them ('One contact of both authors, who had joint custody of her daughter and sole custody of her son, lost custody of her children to her ex-partner when social services learned of her sex work, despite the fact that there was a record of the father's abusive behaviour;', Levy, J., & Jakobsson, P., 2014). It would seem clear then that by choosing to exchange sex for money, one is giving up at least part of their citizenship, and in the eyes of some of these laws, certainly their personhood.

In the particular case of the UK, sex work is partially criminalised through the Brothel-keeping laws. This means that sex workers (particularly migrants) are raided,

arrested and accused of trafficking each other[82], and their money is stolen by the police[83]. Ample evidence of this can be found in the 2020 report by the English Collective of Prostitutes 'Sex Workers are being screwed by Brexit', as well as their 2022 'Sex Workers Access to Justice' (English Collective of Prostitutes, 2022). Given the political context of the UK, I believe that the Thatcherite idea of the 'active citizen' might somewhat explain why sex-workers have their citizen status called into question (at best):

> It was part of my credo that individuals were worthy of respect as individuals, not as members of classes or races; the whole purpose of the political and economic system I favoured was to liberate the talents of those individuals for the benefit of society (Thatcher, 1995: 406)

Of course, the 'benefit of society' that Thatcher mentions would hardly be that single mothers can comfortably pay for their childcare and spend time with their kids, or that people can pay to satisfy different sexual kinks. This 'benefit of society' is deeply tied to productive labour, that is, the labour that produces goods (and sometimes services) that add value to the economy. Unfortunately for sex workers and pornographers, there seems to be a general consensus that paid-for-sex doesn't 'add value'. Sex work is a form of mainly casualised and feminised labour (not because 'only femmes perform it', but

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[82] 'Ms N from Brazil, but with EU residency, was entrapped by police posing as a client in a brothel raid. She was working with a friend for safety but fell foul of the law which makes it illegal for more than one woman to work from premises. Police demanded to see her documents and then referred her to immigration who took her to Yarl's Wood Immigration Removal Centre (IRC), where she remains. The ECP has found a lawyer to help and the case is ongoing.' (English Collective of Prostitutes, 2020, p. 3)

[83] 'Ms AM from Romania was stopped by police in the car with her boyfriend. The police found £11,000 in her car and confiscated it and her phones.' (English Collective of Prostitutes, 2020, p.4)

because it is mostly associated with feminine qualities, similarly to care work). Additionally, like many forms of service-providing, it doesn't have a concrete output which can be measured in capitalistic terms. Hence, their professional activities and lifestyle must be redirected to make them into 'active citizens' through punitive policies. Their working in the sex industry immediately marks them as 'non-active citizens', which prevents them from accessing all of their rights (as they're not 'fulfilling their responsibilities' to society). This line of reasoning has obvious intersections with laws on vagrancy, cruising and others (Berkowitz, 2013) that have been created and used to strip disabled, queer (see R. Deslandes, 2017, pp. 267–296) and migrant people from their right to privacy, access to family and other basic human rights.

On top of this, there are manifest tensions for any kind of sexual dissident when it comes to their 'sex life' (ie not just sexual acts but displays of affection etc.): we are forced to live our lives as sexual beings, constantly. In particular, we are thought to be perverse sexual beings constantly. Any sex worker who has ever come out, like any queer person who has ever come out, knows what it feels like to have everyone around them question their sexual habits, ask deeply intimate questions and change their whole perception of them. Entry into the public realm with these identities at their forefront means risking how our personhood is perceived by others and, in front of the law, our citizenship or migration status.

Bell (Bell, 1995, p. 141) maps out three spaces in which a sexual-dissident citizenship identity exists within western society: consumerism, activism and queer politics. Perhaps unsurprisingly, sex work intersects right through those three spaces. It's hard to ignore the fact that many queer people work or have worked in the sex trade, as

well as the way that powerful queer people and kinksters (usually, men) pay for the services of sex workers to quietly express their sexuality. Sex workers then not only exist in these spaces of sexual-dissident citizenship, but actually uphold and provide them for other sexual-dissident citizens to express their identities. Sex workers have been at the heart of LGBTQIIA+ activism since the Stonewall Riots (and before): Marsha P. Johnson was a sex worker who used the money she made in the trade to house homeless queer youth, and she was also the woman who threw the first stone at the police. Nowadays, organisations like hacking//hustling, the English Collective of Prostitutes and others continue to fight for the rights of not only sex workers, but all sexual-dissidents. Sex workers are obviously part of queer politics, given the fact that they're the prime sexual-dissident subject. Additionally, most sex workers don't have the luxury not to organise to protect themselves, since they're under constant attack.

There is yet another aspect of these spaces that translates directly from Bell's mapping into sex workers and pornographers' lives: the 'panoptical spectre of AIDS'. Bell first uses this term in his 2005 essay on sexual citizenship: 'the paradox of AIDS, then, is that it calls into question the publicity of the public and privacy of the private simultaneously: private life cannot be private while the panoptical spectre of AIDS casts its gaze.' (Bell, 2015). The 'panoptical spectre' refers here to the ubiquity of the exacerbated representations of the private lives of people with AIDS for public consumption, the way they were centred in the making of health and legal policies and how these 'private' spaces were exploited in the media (Watney, 1997). Even though statistically speaking sex workers are much better at managing risks associated with AIDS and other STIs, this panoptical gaze is still cast upon them. When sex workers choose to

occupy a public space with their identity upfront, at the same time this gaze is deployed and used to police their desire and other private bodily practices. If a sex worker wants to be visible as a sex worker, they give up their right to a 'private life' in favour of public activism in a way that can be compared to the similar fate suffered by trans people occupying a public activist space.

From Romans in Britain to the Bathroom Question: moral panic as a fascist public engagement tool

> The Battle for Britain has begun, it must be won by those who, inspired by the people's will, stand for the common good in the national interest. — John Hayes CBE, MP for South Holland and The Deepings (in The Common Sense Group, 2021, p. 1)

In order to meaningfully engage with this argument, we must first define fascism. Jason Stanley thinks of fascism as 'a method of politics'. 'It's a rhetoric, a way of running for power.[…] But I really see fascism as a technique to gain power.' (Illing, 2008). Although he defines fascism in ten characteristics, he claims that the three essential features are to invoke a mythic past, to sow division and to attack truth. (Stanley, 2018). In this chapter I will be using this formulation of fascism to talk about moral panics[84] surrounding decency, including moral panics around pornography and queer rights.

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[84] 'A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylised and stereotypical fashion by the mass media;(…)Sometimes the panic passes over and it's forgotten, except in folklore and collective memory.' (Cohen, 1972/2011, p. 9)

Interestingly, Stanley poses that sexual deviancy is a threat to fascism because its existence runs counter to the supremacy of the nuclear family and the fascistic ideal of a particular type of manhood as the source of its strength: 'since fascist politics has, at its basis, the traditional patriarchal family, it is characteristically accompanied by panic about deviations from it. Transgender individuals and homosexuals are used to heighten anxiety and panic about the threat to traditional male gender roles' (Stanley, 2018, p. 94). Sexual deviancy also threatens the purity of the bloodline of the nation, which is present both in the rhetoric about queer people being dangerous to women and children, in the rhetoric about AIDS (as we will see when discussing Gotell later in the chapter), but in more recent fear-stoking rhetorics about darker-skinned people (such as muslim men in France and the UK). In Stanley's views, presenting deviancy as a threat to women/children allows fascism to curtail freedom without having to attack it directly, because it questions men's ability to protect them (Stanley, 2018, p. 101). This is consistent with the findings of Alexander Monea which are discussed in the algorithmic censorship section below, where white men in power have chosen to build-in censorship from the get-go in an attempt to protect women and children from the evils of sexual deviancy. As we will see, these instances are not isolated, but form a cohesive picture of how moral panics are used by fascism to curtail the individual freedoms of dissident individuals. Moral panics in the British press can be related to algorithmic censorship in Silicon Valley through Stanley's understanding of fascism.

A moral panic in Britain that was deeply tied to the advancement of human rights (the removal of Section 28 and depictions of masc homosexuality across all media) was the rape scene in 'The Romans in Britain'. 'The Romans in Britain' is a 1980 stage play

by Howard Brenton that chronicles imperialism and abuse of power in Britain from the Roman invasion onwards, and it was the subject of a private prosecution and smear campaign brought forward by Mary Whitehouse, a conservative moral campaigner (who did not watch the actual play, afraid that watching it could compromise the integrity of her soul).

While Whitehouse ultimately lost her case against the director of the play, she did make his life incredibly difficult for over a year. Additionally, she spearheaded a smear campaign in the press that brought all kinds of negative attention to the director, the performers and the rest of the crew. Though she refused to see the play herself, as she was too frightened it would lead to the 'corruption of her soul' (Gibb, 1981), she requested the Metropolitan Police to examine whether the play was 'an offence against the Theaters Act of 1968' (ibid.) which outlawed performances likely to deprave or corrupt. After a brief investigation, the Attorney General, Lord Havers, decided there was no case to answer. But Mrs. Whitehouse didn't agree and discovered that a private prosecution could be brought against the director on grounds that he had 'procured an act of gross indecency by Peter Sproule with Greg Hicks on the stage of the Olivier Theater,' (ibid.) a law intended to stop men masturbating in lavatories.

The way the press covered this article is particularly interesting to look at, especially if we compare it to the transphobic press campaign that has taken over Britain's press during the last few years. The first article written in The Sunday Times about this case, in January 1981, states 'Director of 'Romans' play bailed'. In another article published 30th June 1981 in The Times, the headline reads 'Rape attempt scene 'was gross indecency''. After this quite damning headline, we learn in the first few lines that this is

what the prosecution argued, not a finding during the hearing or even a comment from the judge. The article, written by Frances Gibb, then proceeds to lay out the basics of the case in a rather impartial way, giving space to the defence's argument that Mrs. Whitehouse (the prosecution) was trying to circumvent the fact that her prosecution efforts under the Theatres Act 1968 by using the crime of Gross Public Indecency to effectively censor the play. Of course, the article also contains a detailed description of the scene in question, courtesy of Mr. Graham Ross-Cornes (Mrs. Whitehouse's solicitor, who watched the play on her instruction, since she did not want to be witness to it herself), as well as his testimony about the audience's shock and horror at the explicit portrayal of a rape scene on stage.

Interestingly, the article also points out that the witness admitted under cross-examination that 'the scene had been seriously treated, with no attempt at eroticism or titillation.' The fact that the prosecution focused on making clear that the scene was not pornographic (no attempt at eroticism or titillation) indicates that the crux of the defence's argument (that there wasn't an obscene act being committed on stage) was not only that there was no actual homosexual sex happening on stage, but that there was no pornographic intent in the portrayal of the rape. Deviant sexual acts can only be allowed if they are not seen to be promoting the deviancy they portray — and thus, any suggestion that any (sane, normal, morally correct) member of the audience could derive pleasure from watching them because they were designed to please, arouse or titillate, endangers not only the acts themselves, but those who write and perform them. In another article penned by Gibb for The Sunday Times, this time published in July 1981, Lord Hutchinson (for the defence) is quoted saying that 'Scenes of simulated sexual behaviour were seen in

places throughout the world'. The article then, again, describes the rape scene in great detail, as well as Mr. Smyth's argument that if the play were to be about paedophilia involving child actors in the scene, surely that would constitute gross indecency. The strategy of conflating queer and deviant people with paedophiles is still being used to censor queer lives today; the last shooting in a queer club in Colorado occurred amidst claims in the press and on social media that drag queens and trans women are grooming children in order to abuse them (ISD, 2022).

On the other hand, there are the swathes of trans panic that have been fabricated and widely spread by all kinds of newspapers, from The Guardian to The Telegraph. Prominent public figures, such as J.K. Rowling, have become known for contributing to the creation of several moral panics around the existence of trans people. The most well-known of these is 'the bathroom question', which pits the existence of trans women against the 'fragility' of white cis women. It does this by proposing that trans women are not women, but cis men using the cover of transness to rape unwitting, innocent cis women in women's bathrooms. According to Stanley, these moral panics are one of the characteristics of fascism: 'The role of the father in the patriarchal family is to protect the mother and the children. Attacking trans women, and representing the feared other as a threat to the manhood of the nation, are ways of placing the very idea of manhood at the centre of political attention, gradually introducing fascist ideals of hierarchy and domination by physical power to the public sphere' (Stanley, 2018, p. 100). We will explore moral panics more in-depth in the section about algorithmic censorship, but suffice to say that there is a strong relationship between these and fascism. In this case, fascism identifies trans people as a threat to the purity of young people (children)

and women, but we can observe similar arguments put forward throughout most of the coverage of legal sentencing found in the Bishopsgate LAGNA archive — see the headlines mentioned ahead.

We can draw a few common threads between these two instances of moral panic: they produced deviance/deviants by using self-victimisation. In the case of Whitehouse, she centred her whiteness and her femininity and used them as discursive devices that allowed her to present herself as a victim of a 'cultural violation'; in the case of the 'bathroom question', transphobes also use whiteness and cis-feminity to present them as being attacked and victimised by the existence of trans people. This is made obvious by Stanley when he talks about sexual repression and the fascist obsession with purity: 'Fascist propaganda does not, of course, merely present members of targeted groups as criminals. To ensure the right kind of moral panic about these groups, its members are represented as particular *kinds* of threats to the fascist nation—most important, and most typical, a threat to its purity' (Stanley, 2018, p. 93). Cohen describes this process as happening through exaggeration and distortion, prediction of dire consequences and symbolisation of acute threat (Cohen, 2011) — he also highlights the necessary role of media and moral entrepreneurs in turning someone/something deviant. Cammaerts (2022) also points out how self-victimisation and free speech are used to 'discursively turn the tables on those who contest hate speech, discrimination and structural racism, sexism and LGBTQ-phobia'. Finally, and coming back to the idea of metapolitics and how (neo) fascism is constructed, the normalisation of the self as a strategy to build, maintain and normalise fascism can only be effective through the sustained effort to 'intensify the

conflict between the self and its enemies so as to reinforce hegemonization' (Schmitt, 1932).

Moral panics serve to distil the fear of otherness into actionable steps taken to 'safeguard' those 'more vulnerable' (white cis women and children) — this is at the core of 'groomer discourse' where queer people are equated to child groomers for daring to offer shelter to young queer kids. Mutual aid is prevented by casting the older queers as dangerous, paedophilic etc. in the media, spinning a narrative that prevents the community from connecting to its own roots. These narratives then get built into law (such as laws to prevent the spread of AIDS by quarantining migrant sex workers in the US and Australia, which have no epidemiological basis and served only to criminalise communities) and are further used to attack human rights and the development of marginalised individuals and communities. In the following section, we will look at the development of one such set of laws, FOSTA/SESTA, and how it has impacted sex workers' and artists' ability to process payments and get paid for their work – therefore impacting their quality of life.

4.3 FOSTA/SESTA and the onset of Online Censorship

FOSTA/SESTA

In 2018, the Allow States and Victims to Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act (FOSTA) and the Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act (SESTA) bills passed in the United States of America. These anti-trafficking laws claimed to make the internet a safer place

for everyone. The way in which they proposed to do this was making it illegal to knowingly assist, facilitate or support sex trafficking and by amending Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act and removing the immunity of online services from civil liability for the content that their users uploaded, as well as for the use of said content.

Initially, they faced backlash from the tech industry as they meant that the tech companies could be held responsible for what their users posted, but this soon went away when tech companies refused to engage with sex workers (Albert, 2022, p. 419). They have become a point of no return for censorship on the internet (Blunt & Wolf, 2020). As a result of the passing of these laws, the following happened:

1. Tumblr banned pornography from their platform. This caused LGTBQ+ artistic communities to lose their ability to make a living, and also lose their networks (Pilipets and Paasonen, 2020).

2. Mastercard and Visa tightened their rules around newly designated pornographic content (Tusikov, 2021). When payment processors tighten their rules, that means that the content hosts (hosting companies, social media, etc.) will have to tighten them too (Blunt and Stardust, 2021). If not, they could risk being able to process any payments (make money off their users).

3. Both Apple's App Store and Google's Play Store tightened their rules on newly designated pornographic content.

4. Before FOSTA/SESTA passed, Backpage got taken down, and many sex workers lost their ability to make a living (Blunt & Wolf, 2020). This was a direct antecedent of these suite of laws being passed.

Most of these platforms use algorithmic moderation to remove content and ban accounts. And studies have shown that algorithms tend to conflate racial, fat and LGTBQ+ content with pornography (Salty, 2019). This means that a fat femme is more likely to get banned on social media for doing the exact same things that a thin white femme does, for example.

Online platforms that are not based in the US (or platforms like Meta and Twitter, who have global presence) have been acting according to FOSTA/SESTA and often, being overzealous with their actions since 2018 (Bronstein, 2021). This, along with a deeper dive on algorithmic censorship, will be explored in the section about algorithmic censorship further ahead in this chapter.

EARN IT Act

The Eliminating Abusive and Rampant Neglect of Interactive Technologies Act (EARN IT Act, S. 3398) was first introduced in 2020. When it failed to pass, it was reintroduced in 2022 and finally in 2023. This Act would see Section 230 further amended, with obvious terrible results for sex workers, queer folks and artists (hughr, 2020). The reason why EARN IT is so dangerous is that it would repeal the liability shield present in Section 230 'for any state criminal and civil law prohibiting the 'distribution' or 'presentation' of CSAM[85]' (Durbin & Grassley, 2022). By placing no 'mens rea' limitation, states would be free to decide the liability standard they impose on platforms who didn't know that CSAM was present on their services. In practical terms, this means hosting

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[85] Child Sexual Abuse Material

user-generated content would become riskier and riskier for platforms, further curtailing sex workers' and artists' access to these services (and with it, curtailing their ability to make a livelihood, which is a form of financial violence):

For those who forge on, in order to mitigate the legal risks inherent in the massive expansion of liability under state law enabled by EARN IT, providers will engage in overbroad censorship of online speech, especially content created by diverse communities, including LGBTQ individuals, whose posts are disproportionately labelled erroneously as sexually explicit (Hudson, 2011), and content carried on platforms ranging from social media apps to video game websites designed for minors and young adults. (Durbin & Grassley, 2022)

Online Safety Act

The Online Safety Act is the latest in a series of very concerning Acts proposed by the former UK Government that threaten freedom of speech, such as the new Policing Act (Statewatch, 2023) and the Public Order Bill (Liberty, 2022).

The former government claims that the Online Safety Act will 'make the UK the safest place in the world to be online while defending free expression'. The Act aims to:

1. increase user safety online

2. preserve and enhance freedom of speech online

3. improve law enforcement's ability to tackle illegal content online

4. improve users' ability to keep themselves safe online

5. improve society's understanding of the harm landscape.

The Act makes 'regulated services' (such as social media and search engines) responsible for removing:

1. illegal content,

2. content that is harmful to children and

3. content that is legal but harmful to adults.

The most complete opinion on the Act (Ryder & Wills, 2022) has been commissioned by Index on Censorship. Index on Censorship said that the Online Safety Act 'will be catastrophic for freedom of speech' (Index on Censorship, 2022).

Index on Censorship's report on the Act concludes that it will 'lead to the restriction of speech considered 'legal but harmful''. But what exactly is 'legal but harmful speech'? Sadly, the bill fails to define this, leaving it open to wide interpretation by both courts and online platforms, who have to enforce this law. In practice, 'legal but harmful speech' could mean anything from producing artworks that depict rape, suicide, racism, even if the artwork is denouncing these things. And it's up to the online platforms to decide what 'legal but harmful speech' is. This undermines the rule of law, according to Matthew Ryder KC. He determines that 'online platforms will inevitably turn to machines, not trained people, which are unable to make such nuanced and difficult legal assessments'. I will go one step further: given what we know about content moderation (Siapera, 2021) — which will be discussed later in this chapter — the algorithms used to

flag these kinds of content will have racist, sexist, fatphobic and xenophobic biases (Monea 2023).

But the Act doesn't stop there. It asks the platforms not only to remove or limit the visibility of this content but to 'prevent' users from posting it. Ryder is concerned that this may lead to the implementation of upload filters. This would prevent all of the content mentioned above from being uploaded in the first place. This may mean anything from being unable to make WhatsApp video calls, uploading content to social media, or uploading content to one's own website.

The consequences of the Online Safety Act will not end there. According to Index on Censorship, "the UK government will be able to directly silence user speech, and even imprison those who publish messages that it doesn't like'. The Act also undermines global encryption standards. This means that private messages would not be private anymore. Platforms would be forced to track them for the UK's Office of Communications (OFCOM).

This is extremely dangerous for LGBTQ+ individuals as well as any other minorities. If an artist is currently producing politically involved art, particularly art that is critical of the government, would they upload it to the internet if they knew that it could land them in a court of law? Would anyone produce this kind of art at all if they had no way of sharing it? The passing of this law will mean that artistic speech is under an assault for which given the state of global communications, there is no precedent.

Section 230

Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act (1996) says that 'No provider or user of an interactive computer service shall be treated as the publisher or speaker of any information provided by another information content provider' (47 U.S.C. ∫ 230). In other words, online intermediaries that host or republish speech are protected against a range of laws that might otherwise be used to hold them legally responsible for what others say and do. The protected intermediaries include not only regular Internet Service Providers (ISPs), but also a range of 'interactive computer service providers' (Electronic Frontier Foundation, 2012) including basically any online service that publishes third-party content. Though there are important exceptions for certain criminal and intellectual property-based claims, CDA 230 creates a broad protection that has allowed innovation and free speech online to flourish.

This legal and policy framework has allowed for YouTube and Vimeo users to upload their own videos, Amazon and Yelp to offer countless user reviews, craigslist to host classified ads, and Facebook and Twitter to offer social networking to hundreds of millions of Internet users. Given the sheer size of user-generated websites (for example, Facebook alone has more than 1 billion users, and YouTube users upload 100 hours of video every minute), it would be impossible for online intermediaries to prevent objectionable content from cropping up on their site. Rather than face potential liability for their users' actions, most would likely not host any user content at all or would need to protect themselves by being actively engaged in censoring what we say, what we see, and what we do online. In short, CDA 230 is perhaps the most influential law to protect the kind of innovation that has allowed the Internet to thrive since 1996.

The legal status of BDSM and pornography in the UK

It is important to understand the current legal landscape of BDSM in order to comprehend how far censorship (both of graphic material, but also of certain interpersonal relationships) is intertwined with law in the United Kingdom. I've chosen to limit my review of the legal landscape to the United Kingdom because it is where I currently reside and study, and because it is directly shaping the application of the Online Safety Act. This is a direct successor of both FOSTA and SESTA and will most likely affect censorship online on a worldwide scale.

First and foremost, British law does not acknowledge that adults may consent to actual bodily harm, which renders most BDSM acts 'illegal'. These laws are sometimes enforced (as we saw before, most famously in R v Brown). This is the case even though British law recognises that adults can consent to activities such as boxing, rugby, body piercing and tattoos, which also result in not only pain, but sometimes permanent injuries. This already indicates a very strong tension between the individual's right to privacy and a very particular understanding of the duty of care that the State has to protect public health and interest — which is sharpened by well-known facts as the current rise in food bank usage, drop in quality of life, etc., that still do not warrant a similar level of State intervention.

This directly impacts laws regarding pornography for a number of reasons. In 2007, the British Government cited the aforementioned Spanner case as a reason to

criminalise images of consensual acts in the Criminal Justice and Immigration Bill, which would mean that the possession of 'extreme pornography' would be deemed illegal:

The material to be covered by this new offence is at the most extreme end of the spectrum of pornographic material which is likely to be thought abhorrent by most people. It is not possible at law to give consent to the type of activity covered by the offence, so it is therefore likely that a criminal offence is being committed where the activity which appears to be taking place is actually taking place. The House of Lords upheld convictions for offences of causing actual and grievous bodily harm in the case of Brown [1994] 1 AC 212 which involved a group of sado-masochists who had engaged in consensual torture. The threshold that the clauses have set is very high, so while those taking part might argue that they had consented to it, such consent is not valid at law. (House of Commons, 2007)

According to the former British Government, this is to protect the individuals participating in the staging of these scenes from the degradation of them. Additionally, the former British Government claimed to be concerned with the protection of children and vulnerable individuals, who may come across this material which is 'widespread on the internet' (House of Commons, 2007). It is interesting and necessary to interrogate why the British Government felt that participating in an extreme BDSM scene would be so degrading for the individual that it would require state intervention. If the goal of this law was truly to prevent harm from coming to their citizens who may be forced to engage in such acts, there is two very clear pathways that would have more successful outcomes while not interfering with the individual's bodily autonomy: one would be to establish a universal basic income (so that people would not have to subject themselves to extreme

conditions in order to survive) and the second one would be to abolish border control or at least, to relax their immigration system[86] (so that people with a vulnerable immigration status would not be forced into dangerous situations). But instead of engaging with the kind of policy that would effectively deal with the problem, the former British Government chose to (once again) criminalise those with marginalised sexual identities.

Note must also be taken of the fact that the arguments used by the government in this bill are an extension of those used to criminalise sex work and homosexuality back in the XIXth century by the same British Government: the original Obscene Publications Act (1857) and the Contagious Diseases Act (1864). The Contagious Diseases Act (CDA) which originally seemed like a series of regulations for cattle, was the first time that British law regulated prostitution (Berkowitz, 2013, p. 372): 'Under the CDA, police in eleven military towns could force the inspection and treatment of any women they suspected of being diseased prostitutes' (ibid., p. 373). However, the law did not define what a prostitute was or wasn't, which allowed the police to 'take aggressive measures to enforce the law' (ibid., p.373). The Obscene Publications Act's most novel aspect was that it effectively 'turned magistrates into all-purpose censors, fully able to declare any literary or artistic work obscene and order it destroyed' (ibid., p.389). Given that, as we now know, criminalising both of those acts has never managed to stop either of them, it is interesting that the same arguments and strategies are still being used by the same government to very little effect. Could it be that the State is not looking for an effective strategy to deal

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[86] For more on policies that support sex workers, including those who are seeking to leave sex work, please see 'Revolting Prostitutes' by Juno Mac and Molly Smith (2018, Verso Books).

with the perceived harm to its citizens (Valverde, 1999), but a strategy that will make it more difficult to exist as a person with a marginalised identity?

Moving on from the Criminal Justice and Immigration Bill, in the 2014 Audiovisual Media Service Regulations, the video distribution of some BDSM practices became illegal. Some of these included:

Sadomasochistic material going beyond the 'trifling or transient' infliction of pain or injury.

Physical restraint which prevents participants from indicating a withdrawal of consent.

Urolagnia

Erotic asphyxiation

Face sitting

Fisting (Hooton, 2014)

This, of course, resulted in widespread protest all across the United Kingdom, including a face sitting protest in front of Parliament in December 2014. Most notably, the now defunct feminist magazine Bitch called attention to the fact that the law seemed to mostly target acts associated with female domination, including female ejaculation (Scott, 2015). Once again, it would seem that marginalised sexual identities were the only ones that required state regulation. Thankfully, most of these were finally overturned in 2019 during an overhaul of the Obscene Publications Act.

As they currently stand, the guidelines of the British Board of Film Classification on what is not acceptable are as it follows:

1. material which is in breach of the criminal law, including material judged to be obscene under the current interpretation of the Obscene Publications Act 1959

2. material (including dialogue) likely to encourage an interest in sexually abusive activity which may include adults role-playing as non-adults the portrayal of sexual activity which involves real or apparent lack of consent.

3. Any form of physical restraint which prevents participants from indicating a withdrawal of consent

4. the infliction of pain or acts which are likely to cause serious physical harm, whether real or (in a sexual context) simulated. Some allowance may be made for non-abusive, consensual activity

5. penetration by any object likely to cause physical harm

6. sexual threats, humiliation or abuse which do not form part of a clearly consenting role-playing game (British Board of Film Classification, 2019)

As usual, given that there are seldom BDSM experts sitting on these boards, whether these interpretations can be correct or not is up for debate. We must remember that in the United Kingdom it is still illegal to publish a work that is considered obscene under the current interpretation of the Obscene Publications Act. It is also important to understand that, technically speaking, these restrictions only apply to pornography that is to be sold, which disproportionately affects sex workers. However, as demonstrated by the

Spanner case, some BDSM acts are illegal and will sometimes be prosecuted, particularly if those taking part in them are dissident citizens.

4.4 Censorship, dissident identities and pornography

This section is concerned with how censorship affects dissident identities and communities, mostly in a negative way. The first part covers how online communities can harbour interesting relationships around people interested in producing and consuming pornography, particularly those with identities that are queer and kinky. I will do this mainly through the anthropologic work of Katrin Tiidenberg and Emily van Der Nagel on Tumblr, FetLife and other online communities before the advent of FOSTA/SESTA. After establishing this, I will look at how algorithmic censorship is designed and its deep ties to colonialism, fatphobia and queerphobia through the work of Alexander Monea. This will help colour the context for the next section, which lays out the economic realities that sex workers who make pornography face: financial discrimination and algorithmic suppression. I do this through Monea's work but also by borrowing from Sophie Ladder's research on different pornographic platforms' terms of service. The following section deals with a similar landscape for artists, because chronologically speaking, once sex workers face a particular type of online discrimination, the wider artistic community tends to follow. This is done mainly looking at Rueschendorf's thesis which deals with aerial artists and pole dancers and the censorship they face on social media, such as Instagram. Throughout both of these sections the relationship between FOSTA/SESTA and dissidence suppression will be made abundantly clear. They neatly lead to the second

to last section, which deals with how these laws have affected the creation and dissemination of queer art since they were passed. The final section looks at the parallel strategies employed by the artists involved in the workshop that produced the I Modi and also by artists' trying to survive algorithmic censorship today.

How do online pornographic communities affect queer and kinky identities?

In Katrin Tiidenberg and Emily van der Nagel's 'Sex and Social Media' (2020) we find a detailed account of how sexual expression lives on, evolves and is affected by Social Media. For the authors, sexual identity is 'something that we do, rather than something we have. [...] Identity work, meaning the activities we all undertake to construct, understand, and represent ourselves as coherent, distinct, and positively valued. This identity work, including sexual identity work, happens, to a considerable extent, in dialogue with the things, ideas, and other people we encounter on social media' (Tiidenberg and van der Nagel, 2020, p. 111). They researched how people use different social networks (from LinkedIn to FetLife and everything in between) and social media accounts as a way to 'satiate their needs and curiosities for excitement, information or connection, but [also as] a form of identity work' (Tiidenberg and van der Nagel, 2020, p. 111). They use Erving Goffman's understanding of identity, which sustains that we create our identities 'through the continuing performance of being ourselves or the process of self-presentation and impression management' (Tiidenberg and van der Nagel, 2020, p. 111).

Embodiment is also crucial to their understanding of the online identity equation: 'Embodiment is the basis of our relation to other people and the world, and it gets complicated and mediated by technology. [...] Our experience of the world and how we relate to it is filtered through our own gendered, raced, differently abled bodies, but it also involves presumptions about other people, as we react in particular and often culturally constrained ways to the weight, height, race, ethnicity, gender, and ability of their bodies' (Tiidenberg and van der Nagel, 2020, p. 112). Attending in particular to the sharing of self-made pornographic material on online communities, such as NSFW Tumblr or certain Reddit communities, they frame this as both a 'creative sexual practice, but [also] a way for the posters to know, understand, and experience their own bodies. Beyond representing bodies and expressing the sexuality of the posters, the process of taking and sharing nudes, with all the contextual nuance discussed, made it possible for people to celebrate, accept or experience themselves in new ways [...] when they had believed or been told that they were too old, fat, genderqueer or disabled to ever warrant such a categorization" (Tiidenberg and van der Nagel, 2020, p. 113-114). This is very interesting because it suggests that self-made pornography acts as a vehicle for self-acceptance, not only of the OP (original poster) but potentially, of the rest of the community. Self-made pornography can enact communal change, particularly changing the standards around attractiveness regarding dissident identities (ie queerness, fatness, youth/age, etc.). Exposure to different bodies in different contexts broadens the normative aesthetic horizons of the community that is engaging with said exposure (see also Irvin 2017). This is consistent with my own findings about my own pornography in Chapter 3, as well as with Ryberg's findings discussed in Chapter 2.

The idea of 'audience segregation' comes from Erving Goffman's 'The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life' (1956). Following from his framework of identity as a construction developed through situationally appropriate performances of different roles in interaction with other actors, audience segregation would be our attempt to ensure that said performances remain situationally appropriate — i.e. that different audiences and performances do not mix. One does not perform the role of sexual lover for family members, usually. Following on with Goffman's theory, Tiidenberg and van der Nagel find that in order to fulfil the audience segregation aspect of their identity, creators of pornography (whether professionals or amateurs) use two main strategies: pseudonymity and omission. These are of course strategies of compartmentalization and curation. Curation is an integral part of any personal social media account. It is a strategy that allows the users, no matter what kind of content they're creating, to manage not only their appearance and make it appropriate for the audience segment they're looking to connect with, but also to maintain their privacy: 'Disconnecting is a crucial part of social media, as it allows people to exercise power and control over their identity and communicative contexts' (Tiidenberg and van der Nagel, 2020, p. 128). For example, if one is curating a food prepping channel, it is unlikely that one would share details of one's life at the office, or allow other crossovers to contaminate the content. This would distract from the main content and perhaps alienate one's audience. However, it should be noted that sometimes this is intentionally avoided in a bid to appear more 'relatable' by sharing these 'crossover' aspects with the audience.

Omission is more often used as a way to anonymise aspects of oneself (blurring tattoos and hiding faces, a very common strategy that escorts use), and can also be found in pseudonymity: the omission of one's own name (usually for safety reasons), which requires the invention of a new one. Pseudonymity can be a particularly productive strategy that allows pornography creators to experiment with their identity: 'As porn star Conner Habib (2015) explains, creating a name is creating an identity, one that protects him as a porn performer from complicated and sometimes discriminatory entanglements. Habib's porn name reflects his Irish and Syrian heritage and introduces a Middle Eastern name to porn, an element he recognizes as underrepresented.' In Habib's case, he made a politically charged choice. In an industry that tends to fetishise ethnic identities and favour white presenting performers, his choice of surname may have had an economic impact in his career. However, the ability to explore, represent and expand these aspects of his identity must have been more interesting for Habib than the potential economic gain. It is interesting to note that while Habib is still a sex worker, he is also an activist, queer fiction author and scholar of philosophy and occultism — and that he has decided to pursue all of these avenues still under the same pseudonym.

A different example, and perhaps one that fits more neatly with preconceived ideas about maximising sexiness and marketability when choosing a name, would be artist, freelance journalist, activist and former pornographic performer Rakel Liekki: 'But choosing a name is an assertion of power: for highly successful Finnish porn performer Rakel Liekke ('Rachel Flame'), this chosen name is a character, media persona, and brand […]. Her pseudonym 'flame' conjures images of fire, heat, and a kind of primal, natural sexuality. Within this specific context, porn performers and sex workers can be

identifiable, and build a reputation, while keeping their occupation private'. (Tiidenberg and van der Nagel, 2020, p. 124) What Tiidenberg and van der Nagel highlight, the ability to be identifiable, is particularly important for sex workers starting out who are also trying to build a certain profile. When I first started working as a live pornographic performer and stripper, I chose a name that evoked the gothic qualities that I was interested in getting across to my audience. While I did not sit down and look at any meaningful amount of data in order to make this decision, I knew that my alternative looks would not really work well with a name that didn't reflect that aspect of myself. In my experience, and particularly when it comes to choosing the first 'nom de guerre', sex workers tend to choose a name that they feel drawn to, that represents those qualities that they believe are going to set them apart from the rest of the market — while trying to also convey the fact that they are sex workers and not, say, bakers. This was much easier five or six years ago, when 'influencing' as a business hadn't yet started to take flight. The sex workers starting out today and choosing a name for themselves must navigate a very tight line between signalling what kind of business they are in (as to not be confused with an influencer, lingerie model, etc.), not be too clear about what they do (as to avoid online censorship of their account), and also convey what is about themselves that is absolutely unique.

We have already touched briefly on how finding connection through social media is an embodied experience. It is because of this embodiment that online communities can help support identitary processes, particularly those that occur around shame and the exploration of dissident identities. Tiidenberg and van der Nagel provide several interviews in their book that reflect this sentiment, such as this excerpt from their

interview with Kiara, who shares her adult content online: 'If people can't find a supportive community and see that they things they are into are normal, it can really take a mental toll […] I mean in general social media has been THE space where I've been able to connect with like-minded people, I've been able to create and share content and find people who really enjoyed it, and find a lot of content that I enjoy as well' (Tiidenberg and van der Nagel, 2020, p. 131-132). This could be read as an evolution from the findings of Chadwick, Raisanen, Goldey, and Anders' paper (2018) on strategies employed by women to enjoy pornography. This suggests that by taking part on the creation process, instead of choosing an 'editing stance' (ie curating the content, acquiring pornoliteracy in order to find better content, or fast-forwarding certain parts of the content to avoid triggering scenes), engagement with pornography becomes even more joyous and fruitful. There are some obvious reasons why engaging with community-produced/sourced pornography would increase pornoliteracy (the ability to understand what kind of pornography one enjoys and the knowledge of the appropriate terminology and libraries in order to navigate the content): posts are often tagged with the appropriate terminology so it's easy to see visual examples of what different practices look like, community members will often recommend new terms or new content to other members, etc. But it is both interesting and exciting to see that engaging with the creation of pornography leads to more enjoyment of both one's own personal pornography as well as other people's work.

In their study of online sex communities, Tiidenberg and van der Nagel suggest 'that sexual community is a similarly necessary fiction for [communities and subcultures other than LGTBQIA+] and groups beyond those based on sexual orientation or gender

identity.' (Tiidenberg and van der Nagel, 2020, p. 137) They found that 'studies with queer youth, asexual youth, people interested in BDSM or polyamory have cited people saying that they simply had no one else in their lives to talk about these things to; had never met anyone like themselves; thought no one else wanted what they wanted; and felt hopelessly alone before finding their online communities[…]. This means online sexual communities are important if we want to examine collective sexual meaning making' (Tiidenberg and van der Nagel, 2020, p. 139). It is no wonder that when someone is exploring their dissident identity (whether this is a queer or kinky identity), finding people who feel similarly about their identities and the kinds of sexual activity they want to engage in is, at the very least, a relief. It means that while one may be dissident, one is certainly not alone. It also allows for the sharing of common interests, growth, and many of the other elements that can be fostered through community engagement. This is again consistent with Ryberg's findings and other aspects of communal engagement with pornography discussed in Chapter 2.

Their book offers several excerpts from interviews that record how these relationships are built, and while entering into disquisitions about how parasocial relationships work is beyond the scope of my thesis, some of them offer excellent jumping points to think about how production creates community and vice versa: "It kind of morphed from being a therapeutic outlet and a journal-like thing that was just for me, into something that was also for other people. Like at times when I didn't want to journal and 'ruin' the fairytale of non-stop hot sex, I was encouraged not only by the fact that it was so cathartic for me to write about these realities, but also that I wanted to be real for those who were reading. There is a lack of information out there for couples in open

marriages. And the info that is out there is so skewed. Everything I read before I started was either erotic story-telling or about swinging or wife swapping. Nothing tackled the emotional issues involved with navigating polyamorous relationships.' Kat' (Tiidenberg and van der Nagel, 2020, p. 149). The interviewee, who started blogging about her open marriage because she found a lack of resources online, ended up becoming an influencer of sorts in NSFW Tumblr, where she fostered a community of individuals who were interested in her content, both pornographic and costumbrist. Fostering this community allowed her to connect with like-minded individuals but also to shape the community that she was part of. Another participant shared: 'On Tumblr it's just nice to see that there's so many other people and you know, they're not like, judging you, for the most part. I've been surprised to see that people have had similar experiences, because I've felt like, must be the only person who is that disgusting, and then to figure out that it is actually not that disgusting, and actually a lot more common than I was giving myself credit for.' (Tiidenberg and van der Nagel, 2020, p. 157).

Even though most participants in the study used occlusion and pseudonymity strategies, the authors found that they were committed to holding a vulnerable space for their community. 'Shaming or ridiculing people about their sexual practices, preferences, or appearances was discouraged. If someone did get a mean comment or an Ask, they would often publish it with either a sincere reflection on how that made them feel or a take-down. [...] Publicising mean comments was typically met with a lot of public support [which] served to help activate and reinforce community boundaries and norms' (Tiidenberg and van der Nagel, 2020, p. 158). This is probably an excellent example of censorship as a productive power when it is wielded organically by the community and in

order to curtail direct harm to an individual. By showing support to the people who had chosen to publish the negative interactions they'd had (a mean comment, a request that made them uncomfortable), the community softly censors the highlighted behaviour and those behaving in that way, effectively sending the message that such behaviour is not okay and not welcome in this online space — this makes the space safer for community members, which are engaged in a continuous feedback loop of educating one another.

'When people posted sexy selfies, shared stories about their lives, or chose to reblog someone else's selfie with a reassuring comment, because they remembered how important it had been for them to get a comment like that once, they were also almost by accident, reframing how they represented and understood other people and the cultural, normative, and political conditions they live in. [...] The support people showed each other had profound psychological, emotional and embodied implications, helping people to first accept and then critically reflect on their experiences [...] also offered people escape, entertainment, and creative self-expression' (Tiidenberg and van der Nagel, 2020, p. 159). It is fundamental for the shaping of one's identity but also for the health and well-being of both the community and the individuals that shape it to have a space that promotes that acceptance and reflection cycle. Through sharing their own pornographic and/or sexual content, different perspectives and options (even within dissidency there must be difference) became available for the community, making it possible to externalise identitary processes in a very productive way. All in all, the book found that 'sexual social media communities may have profound value and significance for their members' (Tiidenberg and van der Nagel, 2020, p. 161), which will not surprise anyone who has ever been part of the queer or kinky spaces online.

How is algorithmic censorship designed?

Now that we have examined the way in which mainly pre-FOSTA/SESTA pornographic communal spaces fostered all kinds of positive interactions, we are more prepared to understand the true impacts of FOSTA/SESTA. The advent of FOSTA/SESTA changed the landscape of sex work across the globe in a way that is not easy to understand unless one is aware of three distinct factors: the way Silicon Valley culture shapes technology, the nature of the fintech (financial technology) industry, and how Silicon Valley culture shaped fintech in particular, and US legal supremacy over the global internet. Before we analyse how these aspects have negatively affected sex workers everywhere, we must first understand all these three issues.

Technology, like law, is never developed in a completely neutral way in a neutral environment. The way that technology is designed is deeply dependent on geographic and cultural factors, and when designed for profit, will reflect those preoccupations as well. In Monea's 'The Digital Closet' the Silicon Valley culture that gave birth to Meta (Facebook), Twitter, Paypal and Cashapp is interrogated and closely examined. Amongst other things, Monea looks at how corporate cultures that empower 'former nerds' (usually cis, straight men with excellent technological abilities and very little social currency before their access to a high-paid career) end up shaping heterosexist technology, and how the extreme neoliberal bias of Silicon Valley fosters an environment where technology evolves to continue pushing marginalised communities further into said margins:

When these biases and silences are combined with the hacker culture surrounding the implementation of new algorithms and curation of big data in Silicon Valley, it can lead to biassed technological systems and platforms that carry with them a large amount of inertia that inhibits the full correction of biassed functions after implementation (Monea, 2022, p. 76)

While coding was often done by women in the early days, by the time that Steven Levy's 'Hackers: Heroes of the Computer Revolution' was published in 1984, the field was already dominated by men. According to Monea, 'this hacker ethic quickly cemented itself into what others have called 'the Californian Ideology', an aggressive libertarian and narcissistic understanding of society that masquerades under the facade of chill nerds who just like to build cool things' (Monea, 2022, p. 78). And given how easy to replace programmers are (since these corporations and start-ups are built on modular ideas that treat workers as easily exchangeable cogs in the machine, which condemns the workers to their own obsolescence), even if individual programmers are trying to fight against this tendency, their corporate bosses have enough power to enforce their ideology over the precariously employed coders. This ideology, which is plagued with hetero-cis-sexism and racism biases by design, is also obsessed with 'progress' and being at the cutting edge of the technological race — with no 'outsider' oversight or even feedback. Effectively, this means that the sexist and racist biases present from the idea generation to the execution stage go unchecked — because checking them would prevent 'progress' from being achieved. There is an excellent example of this idea at play if we look at Elon Musk's management of Twitter, or 'X' as it is known now (see D'Cruze, 2023; Gilbert, 2022; Schiffer, 2022).

Another excellent example which is explained in great detail in 'The Digital Closet' is the nature of Google SafeSearch and the Cloud Vision API, as well as two datasets that shape the training of this API, WordNet and ImageNet. Google's attitude towards pornography has shaped the way that pornographic and erotic images are 'looked at' by their teams and algorithms:

> It is worth noting that from the beginning, Google has understood web pornography through the lens of spam. Just like spam, porn has no fixed definition and requires vigilant updates. (Monea, 2022, p. 79)

If pornography is treated like spam, has no fixed definition and requires vigilant updates, pornographic content is constantly fighting a sisyphean battle because it is treated as infectious and undesirable content that must be suppressed. If pornography was infectious and undesirable then it wouldn't be something that so many people search for on the internet. The systems to deal with it are designed to censor first and ask questions later, because pornographic content must be contained (again, treating it as infectious and dangerous). Additionally, because spam (and now pornography) has no fixed rules as to what spam looks like, anything could be spam (or pornography), making all the content suspect — the content must prove its innocence in order to be allowed to exist and be found. Finally, since it requires vigilant updates, its suppression will be prioritised in the development of algorithmic tools. This reveals a tendency to treat pornography as a public health emergency, as we will continue to unveil through this chapter.

Before diving into the syntactical biases present in WordNet and ImageNet, let's reflect on this idea for a moment. Spam, according to the Oxford Dictionary, is 'irrelevant or unsolicited messages sent over the internet, typically to a large number of users, for the purposes of advertising, phishing, spreading malware, etc.'. There is an inherent 'virality' and 'fear of contagion' present in the concept of spam: if one were to become infected by malware (which can do a number of things, but is usually utilised to record keyboard activity and, like phishing, extract privileged information (such as passwords, bank account access, etc.) from the unsuspecting user), that malware can then be spread to other hardware (computers, phones, etc.) in our user network. What does it say about how Google, in this case, understands pornography that it is treated as yet another category of spam? Pornography becomes a public health crisis to solve, something pernicious that audiences must be protected from — almost like an STI.

But how did we start fearing pornography online? There are two key elements to consider. First and foremost, the 1995 Time Magazine special on Cyber Pornography, which brought the conversation around 'how easy it was to access pornography' and the fear of children accessing it to the cultural forefront. The tagline reads: 'A new study shows how pervasive and wild it really is. Can we protect our kids — and free speech?', strategically pitting freedom of speech against children's safety. The concern for children's welfare has historically been used as a way to curtail freedom of speech as well as the rights of marginalised populations before (see earlier sections on this Chapter), so it shouldn't be a surprise to see it make an appearance once again. It should also not be a surprise to know that this is the same dichotomy that was used to push through FOSTA/SESTA and is now being used to push through the EARN IT act. Going back to

the Time Magazine cover story, it is important to note that the Rimm study, which the cover story was reporting on, was extremely problematic. Not only was the study just analysing descriptions of pornographic content found in Bulletin Boards (BBS), but according to Jim Thomas, who thankfully wrote an extensive analysis of said study,: 'The BBSs were not public, and the methodological discussion indicates that at least half of the BBSs required proof of age, among other information, as a requirement for access (Rimm, 1995a, p. 187)' (Thomas, 1996, p. 191). The Times' reporting focused on how dangerously full of easily accessible pornography the Internet was. This indicates at best a misunderstanding of a very faulty study, and at best, willfully misrepresenting claims about pornography with the intention of either selling more papers or clamping down on freedom of expression.

The Rimm study was published in the Georgetown Law Journal. It makes sense then, to turn our attention to the infamous 'Butler' case. In 1992, the Supreme Court of Canada published their decision on R v Butler 1 S.C.R. 452, in what has been called a hallmark victory for anti-pornography advocates. The original case saw Donald Butler, who owned a store that sold adult material, charged with obscenity charges for selling, possessing and publicly exposing obscene material. He argued that the obscenity charges violated his freedom of expression. In reaction to this, LEAF (Women's Legal Education and Action Fund) brought the case to the Supreme Court of Canada. They argued that pornography was tantamount to discrimination to individual women and women as a group. This argument was based on the perceived harm model, and the decision of the Supreme Court mentions that in order for freedom of speech to be ignored when applying obscenity laws, the obscenity must be 'undue', which Judge Sopinka said would

be 'explicit sex with violence'. As mentioned many times before, this decision indicates a complete lack of understanding of BDSM pornography, amongst other things. Be that as it may, this was one of the decisions that was shaping both the judicial as well as the public discourse around pornography and its perceived harms.

The Internet was a (potentially) extremely disruptive technology, one that threatened to democratise access to information (including pornography), and one that allowed marginalised populations to reach out to each other and build networks of support. If we put this together with the already accelerating discourse that was championing the model of perceived harm (Valverde, 1999), we have the basic ingredients for a moral panic. According to Weeks, 'Moral panic occurs in complex societies when deep rooted and difficult to resolve social anxieties become focused on symbolic agents which can be easily targeted' (van der Nagel, 2021). Deep rooted social anxieties regarding how disruptive sexual expression could be to the nuclear family (which, with the introduction of more and more women to the workplace since the 60s, was already crumbling) in American society easily became focused on online pornography, an extremely easy to target symbolic agent that could easily act as a scapegoat. This is consistent with Stanley's ideas about fascism and sexual repression mentioned earlier in the chapter.

Lise Gotell argues in 'Shaping Butler: The New Politics of Anti-Pornography' that 'the line that appears to stand between sexual order and social chaos is presented as dangerously permeable; fears abound that this barrier 'will crumble and something unspeakable will skitter across' (Rubin 1993b, 14).' She argues that due to sexual essentialism (treating sexuality as a force of nature that 'exists prior to social life') and

sexual negativity (understanding sex as a negative and dangerous force), 'practices that transgress this line have been understood as threats to the social order' (Gotell, 1997, p.57), also known as the hierarchical system of sexual value. This fear of pornography 'infecting innocents' was also coming on the back of the AIDS crisis, which engendered a huge homophobic and transphobic moral panic during the 80s and early 90s. Therefore, by treating pornography (which is often sought out by its audience) like spam, and equating both concepts, Google SafeSearch tries to make the barrier less permeable, and carries on these hetero-cis-sexist and white supremacist biases into its own conception.

Now that we have a clear idea of the ideological basis for this technology and in order to see how these biases are there by design, we must look at the technical aspects of it. Before the visual analysis of images (pixel by pixel) was possible, the only way for SafeSearch (and any other web-crawler) to categorise images and websites was based on the textual content. In the case of images, this would be the textual content of the 'alt' tag, and in the case of websites, it would be the text on the website. SafeSearch started by tracking a list of 'trigger words' which, in time, would include intentional miss-spellings and AAVE variants of words. They overlaid this with a layer of behavioural data from their users: what users looking for pornography were clicking on told SafeSearch what results should be omitted from future searches. Effectively, this means that unless you turn SafeSearch off (and even if you do, certain things will not show up on Google) you can not access the results on the 'banned list'. Additionally, pornographic pages are 'down ranked' (meaning that they will show up later in the search results, even with SafeSearch off). In 2016, Google launched Cloud Vision API, a neural network that detects pornography in images. Its functions are 'Explicit Content Detection, as well as 'Label

Detection', 'Web Detection', 'Face Detection', 'Logo Detection', 'Landmark Detection', 'Image Attributes', and 'Optical Character Recognition'. According to Monea's experimentation, while some of the other features are severely limited, 'the API's capacity to detect explicit content is uncannily accurate' (Monea, 2022, p. 80).

Google separates its definition of 'explicit image' into five distinct categories: adult, medical, spoof, violent and racy. The first category is meant for 'pornographic' images, particularly those that 'focus on 'strategic' parts of the anatomy'. (Monea, 2022, p. 81) On the other hand, the racy category is for 'lewd or provocative poses, sheer or see-through clothing, closeups of sensitive regions and more' (ibid., p. 81) according to Google themselves. According to Monea, and following on this connection between pornography, virality and disease, 'Demonstrates their [Google's] orientation toward pornography as a virus needing eradication. In this metaphor, the broadness of the classifier indicates that it is more important to eradicate any viral pathogens than it is to preserve benign organisms' (ibid., 2022, p. 81). Therefore, preventing pornography from being easily accessible is more important than blocking access to non-pornographic content. If some non-pornographic content is lost to the public in the fight to keep pornography off the internet, that is a loss that Google is willing to take. Monea also points out the difference between running images of images with female-presenting bodies, half of them got flagged as racy, whereas this was not replicable with male presenting bodies and chests (ibid., 2022, p. 82). This kind of censorship of the female body is present across the whole social media ecosystem (Gillespie, 2019) and has inspired campaigns such as #FreeTheNipple, where users requested that Instagram stop censoring bare-chested female-presenting bodies since bare-chested male presenting

bodies are not censored on the app: 'This sexism in the dataset allows for breasts that are coded as 'female' to be associated with 'pornography', 'adult content', or 'raciness', thus capturing and reinforcing a culturally singular cisnormative and heteronormative bias.' (Monea, 2022, p. 83)

While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to dive into the nature of machine learning and neural networks, I believe a simple introduction to CNN (convolutional neural networks) and how they relate to datasets and semantic/syntactic clusters of data to be relevant in order to understand how these biases are built into the algorithms that, while originally developed in the US (particularly, by Princeton University and Silicon Valley), are now being used and developed worldwide. ImageNet is a dataset of images used for machine learning. Each image in ImageNet is labelled (consistently) with metadata. This metadata (along with the structure of the dataset) is pulled from WordNet, a lexical database of English. Both datasets originated at Princeton, and their goal is to create a 'network of meaningfully related words and concepts' (Princeton University, 2019). It collects English nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs and groups them into 'synsets', cognitive synonyms: 'Synsets are interlinked by means of conceptual-semantic and lexical relations' (Monea, 2022, p. 84). As Monea points out, when looking at the 'sex' Synsets, some of the following child synsets (sub-Synsets) include 'immodesty', 'criminal conversation', 'incest', 'crossbreeding', 'promiscuousness', 'lechery', 'bestiality'... which betrays a very sex-negative bias created at the source that is not being corrected. The bias is ontologically built into this extremely complex work. The biases present in our language are present into these datasets, and the machines that are being trained on them have no way of understanding the nuance of the biases behind these associations — such as one of

the synsets for 'masturbation' containing 'self-abuse' and 'self-stimulation' and attaching them to the 'stimulation of your own genital organ for sexual pleasure' (Monea, 2022, p. 86). Similarly, 'sodomy''s synsets contain both anal sex and bestiality, furthering the kind of fearmongering that frequently plagues debates around the existence of queer people.

But going back to ImageNet, which mainly borrows the 'noun' datasets from WordNet, they say of themselves: 'In ImageNet, we aim to provide on average 1000 images to illustrate each synsets. Images of each concept are quality-controlled and human-annotated' (ImageNet Team, 2021). These humans tend to be low-paid workers outsourced via Amazon's Mechanical Turk whose first language is usually not English (Monea, 2022). This practice, which is steeped in colonialism (outsourcing mechanical labour to other countries) and neoliberalism (only pay the workers that produce the labels that the majority agree on), betrays the lack of purported neutrality of this process. A similar structure is used to deal with content moderation queries that require human intervention, as we will later see. These are the datasets that are being used to train different image-recognition and labelling algorithms, some of them with CNN. The neurons that conform these networks don't work in the same way that our eyes and brains do, instead they work by detecting particular patterns (certain edges, colour contrast) in the pixel values that they are fed. The convolutional layers then work by putting these neurons together in kernels that only get triggered when all the neurons in said kernel are triggered by the same pattern.

Then, the data from the kernels get fed into a max-pooling layer where this local 'knowledge' (in the machine-learning sense, not in the epistemological sense) is aggregated into a broader knowledge about the specific patterns in the image. This layer

determines where the edges of the objects are, what textures or colours they have, what shapes they contain... Finally, this is then fed into fully connected layers that create global patterns for the whole image. When fed a set of consistently labelled images, the CNN can learn 'which kernels of which neurons are useful for indicating local patterns' (Monea, 2022, p. 89) and how these are useful for regional and then global patterns. Therefore, the new images that are fed into the CNN are not programmed to be analysed in a particular way, they are learned by trial and error. Of course, the machines carry the biases present in the datasets they're trained on: 'Literally, what can exist, how and where for the system is shaped by these biases, which has repeatedly been demonstrated in terms of race' (ibid., 2022, p. 90). The ImageNet synset for black people consists of over 6% of images of white people in blackface — which Monea speculates may have to do with adult content filters having a higher error rate for images of POC and BIPOC women (ibid., 2022, p. 92).

Monea also warns that 'the obsession with objectification in the mainstream heteroporn industry [such as including pictures of the actresses from multiple angles as part of the 'package' with the movie] makes it a particularly appealing sample for adult image datasets [...] which likely ensures that it is strongly over represented in adult image datasets' (Monea, 2022, p. 94) which could explain the higher incidence of queer content being flagged as 'pornographic'. Monea warns that with the prevalence of 'hacker ethic' and the Californian Ideology, 'programmers are focused exclusively on implementing their ideas through the most practical means, largely ignoring the potential social harms these new technologies might cause or assuming that any ill effects can be patched on an ad hoc basis.' (Monea, 2022, p. 97)

Now that we have gone over how Silicon Valley's culture is inextricable from the technology it creates and perpetuates, we must look at how this technology is utilised — and potentially, some of the motivations behind its creation. And, in the same way that sex work is inextricable from the monetisation of the internet and the rise of platforms such as Paypal and Cashapp, the monetisation of the internet is inextricable from the censorship faced by sex workers. The current state of the fintech industry is such that there are two main players that can (and will) effectively prevent transactions from happening: Visa and Mastercard. Most online transactions are processed through a Visa or Mastercard paying gate, and therefore if one wishes to take money (easily) over the internet, one will have to interface with either Visa or Mastercard directly, or with a smaller fintech business who has accords with Visa and Mastercard to use their technology. Because Visa and Mastercard are private entities, they can decide what customers to serve and what customers to reject — and both companies are extremely whorephobic, meaning they will go out of their way to prevent sex workers from being able to use their services to directly charge for their work.

A quick overview of how the financial industry has treated sex workers in the last few years will help understand how deeply embedded censorship is in it. Almost ten years ago, the DOJ debuted Operation Choke Point. The operation was intended to stop money laundering by identifying 'high risk' operators and pressuring financial institutions to close the accounts of businesses or individuals that fit that description (Wikipedia, 2022) This resulted in the accounts of people such as adult entertainer Teagan Presley's being closed without any recourse. Her husband, whose social security number was linked to hers, also had his account terminated by Chase (O'Hara, 2014). In an op-ed published in

the Wall Street Journal Frank Keating (then CEO of the American Bankers Association) said that 'Operation Choke Point is asking banks to identify customers who may be breaking the law or simply doing something government officials don't like[…] Banks must then 'choke off' those customers' access to financial services, shutting down their accounts.' Since the list of services targeted by Operation Choke Point includes categories such as ponzi schemes, fraud, arms sales and adult services, one of the main outcomes of this operation has been to equate adult service providers (sex workers) with actors such as arms dealers or fraudsters. It is incredibly important to understand the power of lumping together sex workers with these other groups when it comes to swaying public opinion as well as creating legal precedents that continue to be used to impair sex workers' access to financial services (McDowell & Katrin Tiidenberg, 2023).

With this in mind, we can move down a little bit further down the line. It is now 2018, and Patreon has just announced that they will be cracking down on adult creators due to their 'partners' guidelines'. Vex Ashley announced on Twitter that Patreon[87] had shut down the Four Chambered account on the platform (Ashley, 2018). While this wasn't exactly news, because Patreon had already tightened their standards for acceptable content on the platform back in 2017 (Cole, 2018), the 2018 announcement saw a wave of adult and adult-adjacent creators getting banned from the platform. Sex workers were aware that the suspension of Four Chambered was just the first step in this wave: "But I'm honestly scared of losing my livelihood at any minute,' Vaunt said. 'Once Four Chambers was deleted it felt like the canary in the coal mine for all of us. This recent influx of suspensions and removals is a slippery slope." (Cole, 2018). Another theme that is worth

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[87] A patronage platform that allows artists to create subscription services and process those transactions

noticing and that we will notice cropping up later again is the exercise of passing down the ball to the next entity: Patreon accused their partners of tightening their guidelines, but refused to name which partners, which allowed all of their partners to refuse accountability and left sex workers without a clear idea of where to direct their actions and pressure.

It was around this time that I was working for an American company that allowed sex workers to advertise online. Profiles had to be censored in order to be allowed on the page because otherwise, payment processors would have dropped the company — meaning that they could no longer process the payments of the sex workers trying to use their services. These payment processors would often blame Visa and Mastercard for their policies in a rather opaque way. In turn, the company would then employ extremely opaque communication strategies to pass this information down to their customers, the sex workers. And in the end, no one really understood why their ads kept being rejected. Again, the exercise of passing down the responsibility to someone else proved extremely useful as an obfuscating strategy, because it meant that those affected couldn't focus their attention on pressuring the appropriate actors — instead, they had to spend their time chasing down the actor responsible, which was an endless, often pointless, wild chase.

Going back to Paypal, one of Patreon's main partners during their 2018 crackdown, it is worth noting that the platform has a long story of discriminating against sex workers and closing their personal accounts even when they are not used for their businesses (Horn, 2014). Paypal will often ban sex workers for life from their platform, and since Paypal personal accounts must be tied to a real identity, this means that the sex workers that have been banned for life can never use this service, no matter whether they

are still in the industry or not. Additionally, Paypal is known for seizing the funds still available in their accounts and simply not returning them (Horn, 2014). This is an almost unbelievable amount of financial discrimination that, to my knowledge, no other part of the population faces.

In more recent years, 2021 saw the advent of Mastercard's new policy regarding adult content: 'The policy imposed requirements such as pre approval of all content before publication, forbidding certain search terms and keeping records of age and identity verification for all performers.' (Holston-Zannell, 2023). While this may seem like a set of reasonable requirements for someone who is not part of the digital economy, anyone who is familiar with the rate at which content is uploaded to a platform knows that this placed incredible pressure on those platforms in order to pre approve all of the content that was being uploaded. It is the reason behind OnlyFans' attempt to remove adult content from their platform, which ultimately backfired. There is simply not enough manpower to make that happen. Additionally, it is important to understand that such a requirement would have never been even suggested had it not been for FOSTA/SESTA and the pioneering efforts in making platforms responsible for their users' content. Forbidding certain search terms means, as we will explore more fully later in this chapter, that queer and BDSM pornography is harder to find and it furthers the hegemony of heteronormative pornography (Monea, 2022). Finally, keeping age and identity records for adult performers puts said performers' lives and access to financial services at undue risk. Even organisations such as the American Civil Liberties Union have called for Mastercard to stop such financially discriminatory policies (Holston-Zannell, 2021).

This is a very brief overview of how the last ten years have shaped the fintech industry to be one of the most hostile against sex workers (Blue, 2015). It is important to understand that having access to financial services reduced has very real consequences for sex workers: how is someone to pay their rent if they can't access a bank account? They may resort to using their partner's bank account, which then puts them in a complicated position that breeds financial abuse. What if they don't have a partner? What if they want to start a new business? Cutting someone off from accessing financial services is an extremely effective way to ensure that they will continue to exist in a marginalised, precarious position.

The other way to make money on the internet is through advertising. However, since many advertisers (particularly those who are part of bigger corporate conglomerates) do not wish to be advertised where adult products or media are being shown or sold, because that would create a moral panic and media scandal that would sink their PR value, content-hosting platforms (such as most social media sites that make a revenue from advertising, ie Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, Tiktok...) find themselves in a very awkward position: adult content makes up for a lot of very engaged traffic (up to 30% of Twitter's traffic before the Musk takeover was attributed to adult content), but it can prevent advertisers from being interested in advertising in these sites. Therefore, they will either limit the reach of the content, or outright ban it. This means that, effectively, the personal biases of the boards of two private companies based in the US (Visa and Mastercard) along with the corporate interests of a few corporations control whether sex workers and queer, kinky people can make a living or not.

Finally, when it comes to the legal supremacy of the US legislation over the global internet landscape, there are a few geographic factors coming into play. FOSTA/SESTA have been mentioned before but it is important to understand how insidious their application is. Any company born out of Silicon Valley, such as any Meta subsidiary (including Instagram, Threads, and others), Twitter, Tumblr, etc. is based in the United States and subject to United States legislation — even if their users are posting somewhere else. In truth, lawmakers from many countries have not yet caught up with the decentralised global nature of the internet — perhaps because it is a type of structure that resists centralised, geographically located efforts to legislate. But companies that operate in the United States, although not based there, are also subject to at least some of this legislation — and also subject to both the scrutiny and the whims of US lawmakers, as the recent situation with TikTok proves (Paul and Bhuiyan, 2023). There is a geography to hosting adult content, as well. Many countries, including the US and the UK, are extremely hostile to adult content being hosted in their territory, which usually leads to smaller companies to host their content in Eastern European servers, where the laws are more lenient towards adult content. But when this adult content is being served through a social media interface, (or a search engine such as Google) and that platform is subject to US laws, it is irrelevant what the geographical location of the original host of the content is: the content may get wiped out of that social media, severely limiting its reach.

Effectively, this means that whatever laws are passed in the US regarding the regulation of content on the Internet, their effect will be global. This gives the US an unheard of supremacy over world-wide censorship and media distribution: imagine if laws passed in the US regarding freedom of press or media censorship impacted what

could be published in the press or the kind of media produced in the UK. While this may appear far-fetched, 2023 has seen the Supreme Court of the United States threatening to abolish Section 230 of the Communications Act: "Section 230, which says that whoever's allowing us to talk to each other isn't liable for our conversations,' said Eric Goldman, a professor at Santa Clara University specialising in internet law. 'The Supreme Court could easily disturb or eliminate that basic proposition and say that the people allowing us to talk to each other are liable for those conversations. At which point they won't allow us to talk to each other anymore." (Associated Press, 2023). If this had happened, the Internet as we know it would have changed forever. It would be impossible, as mentioned before, for platforms to monitor and pre-approve every single piece of content uploaded to their servers. We have seen how algorithmic censorship (their solution for this) enables white supremacy and censors marginalised voices. And this would have happened globally, because all the major players in this stage are based on the US.

If in doubt of the US' legal supremacy in the online global playground, one need to look no further than the consequences of killing Backpage. Backpage, whilst most successful in the US, had sites in almost every European country. After its takedown, which announced the rise of FOSTA/SESTA, I remember sitting with some colleagues trying to place some advertisements in the Spanish Backpage pages, which hadn't been taken down yet. These were great because American clients, who paid better, were used to this interface and would often try and find workers when they came to Spain on business or on holiday. At least five of us lost most of our projected profits that conference season because Backpage had to take down their Spanish page as well, since they could no longer process our payments. A law passed in a country on the other side of the world meant

that some of my colleagues had to work in a brothel that season, which meant that they made less money whilst working more hours. That, in my opinion, is global legal supremacy.

How has FOSTA/SESTA affected sex workers creating pornography?

Under capitalism one of the most effective ways to prevent someone from creating a particular type of artwork (or content) is by ensuring that the economic rewards for it are extremely low, or non-existent. As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, the kind of censorship brought about by FOSTA/SESTA does not stop pornographic creation, but instead it rewards cis-hetero-normative, repetitive pornographic creation. The easiest way to prove this is by looking at the kinds of content that sex workers can and can not sell on different platforms. First, we look at how sex workers create pornography with intention to monetise it — ie, how does a sex worker make money online? There are several avenues, including direct online services (either taking calls or video calls, for example), clip sales (creating video content and selling it online) or texting (similar to direct online services, and it may include live pictures or short videos). As we have covered before, sex workers can not use a regular paying gate to process their payments, since selling any kind of sexual content or service is not allowable under the Terms of Service of PayPal, Square, Cashapp... This means that sex workers are at the mercy of one (or, usually, several) third parties, such as OnlyFans, ManyVids, IWantClips, Clips4Sale, and others. There are two main categories of sites: clip sites and fan sites. Clip sites will give the sex worker (or the studio) their own subdomain on their

page where they can list all the clips they have for sale (and sometimes, offer 'custom clips', where the sex worker gets paid in advance to record a client's custom fantasy) — IWantClips, ManyVids and Clips4Sale fall under this category. The other category is fansites, where each sex worker has a feed of content they post where fans (sometimes paying, sometimes for free) can interact with the content. Then, the sex worker can opt to upsell the fans by sending them Pay Per View content via Direct Message, or the fans can request custom videos, particular picture sets etc. via Direct Message. OnlyFans, JustForFans, Fansly, Fancentro etc. fall under this second category. It must be mentioned that most of these sites tend to take inordinate commission fees from the sales that the sex workers make — OnlyFans' success was due to the fact that they only kept 20% of the sales, whereas other sites, like IWantClips or Clips4Sale, would keep up to 60% of the sales.

However, like other payment processors (such as Paypal, which charges 2.99% of the sales to the seller), these sites have their own terms of service — adult content is allowed, yes, but what kind of adult content can one sell? Something must be understood: if a sex worker is banned from one of these sites, the site usually keeps any money that hasn't been 'cashed out', the sex worker is prevented from joining again (meaning that they can't continue to sell their products and are therefore put in an incredibly vulnerable position) and they will lose access to any and all content previously uploaded to the site. Going against the terms of service is extremely dangerous for a sex worker, and not something that can be done lightly. On top of this, the Terms of Service of most of these platforms tend to be rather opaque, lines are easily blurred depending on the size of the account and how much revenue the sex worker brings, and content moderation teams are

not easy to get hold of or negotiate with. Sex workers are treated by these platforms (which make their revenue on the back of their work) as hostile agents that need to be constantly moderated.

The sex working community is constantly trying to stay up to date with the ever-changing policies of the clip-selling/fan site landscape, and it is thanks to the work of one particular creator, Sophie Ladder, that I am able to do this analysis. Sophie Ladder has been keeping track of the different terms of service of these pages since at least 2019, when I was first made aware of her list. What follows are two screenshots of her latest update at the time of my writing — she usually posts updates every two or three months, that is how fast the landscape keeps changing (and remember, changes to the terms of policy are retroactively enforced, meaning that the content that was fine a few months ago may lead to a permanent ban with an update to the Terms of Service):

	ManyVids	Clips4Sale	iWantClips	LoverFans (also a fansite)	AP Clips	Sheer (also a fansite)	Extra Lunch Money
Clip Sites	1,600	2,007	14,404	67,417	81,057	52,878	311,431
Blood	fake blood allowed if not convincing	no	no	no	no	no	no
Menstrual Blood	no	no	no	no	no	yes, but may be flagged anyway	yes (hidden from front page)
Lactation	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	can't lactate on someone else?
Vomit	banned in Upload Rules, but not always enforced	hidden in search	no	yes	no	yes	yes
Scat	no	no	no	yes	no	no (will be allowed in future via direct sales)	no
Peeing	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	yes
Peeing on others	yes	yes	no	yes	no	yes	yes (hidden from front page)
Piss Drinking	no	no (squirt is considered urine for this rule)	no	yes	no	yes	yes (hidden from front page)
Asphyxiation	word-banned	no	no	no	¯_(°_o)_/¯	yes	yes
4 limbs bound w/ penetration	allowed if consent can clearly be revoked	no (DID content is allowed but cannot have sexual content)	no	yes	¯_(°_o)_/¯	yes	yes
Fisting	if not "excessive" or "violent"	yes	no	yes	no	yes	yes
Weapons	no real weapons (props allowed)	no	no	no "force" or "violence"	yes	yes	yes
Incest Roleplay	yes	strictly if "step"	any step relation	no	no	yes	no
Comsuming Drugs/ Alcohol	no illegal drugs	no	no	no drugs or inebriation	no	yes	yes
Age-Play	no "acting underage" or vaginal/anal	no	no	no	no	yes	prohibits "extreme age play"
Diapers	no partnered diaper content	yes	no	yes	no	yes	yes
Kidnapping roleplay	no	cannot use "abduction"	no	no "force" or "violence"	no	yes	yes
Hypnosis	no, but you can call it "mesmerize" or "mindfuck"	no	use "mesmerize" instead	no	yes	yes	word-banned
Large / "Animal" Dildos	yes	"animal" dildos allowed if you do not reference the animal	large humanoid dildos allowed	large yes / "animal" no	yes	yes	yes

	Fan Sites					
	OnlyFans	Fansly	LoyalFans	JustForFans	FanCentro	LoverFans (also a clip site)	PocketStars
SimilarWeb Rank 6-JUL-2023	97	1,571	6,154	14,183	27,797	67,417	178,075
Blood	no	no	no	no	no	no	no
Menstrual Blood	no	no	no	"not during intercourse"	no	no	no
Lactation	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Vomit	no	no	no	yes	no	yes	no
Scat	no	no	no	no	no	yes	no
Peeing	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no
Peeing on others	no	yes	no	no	no	yes	no
Piss Drinking	no	no	no	no	no	yes	no
Asphyxiation	no	no	no	yes, but cannot leave marks / lose conciousness	no	no	no
4 limbs bound w/ penetration	no	no	no "hardcore bondage"	yes	no	yes	¯_(°_o)_/¯
Fisting	no	yes	no "extreme fisting"	yes	no "extreme fisting"	yes	yes
Weapons	no	no, unless "obviously fake"	yes. knives etc used on body cannot damage skin	no	no	no "force" or "violence"	no
Incest Roleplay	maybe allowed w/ disclaimer that the parties are not actually related	no	no	yes	no	no	no
Comsuming Drugs/ Alcohol	no	weed allowed, nothing illegal	no	no*	no	no drugs or inebriation	no
Age-Play	no	no	no	yes	no	no	no
Diapers	no	yes	yes (no age-play)	yes	no	yes	no
Kidnapping roleplay	no	no	no	no	yes	no "force" or "violence"	no
Hypnosis	no	no	no	no	no	no	no
Large / "Animal" Dildos	no animal toys if you are penetrated	yes	yes	yes	yes	large yes / "animal" no	yes

SOPHIELADDER.COM 2023-Aug-10 *you can smoke weed if you call it herbs or tobacco   see also: Darkfans and Scatbook, two Loverfans platforms

Fig. 40 & 41 – Courtesy of Sophie Ladder

Before we start looking more minutely at the different kinds of banned content and how they may betray a deeply hetero-cis-sexist and white supremacist approach to pornography, we must understand what the number above every column is: that's the Similar Web Rank. It tells us how popular that website is compared with the others. Why is this relevant? Because the more popular a website is, the bigger its user base, the more clients and revenue it can bring to the sex worker. All these websites require the

buyer/client to have an account registered with them, and some of them require the buyer/client to purchase tokens instead of paying directly for each purchase. The more popular websites have more (and higher profile) sex workers, which bring with them their following/clientele, which in turn means that even if the platform doesn't offer a 'discovery' page (where one can find new accounts to follow), the barrier of entry to purchase new content from a new creator is much lower since the buyer/client already has an account on said website.

Creating and selling pornographic content includes an unavoidable amount of admin work. Sex workers have to ensure that all proper paperwork is filled (including a different type of model release for every website they work with, with websites like OnlyFans requesting their own specific type of document to be used), the content is created, then edited (with many sex workers doing this themselves), then uploaded to the platform — where the relevant checks must be passed. Then the content needs to be promoted and sold to their audience. Most sex workers will only use two to three platforms to sell their content, with one of them usually being OnlyFans (since it's the one with the capability to bring more revenue), because it is unthinkable to maintain more than two or three platforms at the same time. On top of this, most sex workers need to maintain a social media presence in order to keep their audience aware of their new releases.

Here are a few of the terms that appear in Ladder's spreadsheet: hypnosis, menstrual blood, fisting, kidnapping roleplay and scat. With the exception of menstrual blood, most of this content was originally used in either queer or BDSM pornography — usually found in Femdom videos. Hypnosis is a particularly interesting case, because the

censoring of this type of content came about because of one particular Dominatrix that heralded the rise of Findom (financial domination). Femdom (and Findom) hypnosis is a fetish that was made popular through the work of Bardot Smith and other online Dominatrixes, and it tends to consist of a Dominatrix speaking to camera, 'hypnotising' the subject on the other side of the screen and then, if it's a Findom video, 'making' the subject give her all his money, 'installing' a certain programing so he will send her money when triggered (such as 'You will send me x money whenever you see a red car', for example). Some videos will include nudity, but others won't. It is really far away from most audience's understanding of pornography, yet it is banned from most of these websites. It wasn't until 2018, when Bardot Smith's videos were really popular on ManyVids that I started seeing different websites incorporate the 'no hypnosis content' clause. I highlight this as a particularly interesting case to look at because it underlines how these content policies are never about 'protecting women and children' from abuse, but about keeping sex workers from making (enough/more) money — keeping a population understood to be 'female' from making money through their sexuality.

If we turn our attention now to menstrual blood, we find that some sites will allow fake blood, but not menstrual blood. This is directly tied to the Visa and Mastercard protocols again — these businesses find menstrual blood to be such a taboo that they do not wish to be associated with it in any aspect. Heterosexual pornography that repeats heterosexist roles and situations is fine, but menstrual blood is a step too far. It doesn't belong in the realm of sexuality because it is too deviant — therefore, condemning online pornography creators once again to have to comply with a set of heterosexist roles and rules.

But what about fisting? Fisting as a practice in the XXth century, particularly when it comes to pornography, can be traced to the queer leather communities steeped in the world of BDSM. Anal fisting is a particularly popular category of BDSM pornography, especially in Femdom. This is not to say that women do not get fisted by men, however. We are again looking at a practice with queer origins that speaks to or about deviant sexualities, and that doesn't centre on the ejaculation of a penis. And, once again, it is banned on the most popular independent adult content selling platform on the planet.

Kidnapping roleplay is another staple of Femdom and BDSM content, although it can of course be found in vanilla content as well. Kidnapping roleplay is, in the context of Femdom, particularly tied to forced drug consumption and forced intoxication. This narrative usually presents a woman turning the tables on her date by drugging him and then kidnapping him in order to either force him to submit, have some kind of sexual intercourse with him, or sometimes, forcefully feminise him. Kidnapping fantasies explore issues of consent, sexual assault and bodily autonomy in an interesting way, but as we can see, this kind of content is also banned from a majority of the platforms.

Finally, we get to scat. Scat refers to scatological content, that is, content that has to do with (usually human) excrements. This may be something that many people find repulsive, but it is still relatively popular content. Interestingly, it is majorly Femdom content. While it can be argued that this is such a taboo topic that it is understandable for companies to want to ban its sale, it must be noted that it is another type of deviant sexuality that doesn't centre on penile ejaculation. It is produced in its majority by Femdom content creators and, under a western understanding, is humiliating for the

receiving party, which tends to be a man. Once again, banning this content is not protecting women or their safety – it seems more about protecting a narrowing, white, cis heterosexual view of what a valid sexuality is.

Once we understand what these terms mean and where they come from — in their majority, from marginal, queer, BDSM sexual traditions — it becomes quite clear that banning them only leaves space for a mostly hetero-sexist understanding of pornography, and particularly, for 'mainstream' styles of pornography. Moreover, the fact that only less popular sites allow for these types of content to be sold directly discriminates against non-white, non-cis, non-heterosexual sex workers, as well as severely limiting their creativity and freedom of speech. How is an independent creator going to create interesting, queer pornography when they can not sell it on the most popular site, let alone half of the other more or less popular sites? Queer, non-white people tend to be in less economically stable situations than their white, cis-het fellow workers. Sex workers are an economically depressed population, which is only made worse by the financial discrimination they face. These content policies not only strangle dissident sexualities, but also put an insurmountable onus on marginalised creators to make their content — and to make their content work. Coupled with an extremely opaque content moderation appeal system and customer-service teams that treat creators with extreme degrees of suspicion, making heterocentric pornography seems to be the only way to make enough, more or less stable money. Every time one of these creators chooses to ignore the terms of service and put out a piece of pornography that reflects sexual traditions in their community or marginal sexual practices, they are risking their entire livelihood and ability to continue working in this industry — a ban from OnlyFans

or ManyVids, where one's account is tied to one's ID can be a ban for life, pushing marginalised creators more and more into the margins. They are faced with an impossible choice: make the content they want and risk deletion, or make normative content and hope to continue to be able to work.

Of course, this is only made worse because like in every other tech industry, disabled, fat, BIPOC bodies are censored much quicker than white, thin and abled bodies. Sex workers that are able to leverage their following and the revenue they bring to these sites are allowed a more or less precarious 'seat at the table' when it comes to content moderation, while smaller creators (who have a harder time at growing their audience because of the aforementioned reasons) are hardly ever paid any attention to. Dissident sexualities are once again pushed to the margins in order for US-based companies to turn a profit on the back of the work of sex workers.

Another way in which the Terms of Service of these companies force dissident, queer and BDSM sexualities towards the margins is by allowing the sale of some of this content via private message only. Some companies will turn a blind eye to what is being sold directly to the customer in a Direct Message thread, since these are not easily accessible or viewable by an external auditor. Therefore, both sex workers and clients have to navigate risky channels of communication and risk being outed by the other party as consumers to this kind of content, which in the case of the sex worker may result in their account being terminated and them not being able to continue supporting themselves with their work. This encourages both clients and sex workers to view these practices under a negative light, highlighting their 'deviant' nature — which punishes dissident sexualities in the community as well as in the wider discourse. It can harbour

feelings of resentment from clients who may be rejected in private, which in turn can become violent towards the sex worker and either report their account, turn into a stalking, doxxing nightmare or anything in between. Additionally, it ensures the supremacy of tube sites such as Pornhub or xhamster, where some of this content can be found (albeit is usually deleted after a short while, and it tends to be content with a more hetero-sexist audience in mind).

In conclusion, the terms of service enforced by these websites, which are only in place because of the technological and financial discrimination faced by sex workers, make sure that only the most white, hetero, male-gaze porn keeps being made because it is the only kind of porn that can be easily sold and easily viewed. All the while, the entities responsible for these terms of service (both the websites and Visa/Mastercard) keep arguing that they are defending women and keeping women from harm with these policies, since they are supposed to keep 'bad, violent pornography' at bay — but what they are mainly keeping at bay is more diverse, weird, queer pornography and sexual explorations.

How FOSTA/SESTA affects artists' creating pornography and erotic work

In a similar way to sex workers who are trying to sell their content via the aforementioned platforms, artists of all kinds face social media censorship, particularly when their work has pornographic or erotic undertones — or is understood by these platforms to have them. But before we look at how different artists and different kinds of content face censorship on social media, we must understand the socioeconomic factors

that surround the current online media landscape. Having a social media following is no longer an option, but a requisite necessity to promote one's own work, and this is true whether one is a musician, a dancer, a painter, a film maker… Galleries, music labels and magazines will often look at the follower count of the artist they are looking to promote and make a decision at least partially based on this number. Calls for artists may have a requisite 'social media account' field that one must fill out in order to even be able to submit to them. Having a social media account with a 'decent' following (and here decent will mean different things for different artists at different stages of their career) that is engaged with one's work is fundamental in order to access better economic opportunities and even to be able to continue having an artistic career, unless one is extraordinarily lucky or can leverage additional conditions or connections (such as networks born out of attending private schools and Russell Group universities, being born to a family who is part of the art world/music and film business, etc.). Economic success and access are heavily dependent on one's ability to create and maintain a social media presence in platforms such as Twitter, TikTok or, for visual artists, Instagram. While artists who decide to sell their own merchandise face the same (or even more) restrictive terms of service in the payment processors they use as the sex workers mentioned above[88], since most artists are required to have a social media presence whether they want to sell their artwork on their own or want to be signed by an agent, an agency or some other representative, we will be looking at how the censoring process works in social media and how it affects the kinds of art that artists can afford to create.

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[88] It is worth mentioning that recently (March 2023) Gumroad (a popular digital art selling platform) and Patreon restricted their terms further, which led to pornographic platform Just For Fans to launch a category for artists in direct response to this (see here). I first wrote this chapter in the summer of 2022.

Let's start by considering the plight of aerial artists, particularly those whose medium is pole dance. There are several reasons why I choose to look at them before focusing on visual artists (which I will discuss in the next section): pole dance requires the artist to show their own body, it is a form of art born out of sex work (stripping) and it is a centre of some controversies surrounding objectification. Some strippers also perform as aerial artists and run workshops to teach others their pole artistry, so this serves as an ideal stepping stone between sex workers who are selling pornography and sex workers who, besides their sex working jobs, also work as artists. This is also a community that not only has historically faced social media censorship, but where there has been enough research conducted (such as Rueschendorf's investigation on the censorship faced by different types of pole dancers on Instagram and how these groups perceive and react to it, but also Are, C., & Briggs, P. (2023), Are 2022, or Leybold and Nadegger 2023) and where members of the community are also advocating for a community-based content moderation strategy. Rueschendorf collected an extraordinary wealth of data, as has Are, which allows us to analyse and to draw conclusions from before we look at how other types of artists react to social media censorship, and highlights the heterosexist, cisnormative and white biases mentioned before.

Rueschendorf divides her sample of artists into three groups. Group A consisted of recreational pole dancers, who just engaged in this sport as a hobby. Group B consisted of participants who were professional dancers, some of whom were also working as strippers and/or studio teachers or studio owners. Group C was open to any type of dancer, with one of them having worked as a stripper and all of the participants working as teachers. Looking at her overall sample, 50% of it was composed of strippers and 50%

were (just) studio dancers. Rueschendorf also makes a very clear distinction between sexual and sexualisation which is key to understand some of the findings of her research:

> 'The terms sexualised implies the reduction of a woman as a sexual object as the circumstances, the environment or the situation in which she is perceived as sexual were not intended to be sexual. Sexual, on the other hand, is an expression, self-representation or emotion. In contrast to sexualised, sexual expression is not inherently non-consensual or reductive' (Rueschendorf, 2021, p. 40)

As we can see, agency and choice are the key differences between the two concepts. A subject is sexualised if they did not make the choice to be perceived as sexual: an excellent example of this is when a reporter who was writing about the Lolita fashion subculture wrote that the women involved in the subculture didn't think of it as sexual, but they were 'nibbling cookies seductively' (Nir, 2010). These women were probably not intending to be perceived as sexual, but the reporter decided that her perception of their aesthetic choices and mannerisms was more valid than their own idea of themselves, imposing her sexualised view of them on them. On the other hand, if a subject chooses to represent, present or express themselves in a sexual manner, this can not be non-consensual or reductive: the subject is exercising their agency to be a (whole, entire) sexual being, and it is not an external locus or perception that is being forced on them what is defining how or whether they are a sexual being in that moment. Sexualisation is imposed, while being sexual is proposed.

Interestingly, one of the Group B participants, who is also a stripper, makes the following comment: 'as long as a woman exhibits her sexuality for her husband within her own four walls it is considered acceptable, but when she shares her sexuality with a room full of strangers it is considered shameful' (Rueschendorf, 2021, p. 40). This indicates that the problem is not inherently with displaying sexuality with agency, but displaying sexuality that either displaces or doesn't reify monogamous, heterosexual models of romantic relationships. Moreover, these 'deviant' exhibitions of sexuality are only allowable when they serve a productive purpose under capitalism: it is okay for a pop artist to appropriate stripper aesthetics, it is okay for a married woman to give her husband a lap dance in private, but it is not acceptable for a stripper to monetise her sexuality. Sexualisation is acceptable when it is seen as a productive power under capitalism, because it contributes to the generation of capital in a way that perpetuates the existing power structures (the pop artist is ingrained in an industry that thrives off of the exploitation of other bodies; the wife is performing a relationship which under capitalism is understood to have procreation as one of its main goals), whereas being sexual is unacceptable because it doesn't perpetuate this power structure in a way that is productive to capitalism.

Now, this is not to say that sex work or stripping are 'empowering' or do not partake in the capitalistic system — it is impossible to escape the system while trying to survive it. What this means is that expressions of sexuality that are not subordinated to a productive framing are dissident and therefore present a threat to the reproduction of the capitalistic system. The way in which capitalism signals this is by placing the responsibility for the sexualisation back on the sex worker, which penalises this display of

dissident sexuality. In the words of Rueschendorf: 'objectification is an issue that is put back on the objectifier, not the object in the same way we are trying to that in rape culture and in sex work culture'. The device through which the patriarchy (although I would argue, capitalism as well) is able to perpetuate this behaviour, she argues, is that 'men in particular are taught that their behaviour is acceptable because it cannot change, while women are seen as the ones who should change and protect themselves by suppressing or hiding their sexuality" (Rueschendorf, 2021, p. 41). We find ample proof of this in dress codes that value measuring underage girls' skirts over their staying in class for fear that their male colleagues will be distracted. Patriarchy, white supremacy and capitalism play a double bind game with women's sexuality, where it is an incredibly powerful force that can trump men, but where women can not take ownership of this power and retain any class protections. This is also made very obvious by the hyper sexualisation of black women and children, the colonial origins of which have been discussed by Strings. Excellent examples of this are the forced sterilisation of black and indigenous populations in the US (Manjeshwar, 2020), as well as how different black and latine dancers experience the industry (Leybold & Nadegger, 2023).

Going back to how censorship on social media affects pole artists, different groups have different experiences of it. Rueschendorf chose to focus on Instagram, which is part of the Meta family. This means that the same 'community standards' enforced on Facebook are enforced on Instagram. The main problem with Meta's 'community standards', terms of service and algorithmic censorship is not just that they're steeped in the California Ideology, hacker politics and therefore, white supremacy, patriarchy, neoliberalism and cis-heterosexism. It is that they're part of an extremely opaque process

where hypersexualised users are treated (again) like suspects and there is not a free flow of information. This opaqueness by design prevents external oversight, meaning that critiques can be swatted off by pretending that each case is 'individual' and therefore not part of a wider pattern. We must now look at Facebook's 'human algorithms' and how content moderation is enforced in Meta, both algorithmically and personally: 'Around 96 percent of all flagged content was caught by Facebook's automated content moderation system, with the remaining 4 percent being flagged by the user community. Many of these determinations are considered by the company to be obvious, but the ones that fall into grey areas are kicked up to human reviewers whose labour has been formalised by the company such that they are sometimes referred to as 'human algorithms'' (Monea, 2022, p. 99). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, this labour is again largely outsourced to Asian, African and Central American workers who in 2012 were paid about $1/hour plus incentives depending on the amount of content reviewed. New workers receive two weeks of training and a set of 'prescriptive manuals' (ibid., p. 99), written in English. These manuals are created by the company, young engineers and lawyers who try to boil down every possible content moderation decision into a binary yes/no decision. 'It is precisely at this point of hubris, where a small group of people thought that they could universalize determinations of obscenity in secret, that heteronormativity slipped into the foundation of Facebook's content moderation policies' (ibid., p. 100). Sexual content often remains de-escalated, unlike issues around hate speech. Even though this has resulted in several PR scandals around the suppression of queer content, the general outcome of this policy is still good for the Meta brand: 'The fundamental reason for content moderation — its root reason for existing- goes quite simply to the issue of brand protection and liability

mitigation for the platform.' says Sarah T. Roberts, professor at UCLA studying content moderation (Monea, 2022, p. 101).

But who exactly is in charge of content moderation in these platforms? While some of the content moderation has been automated with the introduction of algorithms, there is still a two-part human factor behind many of the content moderation decisions being made. This is what Monea calls the 'human algorithm':

Facebook's human algorithm is produced by a small set of predominantly white, straight, young men looking for the most practical solutions imaginable within their normative worldviews that minimally meet the company's desire to protect its brand value and avoid legal liabilities (Monea, 2022, p. 102)

These lawyers constitute the first human factor of the 'human algorithm': they designed the rules, but they're not actually enforcing them or seeing firsthand the results of their rulebooks. The second human factor is formed by underpaid labourers from the Global South, who are paid very little to review as much content as possible and ensure that it fits within the standards written by the aforementioned white, straight, young men. This disconnect between two cogs of the machine, as well as the differences in how both parts are treated, ensures by design that dissident content will not be treated fairly, and it makes the process of content moderation even more opaque by design.

This plays out in a number of ways for a number of the pole artists studied by Rueschendorf. Group A, recreational pole artists, 'display only little or no anxiety about potential content regulation and all report that their own content has never been removed'. However, they also report that they have noticed censorship being directed at

other dancers or the industry, including the banning of hashtags. It is notable how deeply entrenched FOSTA/SESTA are in this kind of censorship: 'as is pointed out by Are, the effects of SESTA and FOSTA can be compared to a snowball effect that sweeps up all those who are not engaged in sex trafficking, but who are remotely related to sex work (2019b). This includes sex Positive, queer and feminist businesses and educators, as well as strippers and studio pole dancers. The laws also affect women as a whole who are commonly sexualized. The introduction of the law, therefore, may also explain why hashtags such as #women and #femalefitness were temporarily banned in 2018-2019 (Are, 2019e).' (Rueschendorf, 2021, p. 31)

When it comes to the participating strippers, Rueschendorf notes that they have a markedly different experience of censorship — all of them report having faced censorship on Instagram. With the exception of one stripper, they all report having had their posts or accounts fully taken down and/or algorithmically punished (also known as shadowbanning, the practice of not showing the content of an account to other users in the discoverability feeds): 'B5 who exclaims 'I feel hella censored. I can't even post, I had posts removed where I was fully clothed, but they still took it down [...] it was just too sexy for Instagram'. She concludes that 'not everybody is visible' on Instagram. As several dancers have hypothesised (C1, C2, C3), the target of Instagram's censorship practices aims at strippers rather than studio pole dancers, even if their practices overlap and show uncanny similarities. Several participants hypothesise further that the root of this issue is that strippers represent female sexuality through their feminine bodies (B4, B5, C1, C2, C3).' (Rueschendorf, 2021, p. 43). It is of the utmost importance to understand that what this points to is the direct censorship of women, queer people and femme-presenting

people who make money off their sexuality: the problem doesn't seem to be the content itself (since Group A hasn't had any content censored and members of groups B and C have, even when they were clothed, and it is reasonable to assume that the content itself is similar) but who is posting it. This is especially dangerous because Meta links accounts and cross-references user information whether the user wants it or not. Meta's anti-privacy stance is so well known in the sex-working community that it is common advice for full-service workers to never leave their two phones (personal and professional) together, airdrop files, or have them connected to the same home wifi without the use of a VPN. Additionally, it is recommended that clients do not leave their phone near the phone of the worker they're hiring. Instances of the worker's personal profile being recommended as a possible friend to the client's spouse or family are known to happen.

Moreover, in the new Threads app recently launched by Meta, one can only delete one's own account if one deletes their own Instagram account: these accounts are forcibly linked. What this means is that non-extremely-tech-savvy users are often sharing data between accounts in a way that compromises their privacy — and considering the social and legal consequences that this data sharing can have (being outed as queer, or as a sex worker, can mean losing one's socioeconomic status or land one in jail in certain US states), it is an extremely dangerous practice. Therefore, if Meta knows that a stripper has a second instagram account on the same phone where they are trying to advertise their pole dancing lessons (which does not go against the terms of service of their platform), Meta will suppress or even ban this second account. Meta does not censor the content itself, but the identity of the content creator: 'For business owners and professionals who rely on their dance form as their main source of income, Instagram's erasure has

detrimental effects: 'it makes it hard to promote my business, even when I'm fully clothed […] I have no space to really show my business to people' (Rueschendorf, 2021, p. 43). Rueschendorf relates that 'the professional dancers react with a range of emotions centred around great fear for their future' (Rueschendorf, 2021, p. 43). Furthermore, 'several participants highlight that their erasure on and exclusion from social media platforms increases danger. B5 and B7 explain that Instagram forms a safer place to promote one's business – if that opportunity is taken away, it pushes dancers back into the strip club or other forms of sex work which may be an environment of heightened danger of exploitation or trafficking.' (Rueschendorf, 2021, p. 47). Meta may be anti-sex work, as they make clear in their terms of service and community standards, but their algorithmic censorship continues to push sex workers back into more and more dangerous forms of sex work.

These workers feel 'trapped' in their relationship with the platform: 'Despite her experiences of sub-human and degrading treatment and constant erasure, the role of social media in her life is so integral that leaving would cause too great of a loss. Consequently, she is trapped in a choice between acceptance of the abuse to enjoy the benefits of the platform or complete invisibility, erasure, and exclusion without Instagram.' (Rueschendorf, 2021, p. 50). Online conversations trying to elucidate how to avoid shadowbanning abound amongst sex workers and pole dancers alike: don't wear clothing that delineates the genital area too much (almost unavoidable depending on your particular physical characteristics), don't post with this type of sound or the other, make fully clothed videos, don't dance 'sexually'… The constant censorship they face is definitely affecting the nature of the artwork that these artists create. Those who can

afford to face censorship are able to afford posting more risque content since their direct economic well-being is not tied to the reach of those posts. This is the case of Are, and although now she is no longer employed as a dance instructor, she still faces the constant threat of losing her social media accounts — and therefore, the entire corpus of her artistic and community work. The nature, duration and quality of the work they create is directly affected by the content policies and moderation employed by social media companies. Rueschendorf goes one step further to propose that, on top of that, 'Yet the institutionalised misogyny that silences female and feminine bodies and undermines free speech regarding female sexuality online is exemplified by the censorship practices which Instagram employs. By limiting the outreach and visibility of strippers, but also pole dancers at broad, with a target on them, diversity is not truly reflected.' (Rueschendorf, 2021, p.60). As we have made note of before, the misogyny is a feature of the system and therefore the content moderation strategies employed by Meta can not escape it, because they are there by design. This directly targets diversity (divergent diversity, at least, that which is not palatable or desirable for the maintenance of the systemic inequalities).

Rueschendorf goes one step forward and proposes that by suppressing their content Meta is not only effectively silencing these individuals (and by extension, this group), but that this particular type of silencing engenders violence against the silenced group: 'As they are subject to marginalisation, the contribution to their silencing creates a hostility through invisibility to varying degrees that prevents those affected from challenging stereotypes.' (Rueschendorf, 2021, p. 60). Representation of marginalised communities in media is an important part of identity politics and identity building (Howarth, 2011), and as we discussed earlier when dealing with queer ideation and

self-identification when it comes to pornography, it is extremely harmful to not have access to it. Following Rueschendorf's proposition of silencing engendering hostility and violence against the silenced group, we could argue that by preventing oppressing populations (such as white men) to have access to uncensored, diverse female sexuality that is not compliant with cis-hetero-sexist standards, harmful narratives about the agency of sex workers and queer people continue to go unchallenged in the public discourse. Because the only narratives available to the oppressive group are those created by said oppressive group, the violence against the oppressed and silenced group continues to go unchallenged — there are no alternatives available (or, perhaps, even imaginable) for the oppressive group. This is not to say that the oppressive group doesn't have responsibility in their oppression — far from it. What I intend to say is that by employing these suppressive strategies, algorithmic censorship ensures the stability of the system and the continuation of the status quo (Are & Briggs, 2023) — so much for the claims of 'disruptive technology' that are the underlying basis of hacker ethics and Silicon Valley philosophy.

How have FOSTA/SESTA affected queer art?

There are many ways in which FOSTA and SESTA have changed the internet, probably forever, and not just for sex workers. Before we dive into how they have particularly affected queer art, I would like to explain some of the commonalities between sex workers and queer artists — beyond the most obvious, which is the ample overlap between the two groups (meaning that some people who are queer artists are also sex workers, and vice versa). I will be using Hacking//Hustling's 'Erased', a sex-worker led

report released in 2020 (two years after FOSTA and SESTA came into law) which surveyed the sex-working community on the impacts of the laws.

The first obvious shared impact between these communities, which coincidentally also affected the BDSM community, has been the disappearance of online spaces in which to organise and share resources. Tiidenberg and van der Nagel's findings also mention this sense of loss in their previously mentioned work (Katrin Tiidenberg & Emily, 2020), but here is what hacking//hustling found out in regards to sex workers and their spaces:

> The Internet provided a space for sex workers to share resources, build community, and advertise their services. Sex workers who use social media to connect with community or share harm-reduction working tools may now find themselves isolated from their trusted networks and unable to find community members through regular searches. Access to community spaces (both online and offline) have been shown to reduce negative mental health outcomes, stigma, and rates of HIV transmission in sex workers.46 97% of online respondents said that they use the Internet to access the sex worker community. 70% of this group said that they've noticed a difference in how they can access the community online, the vast majority of which noted a decrease in access to sex worker community after FOSTA-SESTA. Those who noted a decrease in their ability to access the online sex worker community talked about sex worker and activist organization accounts being shutdown and shadowbanning. (Blunt & Wolf, 2020, p. 25)

When both Tumblr and Facebook announced a change in their Terms of Service as a direct consequence of FOSTA/SESTA, sex workers lost access to local Facebook groups that allowed them to share resources and find community, and queer artists lost their whole communities on Tumblr, where up until that point, a thriving ecosystem of furries, BDSM content and other pornographic or pornography-adjacent art communities had been growing.

The next obvious problem for both sex workers and queer artists alike would be quite a fundamental one: being able to process payments for services rendered.

Those who are not able to access common financial technologies or main stream banking are left to using predatory financial services and payment processors that take between a 30-40% cut of earnings in order to sell their work. This process mirrors the practice of redlining, which was outlawed in 1968. This inequity also creates barriers to financial independence which is crucial to an individual's physical safety. Bardot Smith, a technologist, analyst, and dominatrix, describes the impact of online discrimination as a loss of opportunity. She shows how this discrimination 'disproportionately affects people at the margins: queer people, people of colour, sex workers. It comes down to people they (the platforms) have determined do not deserve access to money. (Blunt & Wolf, 2020. p 30)

Now, the way in which this also affects queer artists is extremely layered. First, as discussed earlier in this chapter, most payment processors will not allow pornographic content to be sold on or through their platform (meaning that if you're selling explicit content, you're liable to be expelled from the platform and for the platform to keep any earnings that you have not withdrawn).

Community research found over 29 payment processors and pay apps that explicitly discriminate against sex workers using their platforms in their Terms of Service agreements. 72.% of online respondents reported using an online payment processor. 33% of online sex workers reported having been kicked off of a payment processor, many of whom said that the platform seized the funds in their account during the closure of their account. (Blunt & Wolf, 2020. pp 30)

Second, patronage platforms such as Patreon also do not allow explicit sexual images or videos. Additionally, and perhaps this is the most insidious layer, platforms like YouTube will not allow sexual or sexual-adjacent content to be monetised. This doesn't just mean that pornographic work can not be monetised, but also means that people discussing BDSM safety, sex worker safety, etc. will not be able to profit from the traffic they bring to the platform. Moreover, YouTube has a known history of algorithmically discriminating against the queer community (Romano, 2019) — which leads us to the next point, the practice of shadowbanning.

Many platforms explicitly ban adult content and sex worker use, some utilise what they refer to as algorithmic curation in a way that causes harm through more opaque practices. When this algorithmic curation is applied in a way that invisibilizes a community, this practice is colloquially referred to by users as 'shadowbanning.' Many people, sex workers included, use social media to build a brand and to create an income. Hashtags and viral posts have the power to shift discourse in the public, but in many instances, these tools do not work the same for sex workers. The architecture of digital spaces dictates who can find whom,

and shadowbanning ensures that sex workers are unable to find each other: If you are unable to find someone, you are unable to build community with them, and if you are unable to build community, you are unable to organize and fight back against harmful laws. (Blunt & Wolf, 2020. p. 31)

As we have mentioned above, platforms like YouTube have shadowbanned LGBTQIA+ creators en-masse before. Platforms like Twitter and TikTok are notorious for shadowbanning queer and BIPOC creators, which obviously includes artists. And this is irrespective of whether these artists are creating pornography or pornography-adjacent artwork — in a very similar way to sex workers getting banned from financial services that they use for personal finances because they engage in sex work, these platforms understand queer and BIPOC content to be inherently sexual and thus, a liability to their platform. This is even though sexual content drives an incredible amount of traffic to and through these websites. But since FOSTA/SESTA passed, these platforms know that they must at least curate how they appear to deal with 'sexual' content.

Now that we understand the three pillars that have been affected (ability to organise/network, ability to advertise and ability to process payments) for both communities, let's see what this means for queer artists. Erotic comic artists have mentioned that it is difficult for them to make any sales:

A lot of what makes this stuff difficult is PayPal being very averse to allowing people to use credit cards for erotic content (Baume, 2020)

Additionally, given the banning of terms like 'escort', 'sex work' and other sex-adjacent terms on social media, they are having a very difficult time promoting their art and getting it to the right audiences:

As a result, he has to employ circuitous euphemisms in order to describe his art. 'It's made it much harder to do what I do,' he says. 'I have to spin everything in PG-friendly ways. Like, it's about male sex workers, but I have to say it's about male entertainers.' (Baume, 2020)

All of this is leading to self-censorship of queer imagery, even if it is not strictly pornographic — or even if it doesn't go against platform guidelines:

'After FOSTA-SESTA,' says Knight, 'a lot of us started to self-censor because we didn't want to lose the platforms we had. On Facebook now you can't post bulges, they'll often flag good looking men in underwear, even if it's not violating their policy. When you're put in Facebook jail for 30 days or 3 months at a time, people act more carefully, so they're not showing as much.' (Baume, 2020)

Finally, this doesn't just affect creators in the US, or just online content. Artists have noticed that it is more and more difficult to produce pornographic-adjacent work — even in print:

In fact, it's recently become more difficult to produce physical comics with adult queer content. 'A few years ago it was really easy to get adult work printed overseas,' says Jay, 'but recently you hear from other people who've had books from Chinese publishers, they're starting to enforce stricter measures about adult work now.' (Baume, 2020)

I can personally confirm this, as I had to go through three different printing companies here in the UK and abroad until I found one willing to print a pornographic deck of cards that I produced for my final MA project. FOSTA/SESTA has literally changed the way that people make queer art — even non explicitly pornographic queer art.

We have seen through this section that FOSTA/SESTA impairs the creation of dissident pornography and art. It does this through algorithmic censorship (where the approach to pornography as a public health crisis is hard-coded from the get go), financial discrimination, and quite curious terms of service in different platforms, from social media to payment processors. My argument that these constant roadblocks make it difficult, sometimes near impossible, for artists and sex workers alike to produce any form of dissident pornography has therefore been proved. And the artistic and communal value of this type of pornography has already been discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. In the next section, to tie all of this together, we will be looking once again at the productive potential of censorship and how it applies to visual artists and the choices they make regarding their artwork to answer the following: Is censoring pornography in this way producing more interesting, albeit less pornographic, artwork?

4.5 I Modi to Loves of the Gods, TikTok's FYP and beyond: how artists cloak and censor their work

We have analysed how sex workers and aerial artists censor their content in order to 'have a presence' on social media, and we have underlined why that presence is so necessary. But does this affect visual artists? Do visual artists self-censor like pole dancers or sex workers do? And how does this self-censorship articulate itself? First, we must understand the relationship between promotion, discoverability, and algorithmic censorship. Then, we will look at visual artists that create pornographic or pornography-adjacent content and their experiences of social media censorship, including Celine Loup. Afterwards and using the Foucauldian notion of censorship as a productive power we will look at the commonalities between contemporary self-censoring and the self-censoring present in the Loves of the Gods, the spiritual successor of the I Modi. Finally, through Elster's analysis of the Hays code as a fundamental factor in the heightened erotic content of Hollywood films, I will make the argument that whilst (self) censorship may produce interesting artworks, this does not negate how harmful it is for artists interested in exploring pornography because it places their pornographic interests lower than other aesthetic interests. Moreover, signalling pornographic potential/value/interest as inherently lower value than other values/interests is not remotely justified.

Since having a social media presence is a must for most artists, particularly those who are not part of a powerful elite, visual artists need to make content that will help them get noticed on social media. The way that a lot of social media feeds work right now, including Instagram and TikTok's, is by algorithmic discovery. TikTok's For You

Page (FYP) and Instagram's Reel feed both feature 'discoverability', ie, the feeds will show the user content from people that they do not follow yet, but that the algorithm thinks has something in common with the rest of the content that the user watches, likes and engages with. This is one of the reasons why shadowbanning is such a threat, because if your content is not being shown on a discoverable feed, the only way to reach out to potential new members of your audience is for your audience to share your content and recommend it with their audience — which is much less likely to happen and 'robs" creators that do not share content that the platforms value from the ability to grow their audience. Social media does not provide a level playing field.
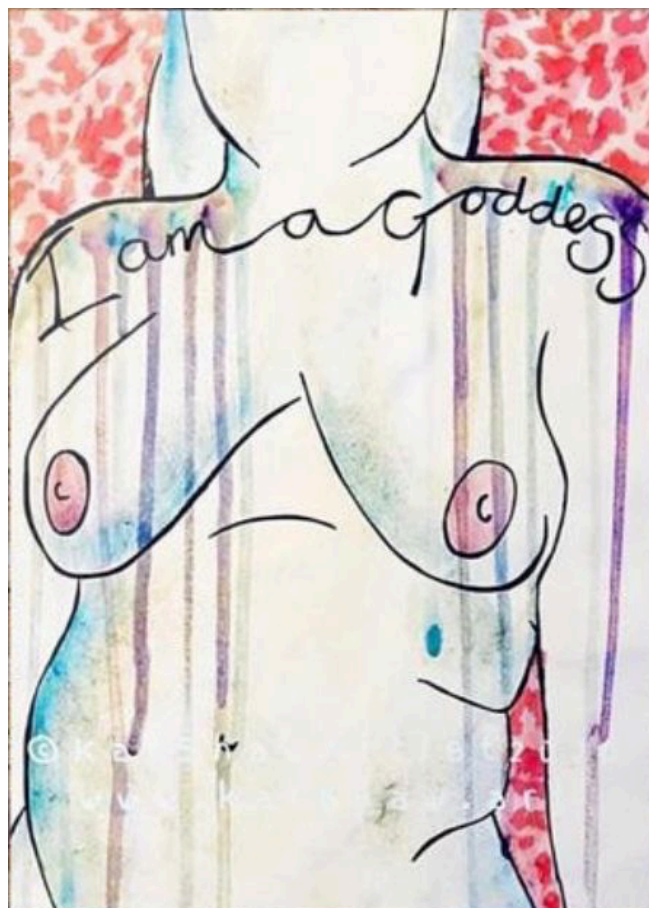
Fig. 42 — I am a Goddess, Kat Shaw

Similarly to sex workers, it is no longer enough for visual artists to produce a piece of art to sell. Now the artists must produce their own marketing: behind the scenes videos, tutorials, animations, picture carousels... Shooting and editing a 60 second video may seem an easy task if one has never shot one, but it involves scripting the content, shooting the content, editing the content, creating the captions and then uploading it to the platform. Every piece of content that is created around a piece of art has to work as best as possible for this to be a feasible investment of time and energy — the smaller the artists' following is, the less they can afford to go against the interests of the platform they're using. Artists like Kat Shaw (a North-American artist who creates paintings featuring female nudity and body art which often celebrates the 'imperfection' of the bodies it features) are regularly served content regulation warnings, where their content is removed from the platform, they are locked out of their account, or their content is not pushed out to the discovery feeds. Her work is not pornographic by most standards, but it does push the comfort zone of Instagram and is therefore suppressed.

Showcasing the economic consequences of censorship for artists who work with divergent content, such as pornography and erotica, we can look at pornographic artist Otava Hekkila's opinion on the recent Twitter move looking at adding the option to process payments to the website. The urgency of the language allows us to see how vivid the memories of the Tumblr purge are still for this community : 'i want you all buying the art of nsfw creators, and people consuming content made by sex workers (so, all of you) to think of where we will have left to go if all platforms get eaten by apple's and credit card companies' shitty anti-porn rules' (Heikkilä, 2021).

Artists like Celine Loup have long recorded the effects of not just platform censorship, but user censorship as well. Loup is a graphic novel artist who creates erotic and pornographic artwork. Her work sometimes explores uncomfortable taboos around sexuality in western culture, and that has led to her being inundated with negative interactions on Twitter. These are coordinated attacks, usually by younger people who believe that problematic sexual relationships should never be depicted in art for fear that it will lead to abusive situations in real life — a great example of how the sexual harm discourse shapes social censorship. Loup has often reflected on how the deplatforming that she and many other erotic visual artists suffered with the Tumblr purge, together with some toxic aspects of fan culture, seem to have created an exceedingly puritanical visual culture in at least some members of younger generations: 'So here's where the radfem tumblr culture of the last 10 years finds these kids when they're still very young and online and starts replicating itself through fandom' (Loup, 2020). There is a lot of room here to reflect on purity culture, the erasure of asexual people in the queer community and how these two phenomenons may be intertwined, of course — however, that falls outside of the scope for this thesis.

Fig. 43 & 44 – 'Jupiter and Io' & 'Jupiter and Mnemosyne', engravings by Jacopo Caraglio. Courtesy of Istituto Centrale per la Grafica, Rome and the Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest

Before we turn our attention to the cloaking and censoring strategies of the artists of today it would be remiss not to spend some time with the Loves of the Gods. We have somewhat covered these in Chapter 3 as part of the I Modi's pornographic programme. However, here I would like to focus on some of the particular censoring strategies they used to make them acceptable and how they are still repeated by many artists today. I have chosen two prints to analyse because they show a good range of 'explicitness' and are very rich in the mythological elements that made them acceptable. They both feature Jupiter, the first being 'Jupiter and Io' and the second one being 'Jupiter and Mnemosyne'. They both feature eagles and references to lighting bolts and other sky figures which serve not only to identify Jupiter, but to place these images in the realm of relative acceptability. As covered in Chapter 3, the inclusion of mythological themes was probably made in an effort to step away from the 'secularity' present in the I Modi – which Talvacchia speculates, and I agree, is one of the reasons why Raimondi was

in prison. These were no longer normal people having sex, they were the Gods of the roman times. By placing them in a completely different reality and adding that mythological subtext, they were suddenly more acceptable as artwork to be consumed by a relatively large number of people. We find an interesting link here to Relma's work (discussed later in this section), where she uses plenty of folkloric, mythologic and architectonic elements in her otherwise rather explicit work. The second, more obvious type of censorship present in the Loves of the Gods is their positioning. There are many variations, but most of the engravings do not show explicit sex occurring — it happens much more often in the I Modi. These two Jupiter prints are a good example of that: with Io, Jupiter is seen on top of her and while the attitude is amorous, there is no genital interaction on sight. On the other hand, with Mnemosyne, we see her grabbing Jupiter's genitals – as mentioned, a rarity of this set of prints. There were originally twenty engravings, but at this point no complete set survives and Talvacchia reconstructed it from different single sheets that remained (ibid., p. 139). This raises questions about whether the prints that have not survived were more explicit in their treatment of the sexual intercourse. In any case, the positioning of bodies and use of different elements to censor genitals is seen very often, including in the Hasegawa example shown next.

Here is where it may be worthwhile to look at Foucault's definition of censorship as a productive power, particularly since examples of it can be found both in how contemporary artists' producing erotic artwork respond to social media's censorship attempts, and in how the pornographic programme of the I Modi survived through creative change. It will also be interesting to question the nature of the productive power of censorship in regards to being used as a way to advance different minority's rights.

Borrowing another tweet from Loup's Twitter, where she sometimes analyses artwork, we can see an excellent example of productive censorship being used in pornographic artwork in order to skirt particular content rules of japanese printed media, whilst still delivering the full impact of the pornographic artwork itself:
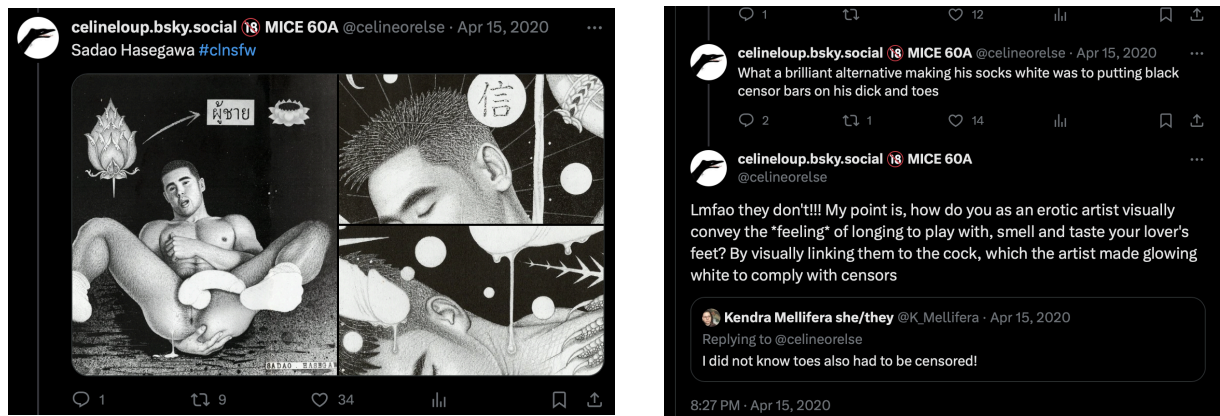

Fig. 44 & 45 — Courtesy of Celine Loup

As Loup points out, the toes don't need to be censored, but in order to avoid the classic black lines across the genitalia that are the common solution to skirt the censorship placed on printed japanese pornographic artwork, Hasegawa chooses to have the character wearing white socks, and uses white 'negative space' to contour the genitalia, effectively avoiding censorship whilst creating an extremely pornographic piece of work. Additionally, the choice to have dripping bubbles and the repetition of this dripping texture utilising the same white 'negative space' resource, heightens the pornographic impact even further.

Foucault saw power as an everyday, embodied social phenomenon. Instead of looking for some truth external to the system that we live in in order to 'dethrone' power, which in his understanding wouldn't be possible since truth is a socially produced power, we should aim to detach the power of truth from forms of hegemonic, social and cultural power. It is however difficult to talk about Foucault's understanding of power without at least touching onto 'biopower':

> By this I mean a number of phenomena that seem to me to be quite significant, namely, the set of mechanisms through which the basic biological features of the human species became the object of a political strategy, of a general strategy of power, or, in other words, how, starting from the 18th century, modern Western societies took on board the fundamental biological fact that human beings are a species. This is what I have called biopower. (Foucault., 2009)

While discipline makes workers behave, biopower ensures the existence of a 'healthy' working force. Foucault's biopower is a feature of the transition from a feudal system to a political one, and particularly, the transition from a religious system to a scientific one: 'We saw the emergence of techniques of power that were essentially centred on the body, on the individual body. They included all devices that were used to ensure the spatial distribution of individuals' bodies (their separation, their alignment, their serialisation, and their surveillance) and the organisation, around those individuals, of a whole field of visibility.' (Foucault., 2009). Foucault goes on to say that the way in which this power is enforced is through a system of surveillance and bureaucracy, a system of reports and 'technology of labour' which allows it to be extremely efficient and cost-effective. This is extremely reminiscent and easily applicable to the way that

algorithmic censorship and social media work right now. Although Foucault is here referring to the advent of new institutions of power during the 18th and 19th centuries, it provides us with a framework through which to analyse how visual artists engage in self-censorship and what exactly it is that censorship, as a productive power, may produce.

A quick look at my own artist Instagram reels feed offers a good example of biopower being used to encourage artists to turn into productive members of the workforce: '3 ways to turn your artwork into more content', 'How to create a month's worth of Instagram content in a day'. 'How to market yourself as an artist' are three videos found in less than 2 minutes of mindless scrolling. It is also easy to find either reels or static posts exhorting artists to 'stop complaining about shadowbanning' and 'face the fact that you need to make your content more engaging', which turns a systemic failure (of the way that the Terms of Service, FOSTA/SESTA, etc. suppress certain types of content) into an individual one. It is impossible not to follow on with Foucault's focus on Bentham's panopticon, because anyone with a social media presence is living in one right now — and visual artists are no exception. Foucault understood that society worked as a panopticon, where censorship was not necessarily just a power exercised by the state (top-down) but from all parts of society: a plastic, elastic, somewhat horizontal power that shapes social interactions. So let's think through the following scenario: I am a visual artist that produces pornographic or erotic work. I have a small following (less than 10k followers on any platform). I see content like the one mentioned above regularly on my feeds. My content doesn't get any eyes on me or my work. I am sometimes served with content regulation warnings. How does this affect the kind of artwork that I create? Chances are that I will start experimenting with less explicit content, which may perform slightly

better. My environment, mediated through social media TOS, is encouraging me to deviate from my explicit artwork. My environment is also very inhospitable to any artwork that doesn't conform to certain standards of beauty and 'watchability' (ie content that is able to quickly capture my audience's attention and retain it). It is not far-fetched to think that I will start producing more content around artwork that the algorithmic environment in which I exist online rewards. More norm-conforming artwork, more norm-conforming content. Probably, I do not even need to receive many content warnings, and I will self-censor in order to attain the respectability and protection that comes with a bigger following. This process is particularly true if I do not have another audience elsewhere (such as a Tumblr account, pre-purge, where I could share my pornographic or dissident artwork with a community that is more hospitable to it), or a big enough following to start with.

However, I propose that censorship as a productive power produces more desirable results when there is more social currency behind whoever is being censored/censoring themselves. Looking at the way that marginalised communities censor or reclaim slurs or practices that originally belong to them, that social currency is only achieved through organising — when the community presents a numerous, united front, then the censorship that is exercised by the community has productive and even powerful results. But if there is no such social currency (in this case, found in the number of people who educate and organise themselves, as well as in members of the community who may have more personal social currency such as academics, high earners, etc.), censorship fails to act as a productive power. A choice is only a choice if one can afford to make it, after all.

In Ulysses Unbound (2000), Jon Elster makes the argument that the Hays Code and its application did more to enhance the erotic content of Hollywood Movies than to hamper its development. He follows on Richard Maltby's argument that the Hays Code was an enabler of erotic creation and through borrowing Rudolf Arnheim's idea about how the limitations placed on cinematic art (such as 2D vs. 3D image, or silent films vs. films with sound) actually produced more artistically worthwhile works. He argues that the space that opens up between what's shown on screen and what the audience might imagine is actually happening has a higher erotic potential than explicitly showing the actions themselves: "The idea of leaving something to the viewer's imagination is also central in the argument that the Hays Code, while intended to ban eroticism, actually enhanced it.' (Elster, 2000, p. 232). He also argues that instead of preventing the audience (and the filmmakers) from developing their erotic language and repertoire, the constraints placed by the Hays Code actually produced that had a far more sophisticated understanding of eroticism than before the Code's implementation: 'The only hope of the director was to write for an audience that was one notch more sophisticated than the censor.' (ibid., p. 230).

According to Elster, audience and filmmaker had to grow and learn together at a quicker pace than the censors did, and this birthed extremely sophisticated filmic erotic devices. While I agree that placing constraints can be an extremely effective way of developing artistic outcomes, Elster seems to imply that this wouldn't have worked with more explicit content: what he calls an 'immediate reward', vs. a 'delayed reward', the delayed reward being what some audiences might initially prefer but something that may

also end up making them regret their choice. I propose that this idea is problematic mainly because it places the filmmaker (or the artist) in a prescriptive position, where they must guide the audience because the audience doesn't know what they want, they're too concerned with immediacy and explicitness to find their way to the delights that come with exploring those spaces that censorship would force them to explore. While I agree that it is the privilege of any artist to take the audience to places that they may not have even thought about before, assigning a 'lower artistic value' to explicitness and intimacy is not justified. Moreover, I think that while the application of the Hays Code certainly resulted in extremely interesting developments of erotic content, similarly interesting developments would have taken place if explicit content had been allowed to exist. Artists place constraints on their work irrespective of whether censorship is at work or not, and it wouldn't be fair to credit the censors for the creative responses to censorship.

The work of Richard Kimberly Heck, professor of philosophy at Brown and author of 'Modes of Representation' (Oxford University Press, 2024), proves an excellent example of how these developments happen in explicit media. I am, of course, not talking about his work on Frege, but about Better Porn. Heck maintains a website where he not just reviews pornographic films, but also offers a list of Better Porn Movies and even a proposition of what Better Porn means: 'Sex in 'better' porn isn't presented as something men do to women (as Catharine MacKinnon famously put it) but as something that people do together. Of course, that focuses on partnered sex. But even if it's just one person having sex by themselves, that can be presented as a performance for an audience

or as something they are doing for their own pleasure; as something a person is doing, or as something happening to body parts.' (Heck, 2024)

This implies many things that run counter to Elster's thesis about the effects of censorship on the development of filmic language: for starters, that there is more than one way to shoot explicit scenes. For Heck there is a keen difference between the way that the 'meat shot'[89] is used and the way that other filmmakers choose to showcase human bodies having sex on screen. But Heck does not stop there, and he provides us with some great analysis of how pornographic narrative works across a number of different films. These pornographic narratives operate often at the level of explicitness, and could not be achieved without that explicit quality. When talking about 'Night Trips' (1989, Andrew Blake), he raises some interesting points about the use of hyper-stylised sex as a narrative device: 'Tori senses her presence and asks her not to leave, remarking, "Sometimes, we see these 'directly', as it were, and sometimes we see them projected on the screen where the doctors see them. This simple technique puts us in something like the position of the doctors, and I'm also inclined to think that it makes the film at least somewhat 'reflexive', in the sense that serves to remind us of, and so to contemplate, our own position as viewers of pornography.' (Heck, 2024). Heck goes on to analyse how the sex scenes feel surreal because they are choreographed to do so, because they are supposed to be the literal fantasies of the protagonist Tori, plucked straight out of her mind. Going back to Elster, here the movie is offering the supposed quick, explicit pay-off that the audience 'wants' (and that the filmmaker must guide them away from, in Elster's model). However, this is used to explore the sexual agency of the main female character, as well as our

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[89] The 'meat shot' refers to the use of "disembodied penises" in pornography, where the male actor's body and face are barely shown in favour of showing his penis doing things to his female counterpart(s), who are often fully showcased.

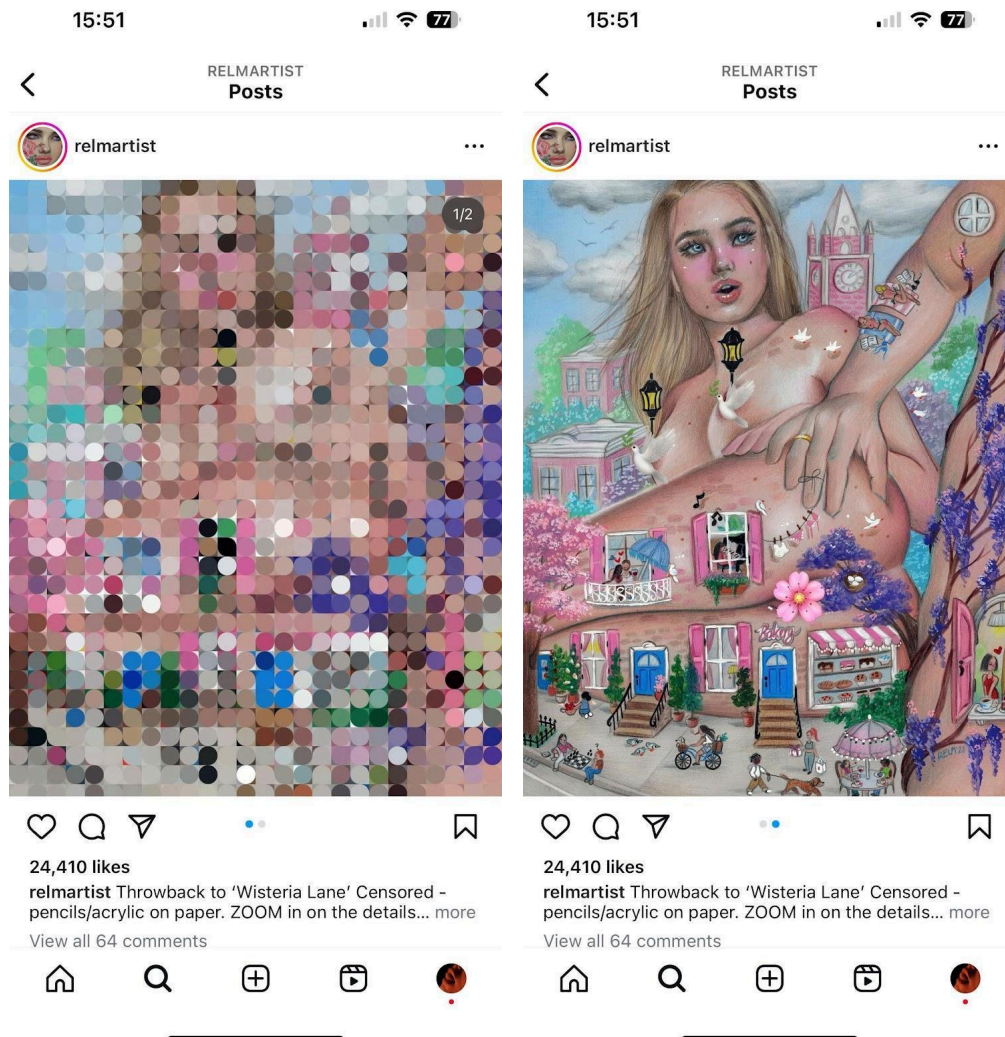position and film-watchers and potential voyeurs, and does result in innovative and interesting filmic outcomes.

Fig. 46 & 47 — A recent carousel on Relma's account, showcasing the pixelation technique.

Courtesy of @relmartist

Another case which illustrates the productive power of censorship, and how it is tied to social currency, is Relma Artist's instagram feed. I want to focus on how she changed her strategy in order to adapt to Instagram's censorship. About a year ago, Relma's posts used to be one or two images of her artwork. They would usually be uncensored but show no obvious genitalia. However, in the last year, she has been posting

carousels where the first image is a pixelated version of the explicit illustration. Since the Instagram algorithm seems to give more importance to analysing the first image on a carousel, it's a good bet to say that this is preventing her from being algorithmically punished. But this also serves a second purpose — and there is no telling whether this was an intended or unintended consequence. This pixelated version makes the audience stop their scrolling and actually swipe through the carousel to see the actual illustration, which will raise the engagement of her posts, pushing them further up algorithmically. It is a genius move because not only does this allow her to somewhat slide past Instagram's understanding of problematic content, but it also engages and rewards her audiences (existing and potential) in a way that makes her content more popular. Interestingly, it also creates a new artistic outcome, the tiled pixelated version of the artwork. And it is not a high-effort solution, since the images are filtered — she is not creating a new version from scratch. She doesn't have to stop creating the art that she wants to create, and she is still reaching her audience. It is worth noting, however, that she still has to censor the more explicit aspects of her artworks. If we look at the image, we will see this in the form of two dove emojis over the nipples and a flower emoji over the vulva. Other artists opt to just blur out the part of the image that depicts genitalia or explicit sex, but this is not as attention grabbing as an image that the audience's brain can not immediately interpret. In a landscape of highly curated, beautifully realistic images, Relma's pixelated covers provide both visual relief and interest. It does beg the question, however, of whether this would have been possible had Relma not had an already decently sized audience (social currency) that would engage with this new type of content to push it out.

Whether it is Hasegawa's choice of white socks and use of 'negative space', Relma's pixelation technique, or the use of strategic cropping and blurring, all of these examples of censorship as a productive power (literally, a power that forces artists to create a new artwork from the old one, whether it's pixelating the whole image or just a part of it) are also in conversation with the choices made by Raimondi and Baviera after the I Modi scandal. The Loves of the Gods, which by all account is heavily inspired not just by the I Modi but by other pornographic and erotic works by Romano (Talvacchia, 2001), carries on the I Modi's pornographic programme — but instead of facing the censorship of its predecessor, the productive power of censorship is used to substitute the explicit sexual intercourse with the interlacing of arms and legs, as well as add again the mythological component that 'justifies' the pornographic choices. However, this seems to be more of a step back than an exploration of opportunity: both mythological cloaking as well as the interlacing of limbs were seen as sexual innuendos well before the Loves of the Gods was published. And tying this back with our previous contemporary example, partially or completely pixelating an image in order to both hide and imply explicitness (therefore, transforming it into a sexual innuendo) has been present in digital media for as long as I can personally remember: hentai movies (japanese animated pornography) were often shared online with pixelated genitalia because of the strict japanese rules around portrayal of genitals in media (although that did not make them less enjoyable or pornographic, oddly enough). It would seem then that although partially obscuring or obfuscating the pornographic meaning of an image is a result of censorship acting as a productive power, it does so by returning to old(er) strategies of obfuscation.

While strategies of obfuscation are interesting and should be explored and used, where does this leave the explicitness present in pornography? Is the productive power of censorship advancing anything in particular in this case? As it's been hinted at before in looking at Elster's analysis of the effects of the Hays Code, my question is whether there is a positive result for the advancement of pornographic artwork through the productive power of censorship. It is difficult to produce a truthful answer to this question, since censorship is not applied equally across the board, and we would have to define what a positive result would look like. Several positive, or at least, interesting outcomes of this have been shown in this chapter. But I remain unconvinced that these results couldn't have been achieved through self-imposed artistic constraints. My issue is this: whilst censorship can be a productive power and artists rise, time and time again, to the challenge of meeting the constraints that it places on their work, the cost of censorship is entirely too high. From the inability to explore certain themes and how certain characters must be portrayed (such as the treatment of queer characters during the Hays years as well as afterwards) to the very real challenge of getting paid for their work (due to both algorithmic censorship as well as the rules imposed by payment processors), censorship prevents further artistic development.

It is undeniable that this censorship is preventing artists from further experimenting with the possibilities of explicitness as an artistic language, framework or medium, and forcing them to reuse obfuscation strategies to bypass algorithmic censorship. It is also undeniable that artists are using these strategies in increasingly creative ways, but why must we use our creativity in this way instead of exploring languages that are more interesting, or perhaps meaningful, to us? The panopticon of

social media is harmful for all artists — exposing one's process to constant criticism (whether actual comments or the deafening silence of not having a single interaction on your post) is extremely harmful to one's confidence as an artist, which impacts our ability to take risks in our practice. In answering the question of whether censoring pornography in this way produces more interesting artwork I must go back to my former point about erotic/pornographic interests and their value as well as the cost of censorship. This panopticon is insidiously harmful to those artists from dissident backgrounds who are working with pornography as their chosen interest.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter started, in a way, with a review of the status of the citizen-pervert in Britain. This was done by examining two particular instances that occurred during the XXth century, the Spanner case and the censorship of Romans in Britain. The reason for this was to establish some historical precedents that could help guide us towards the current status of BDSM, pornography and adult content in the UK right now. However, because of the increasing global supremacy of Silicon Valley and US legislation of the Internet, it was necessary also to introduce FOSTA/SESTA and its relationship to the Online Safety Act. All of this was done in an effort to showcase the legal and societal context within which pornography has and is being produced. In order to paint an even stronger picture, it was fundamental to showcase further links between colonial attitudes towards sex and 'perversion', fascism and the way these laws and platforms shape both our collective experience of the internet and in particular, the dissident citizens' experience of

it. This was done by looking at the history and development of ImageNet, WordNet and the notion of the 'human algorithm'. Through this it has been made clear that censoring queerness and dissidence is not an afterthought, but an issue of design present since the inception of many of these systems that is linked to a particular mindset and politics that has strong correlations with Stanley's understanding of fascism. In the final section we looked again at whether there could be some positive, productive aspect of censorship. There were some examples of self-censorship provided, and the relationship between historical and contemporary self-censoring techniques was highlighted.

It is interesting to note the threads that come up time and time again, particularly when it comes to the legal landscape: its relationship to previous colonial responses to sexual dissidence, treating it as a public health crisis. This is coherent with the way that Google has treated pornography since the beginning of SafeSearch. At the same time, this same attitude is linked to other moral panics (including the Spanner case and Romans in Britain) and the treatment of pornography as an internet virus or piece of malware. Furthermore, through Monea's work it is clear that there are syntactic links that showcase an attitude of sex negativity that has been present in these datasets and algorithms since their very beginning. Overall, this all points to an anti-queer, anti-dissidence and anti-pleasure stance.

We have seen too that the result of this is not less sexual content, but more cis-centric, heterosexist sexual content. And that is the main reason why this chapter and its findings is so incredibly relevant for the thesis: it is extremely difficult for pornography to grow as an art form in this environment. This is consistent with Maes' idea that introducing a hierarchy between pornography and art may lead to the loss of interesting

artworks (Maes, 2012), as well as Kipnis' worry about the loss of works that explore the human psyche in this particular way (Kipnis, 2006). As mentioned in the last section, censorship from the top applied to marginalised individuals will always result in less dissident art being created. The artistic qualities and merits of pornography can not be explored in the same way because of this censorship, and also because the economic rewards are suppressed by these platforms. Even if audiences are interested in pornography (which they are, because it is a massive driver of traffic), because these laws, companies and powers have shaped the online environment in this particular way, they can not easily find it, artists can't easily create it, and this impairs its growth as an artistic discipline.

Finally, in the next (and final) chapter, the broader implications of censorship will be brought about, including its role in reproducing harmful attitudes towards deviancy.

Chapter 5 — Hitting the spot: Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

Through this brief introduction, I will first lay out my general argument and then specify, chapter by chapter, how it has been developed. One of the questions at the core of this thesis has been whether pornography could be a form of art, and whether it could produce aesthetically valuable experiences. My argument is that yes, it can be art and it can produce aesthetic experiences for both artist/creator and audience/receptor. I also discovered that it has a huge potential for haptic dimensions through my research in Chapter 3. Importantly, (dissident) pornography is also extremely relevant for dissident identities, particularly those with queer and kinky experiences. It can, amongst other things, foster community for them. However, because pornography is treated very often by those in power as a disease, sex workers and artists alike suffer immense censorship. Pornography is treated as a disease in part due to the long colonial shadow of the medical gaze cast upon 'othered' bodies, including but not limited to female, femme, queer, fat and black bodies. This gaze sexualises and pornographises these bodies, while at the same time cloaking these sexual intentions and desires under the guise of medicine and science, as seen in Chapter 2. This colonial strategy is carried onto the fight against pornography in this century and the way that dissident identities, including sex workers and artists working with sexual content, are treated online: as carriers of a disease that must be contained. This was made evident in Chapter 4. The way that censorship is applied to cull pornography (as a response to a public health crisis) results in dissident pornography being more difficult to produce. It also results in mainstream pornography being more patriarchal, racist and cis-hetero-sexist. As argued in Chapter 2, dissident pornography

can run against fascist values of family and traditional masculinity: it has the potential to shock and disrupt. All of this means that pornography has a more difficult time than other disciplines in evolving artistically because of the constraints placed on those who make it.

In Chapter 1, I argued that some pornography definitions and accounts seem to lack experience of it, and also are trying to define something they have never made before. For example, Bovens (1998) focuses on the immediate graphic nature and the shameful gaze, which is not consistent with the findings about queer pornography and community in Chapter 2 or my own findings in Chapter 3. Levinson (2003) talks about the inherent transparency of the medium, which again my practice-based research in Chapter 3 shows is not necessary. Special attention was paid to Mag Uidhir's account of pornography (2009) because it is purportedly neutral. However, it was also shown to be inconsistent with my findings about manner specificity in Chapter 3. Additionally, while the use of I Modi as a backdrop for the thesis was proposed to add a narrative backbone to it, it has proven particularly useful as a way to show the commonalities between how we treat pornography now and how we have treated it in the past, as well as the power behind a pornographic iconographic programme.

During Chapter 2, much of my focus was on the intersection of queerness and kink. Queer community building is tied to kinky community building, as shown through the brief history of the leather community and the analysis of amateur queer pornographic production (2022) in the chapter. Sprott and Benoit Hancock's (2017) research shows this overlap too. Another layer of this interaction between kink and queerness was found through the study of the productive power of violence in BDSM

environments. BDSM offers a space to explore fear and shame, which are very often part of the queer experience, with relative safety. Tying this with the ideas around Boden's transformational creativity (2003) present in Chapter 3, it was found that violence as applied through BDSM (a form of art under Gaut's cluster account (2000) had the potential to breed transformation. This was also consistent with other research on BDSM as a liminal space and the potential of BDSM to create space for the sublime experience (Cinquino, 2020 and Leiser, 2019).

Secondly, I examined the place of art in identitary processes and found that engagement with art has the potential to change people's identity, and it can also be a communal experience. This is relevant because it mirrors the effects of pornography, which are covered later in the chapter. Both art and pornography act as a surrogate community, but also a gateway to new personal discoveries. Dissident art helps people with dissident identities feel validated and welcome. This is also true of queer pornography for queer people (as shown by Ryberg (2015) and by Tiidenberg and van der Nagel (2020)). Also, Ryberg speculates that pornography has an impact in the way that the audience thinks about arousal — watching pornography doesn't just extend their pornoliteracy but potentially serves as a space for imagining sexualities and attractions that don't necessarily manifest in real life. It creates a space to think about sex (for queer audiences). This is tied with L. A. Paul's theory of art as a trigger of transformation (Aumann, 2022) mentioned in the section about the productive potential of violence. All of these findings highlight that queer pornography can be a queer identity building tool.

Thirdly, as is also shown in Chapter 4, pornographic censorship is used as a way to police sexual identities and subculture (Russo, 2007). Queer pornography is inherently political, as Frackman's research showcases: the queer pornography he looks at includes elements of political protest. Therefore, it is relevant to examine how medicalisation (as it relates to dissident identities) and the medical gaze related to censorship. I showed how the medical gaze could be used to sanitise the pornographic experiences provided by femme and dissident bodies. It was also used to put the 'obscene' label on bodily categories consistent with these dissident identities. The anatomical venuses were introduced as examples of hyper sexualisation, medical gaze and pornographisation of the femme body. A crucial element of them was that they could provide a pornographic aesthetic experience: the experience of being sexually titillated and or moved through aesthetic means. Particularly, in conjunction with their purported medical purposes, which again highlights the relevance of the medical gaze for this argument and its place in colonial strategies. The relationship between I Modi and anatomy manuals further cements this — Estienne wanted to inscribe his anatomical work in the artistic genealogy belonging to the I Modi and its aesthetic baggage (Talvacchia, 2001). His use of I Modi femme figures with their gaze removed reinforces the medical gaze, and also functions as a potential shield from censorship.

In a similar category to the Venuses, I covered Sara Baartman as an example of men engaging erotically, sexually or pornographically with a dissident other in the name of science and medicine — to move their intentions away from sexual pleasure. This highlights the idea that sexual pleasure is not a worthwhile pursuit. This is linked with the ideas around objectification explored in Chapter 3 — if objectification is understood to be

a neutral framing device, the superposition of this shame around seeking sexual pleasure might explain how it turns it from a neutral tool into a tool for oppression. Medical gaze was a fundamental characteristic of Baartman's shows, allowing men to enjoy the pornographic experience offered by her without losing social standing for a) enjoying a sexually titillating experience and/or b) being sexually attracted/titillated by a dissident body.

Finally, on the topic of dissident bodies, I focused on how those who embody fatness, blackness and queerness face many more challenges, particularly if this intersects with sex working identity. This is obvious not just by looking at the Chapter 4 research on WordNet datasets and syntaxes (Monea, 2022), but the kind of content most often censored online. These bodies represent a complicated paradox for capitalism because they are supposed to be undesirable but they can market their fuckability. Here I paid special attention to how the usage of favourable (i.e. white-adjacent) characteristics (thinness, paleness, etc.) allows some dissidents to position themselves closer to Desirability. However, due to the links between querness and fatness, and their shared political struggle, this is not fully achievable. The final link between medicalisation and colonialism comes through the othering of the fat body, where ideas of protecting vulnerable people's health are used to censor these bodies. This is again consistent with Chapter 4 findings, and with Stanley's theories on fascism which are used through this chapter to illustrate the tension between the State and queer, dissident identities.

In Chapter 3, I explain how the embodied experience of art is crucial for understanding my creative practice. I focus particularly on the relationship between haptics and the erotic through the materiality of paint. This relationship between near

and far is manifest in the surface of paint, both as a viewer but also when applying it. Since Marks (2002) proposes the haptic critique to be an invitation to be opened up to new experiences, I argue for some erotic and pornographic experiences as experiences that takes us close to death, a la petite mort. Given that haptic images encourage a bodily relationship and I work with naturalism, it was my intuition that I had to depict something in a way that inspires optical visuality while harnessing the haptic erotic properties of the paint and bringing the viewers' attention to the materiality and surface of the work. This is particularly successful in the series Red Quickies, as covered in my survey responses.

As for the process of creating pornography itself, I found no meaningful difference in painting pornography and painting other things. I found that the manner specificity/inspecificity duality was not the relevant question to ask when it came to creating a pornographic image, but the type of manner specificity, the type of intention itself. I also found that transformational creativity was a relevant part of my artistic practice, both painting pornography and not. I used my filming practice and compared it to Zamir's arguments about pornography using the tools of acting but not being a form of art in itself (2013). Through this I negated some aspect of the argument because centering aesthetic values in my filming practice has not hurt the pornographic value of it. Correspondingly, centering pornographic values in my painting practice has not hurt their aesthetic value. Aesthetic values are integral to raising the pornographic value of my artistic production, they are intertwined. All parts of the pornographic creating process, including in painting and in filming, require engaging with creativity.

When it comes to objectification, I argued that some of my pictures contain it (according to Nussbaum's list (1995)), but that this does not mean that this type of objectification that I am employing is inherently oppressive. Composing and curating my own image to create pornographic outputs is not a process of containment (as per Nead (1992) or Clarke (1990)), not anymore than any other process of portraiture is. I argued in this chapter for the Pornographic Gaze — the way that sex workers create images of themselves and other sex workers. This gaze is often filtered through to other industries like photography or fashion where it is not treated like sensitive content anymore, which raises questions about whether it is the content itself or who is producing it that is being policed.

In terms of the series that I produced as part of my practice-based research, they both created different questions. In the case of the Cloche series, I was aiming to make pornography beautiful but uncomfortable. However, the question raised ended up being whether treating pornography 'better' would mean less disgust or concern from the public. That is, if pornography was allowed to exist in a more neutral space, where it was not policed so heavily, would the public react better to it? This relates to questions of representation raised in Chapter 2, from which we know that the policing of pornography harms the dissident identities associated with it. In the case of the square series, particularly the Red Quickies, the materiality of the paint and thinking about the image through a haptic lens was fundamental. What this produced were images where abstraction and pornography meet — the sharply reduced colour palette flattens the shapes created by the human body into almost geometry. And yet, albeit less 'transparent' and 'immediate' than the other square paintings series, it worked much better as both art

and pornography with the public. This points to pornography actually necessitating a certain level of opacity in order to work, which is certainly cohesive with ideas of longing and teasing.

Finally, in Chapter 4, my aim was to create a meaningful picture of online censorship, its legal and social origins, and its consequences for people right now. As seen in the sections about Spanner case, stemming from the idea of violence as a harmful activity, consensual violence in the name of sexual recreation amongst dissident bodies can be thought of as harmful enough to warrant state intervention. On the other hand, as Romans in Britain showed, deviant sexual acts can only be allowed to be part of an artistic expression if they're not seem to be promoting this deviancy — which is consistent with the Chapter 2 findings about deviancy as a disease. Instead of taking care of its citizens, the state purports to protect them by reacting to deviancy as a public health crisis, in line with colonial standards. This is all consistent with Stanley's theories on fascism and traditional masculinity (2018). The same concern of saving women and children that were used to push the Obscene publications Act of 1857 and the concern with the public's health used for the Contagious Diseases Act of 1864 were used to pass FOSTA/SESTA and the Online Safety Act.

In the chapter it was also discussed how sexual deviancy is a threat to fascism because it runs counter to nuclear family and traditional ideas of masculine strength. It is also contrary to capitalism because it goes against the nuclear family as the core producer of new workers. Interestingly, Rueschendorf's (2021) interviewees were picking up on it, talking about being sexual as non conducive to capitalism/patriarchy and being sexualised (such as through content moderation systems imposing labels and flagging content)

being conductive to these systems. Expressions of insubordinate sexuality seem to be a threat to the systems (of moderation, at least). This ties in with dissidence as disease and seems to be one of the underlying reasons for dislike of pornography and sex workers. Also, by censoring these identities and continuing to paint them as harmful, harmful narratives about them continue to go unchallenged in the public's mind. This affects safety and stigma (Benoit et al. 2017), and it is reflected in Celine Loup's reflections on the attacks she suffers against her pornographic material online.

I also articulated how the citizen-pervert (Bell, 1995), essentially dissident citizens, articulates sex workers' and pornographer's personal and citizenship status. Choosing to exchange sex for money, one seems to be giving up at least part of their citizenship. This supports them losing their personhood in the eyes of other people. Therefore, this person can not be an artist because an artist is a person — a status denied to the citizen-pervert. Having such an identity at their forefront risks how personhood is perceived, immigration status, etc., and means giving up the right to private life. However, Tiidenberg and van der Nagel (2020) find that self-made pornography shared in an online community can be a tool for self acceptance, and that it helps people become more pornoliterate. It also makes engaging with pornography a more joyous and fruitful purpose. In these communities, censorship is wielded as a productive power and used horizontally across the community, not top-down from the state or top-down from an external community to another. However, these communities are ceasing to exist because of new platform TOS aimed at censoring and suppressing sex workers: an example being hacking//hustling's collecting evidence which (Blunt et al. 2020) points to the loss of community amongst sex workers because of FOSTA/SESTA.

Closely related to this, the use of human algorithms as well as platforms turning to machines for moderation on subjects that require nuance (Monea, 2022), have resulted in artistic speech being under a legal and censorship assault. This again seems to be steaming from the idea of sex as a viral disease that needs to be contained: deviancy = disease. Additionally, the syntactic categorisation in WordNet (and therefore, ImageNet) means that sexuality and pleasure are inherently negative and dissident (ibid.). This constrains pornography and its growth as an art form. Another consequence of this is that queer and fat content are also constantly being flagged as pornography because of shared dissidence. This harms artists and creators and their ability to make more original art. This type of censorship often focuses on vaginal pleasure, femme-centric content — such as with the 2014 Audiovisual Media regulations and as seen in the Sophie Ladder TOS list. Additionally, since Tiidenberg and van der Nagel (2020) highlight the necessity for people to fragment their online personas for different audiences, questions about the up and coming Age Verification laws must be asked. They will force people to out their identities which will inevitably harm dissident citizens. The strategy of censoring the users themselves (and cutting them off from services for life sometimes) instead of the content is somewhat equivalent to Raimondi being put in jail for printing the I Modi (Talvacchia, 2001 and Eaton, 2018).

Because artists and sex workers alike need social media to promote their work, censorship harms them (Are & Briggs, 2023). While I recount some astounding and clever examples of self-censorship, I also found that self-censorship is only productive when it is employed by someone in a position of sufficient power to bypass some of the rules. Smaller artists and sex workers have to self-censor more intensely, which may lead to

making less pornographic art — even if this is what they are interested in exploring. These platforms signal that pornographic interest is of lesser value than other artistic interests. While censorship may lead to interesting development of languages and double entendres (Elster, 2000), it also shields many dissident aspects of identities from view and makes them unacceptable. This is harmful to those identities in real life, as covered in Chapter 2. Alongside this idea of pornography or sexual content being less valuable we find the idea of delayed reward as proposed by Jon Elster in Ulysses Unbound (2000). The idea being that the Hays code allowed for spaces of erotic longing to be explored by the audience, this is problematic because it places the artist in a prescriptive position. They need to guide the audience away from their want of immediacy and explicitness and into longing as prescribed by censorship. Longing is a powerful tool but is not negated by explicitness, and pornography is not necessarily immediate (as seen in through the Cloche and Quickies Series in Chapter 3). This hierarchy of artistic values, resulting from censorship, forces artists to turn into old strategies of obfuscation (present in the I Modi, as well). Therefore, the cost of censorship is too high for artists, sex workers, and other dissident identities: artists and sex workers can't make a living out of their work and they're cut off from services they need to live their lives safely. Finally, since pornography is only allowed to exist in an extremely narrow space that is white, cis-hetero-centric, it tends to reproduce patriarchal and colonial power structures. It also perpetuates, by omission, myths and stigma around the different dissident identities.

5.2 Morbid liminality: the relationship between sex and death

Perhaps the most unlikely connection that I discovered through my research for this thesis was that between death, the uncanny, liminal spaces and pornography — and related to it, the pervasiveness of what Da'Shaun Harrison calls the fat/morbid/dead continuum. The best example of this is obviously present in the Anatomical Venuses, through which the connection between these elements and the colonial gaze is made particularly clear. However, I also found myself thinking back to it when reading about different queer pornographies: the queer people in the GDR who were risking their livelihoods, if not prison time or worse, to create pornographic photography, the space that bareback gay pornography occupies in the collective queer mind... In a way, I find it difficult not to connect this with an unbreakable desire to continue being queer after the AIDS crisis — not just as a response to the literal unimaginable death toll on our community (Watney, 1997), but as a response to the way that media and popular culture responded to this crisis.

Queer pornographic productions and the queer pornographic imaginarium seem to be both a celebration of life in the face of peril, while they share a deep and intimate connection with the aesthetics of death, decay and dying. This can also be found, and sometimes portrayed in an even more explicit manner, within the kinky and BDSM compendium of fantasies. BDSM deals with pain and extreme states of being, and one could argue that there is a push for liminality within the practice of it. In a more literal

way, one also finds executrix fantasies[90], mummification[91] practices, or the extremely direct connection that exists in and out of BDSM between the orgasm ('petite mort') and strangulation.

This led me to start thinking about whether one of the characteristics of (particularly queer, kinky) pornography is to be a potentially uncanny, liminal space where sexuality and death are layered on top of one another. Emptiness (the ability to be filled) and the ability to harbour transition are characteristics often associated with a liminal space (or a liminal state). Liminality is also sometimes associated with a sense of unease, which is common to the feeling of the uncanny. As we have seen in Chapter 2, these elements are present in the pornographic experience offered by the Anatomical Venuses, and I found them to be present in some other, more contemporary, forms of queer and BDSM pornography during my research. At this point, it is useful to think about pornography through Windsor's definition of the uncanny: 'an anxious uncertainty about what is real caused by an apparent impossibility' (Windsor, 2018, p. 51). One of the most common criticisms that mainstream pornography faces is the impossibility for real sex to be that way (women not enjoying particular acts, or the lack of vagina-centric pleasure in certain genres, for example). This criticism is sometimes also leveraged against queer and BDSM pornography (although the latter enjoys an interesting relationship with pushing the boundaries of what a human body can withstand).

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[90] Femdom fantasy scenario where the Dominatrix kills her submissive

[91] This covers a range of practices that would fall under extreme bondage, where the body of the submissive is partially or completely restrained with tape, body bags, etc.

This realisation left me with several questions that the field of aesthetics is particularly well-positioned to answer. Does pornography incite feelings of uncanniness due to the apparent impossibilities that it presents its audience? And when it comes to queer pornography, how does this relate to the sex/morbid/death continuum? Can the morbid relationship between sex and death that makes the pornographic experience of the Anatomical Venus explain part of the tension that we feel towards pornography — the tension between disgust and allure? It is my intuition that there is a relationship between the medical gaze, the feeling of the uncanny and how queer and kinky identities, dissident identities, create and contemplate (sometimes consume) pornography. When dissident identities create pornography, this material often explores the medicalisation of their bodies: this is particularly true of disabled creators when they choose to create pornography that centres their disabilities. There is also the unavoidable relationship between the uncanny and queer pornography: the usage of elements that pertain to bodily horror in other genres, the distance between the straight and the queer gaze, etc.. This links directly with Marks' haptics, particularly when she writes about the haptic experience being an invitation to be opened up to new experiences, experiences that take us so close to our own bodies that our self-sufficiency might be temporarily destroyed (Marks, 2002, p. 16). Therefore, I propose that pornography can be a site (a medium) for dissident identities to experience the sex/morbid/death continuum and create worthwhile, interesting, experiences that would not be possible outside of the liminality and the uncanniness of the pornographic space.

5.3 Modern Panopticon: Fatism, colonialism, and public health policies as tools of the surveillance state

If there is anything that my research into both current and historical censorship laws has revealed, it is that concerns about public health and safety standards often feature colonialist tendencies in the way they police dissident identities. Through understanding the citizen pervert and its intersection with queerness, I have demonstrated how British public health and obscenity laws have shaped cultural notions around pornography and acceptability. Interestingly, and also important to note, the way that the particular culture of Silicon Valley has shaped the algorithmic censorship of the internet seems to be directly inheriting its qualities from these concerns. In treating pornography as spam, a virulent outbreak that needs to be contained, I see a relationship to the way that legislation around practices like cruising or prostitution often focuses on public health practices. This is particularly obvious if, as covered in Chapter 2, we look at the Contagious Diseases Act of 1864 amongst others. In direct contrast to this I have come to understand the relationship between censorship as a productive power and queerness as a reaction to the norm. Moreover, the relationship between fatphobia and white supremacy which is revealed when looking at the history of these policies only underlines the importance of understanding the algorithmic and legal biases that constrain our online and real life existences, and what organisations and institutions are behind them.

This idea of 'who will think of the children/vulnerable minds' is of great interest to me. It is ever-present in the anti-pornography and anti-queer discourses. It also seems to have a deep resonance both in Victorian law, but also in the case of renaissance

censorship surrounding the I Modi. Its presence looms over any anatomy manual where the chapters pertaining to sexual organs and reproduction were written in latin while the rest of the text was written in the common tongue: only those with an educated mind could read latin, which rules out women and the general populace (vulnerable minds). Going forward, I believe there is room to research the relationship between pornography/queerness being treated as a threat to public health and aspects such as the theatre of public security (such as airport and transport controls) and its relationship to dissidence and border control. This would be an evolution of the already established relationship between colonial public health laws and controlling dissident sexualities and identities, which we already covered in Chapter 2. Whilst scholarship on border controls as a way to contain queer identities (or their spread) has already been developed[92], it would be interesting to take this one step forward and look at the ways in which censorship laws are both being used as a way to restrict freedom of movement for sex workers (and therefore, queer people) and how the development of a new theatre of security surrounding pornography and its access may impact queer and kinky people overall.

Another interesting thread that has come out of this research, particularly in Chapter 2, is the relationship between the fat/morbid/dead continuum, using the medical gaze as a cloaking device for the pornographic experience, and the power differential that comes through that use, which transforms the consumption of pornography into the consumption of the bodily other in a way that is detrimental to the other's autonomy.

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[92]See the Sexualities Special Issue on Queer Migration, Asylum, and Displacement, Volume 17 Issue 8, December 2014; as well as The Sexual Politics of Border Control (Holzberg, Madrid & Pfeifer, 2022)

This is possible because the Fat is, according to Harrison, ontologically dead and therefore beyond redemption. But also because using the medical gaze to cloak the pornographic experience (such as is the case in both the Anatomical Venuses and Sarah Baartman) puts the consumer/looker in a position of scientific power and authority over that who is being looked at. They are no longer a performer performing for an audience, but a medical curiosity being observed, diagnosed, dissected. As a sex worker, one can often find themselves at the receiving end of this, particularly with non-clients who express an interest in 'saving' the sex worker, or clients who think they can 'rescue' the worker. The use of the medical gaze to cloak the shame of the enjoyment that can be found in the pornographic experience prevents this experience from being one that occurs on more equal footing. Therefore, it appears more advisable to enjoy pornography in and of itself, not to cloak this enjoyment in other ('purer') scientific or moral goals.

5.4 IRL: the very real impact of philosophy in policy, and why art needs pornography

The arguments that philosophers make have an impact in the lives of the workers with whom, very often, they choose not to engage. What do I mean by this? If we look at the arguments employed by lobbying group NCOSE (who, as has already been covered in Chapter 2 and 4, are behind all the major pushes towards anti-pornography legislation in the United States) it is difficult not to find similarities with the works of Scruton, MacKinnon, Langton, and even philosophers of the aesthetics such as Levinson. The case of Scruton and MacKinnon is particularly obvious and straightforward, since they were making moral judgments about the power and position of pornography, and in the case of MacKinnon, actively working with the judiciary in their writing. NCOSE argues that pornography is 'a deeply damaging social influence that corrodes relationships, erodes the sensibilities and sexual freedom of consumers, and dehumanises those used to make it.' (NCOSE, n.d.). Both Scruton and Levinson championed arguments that pornography corrodes relationships, and erodes aspects of sexual freedom, which we now find taken up by NCOSE. Levinson argues that using pornography-aided masturbation as the main way to have sexual relationships prevents the individual from flourishing, amongst other things (Levinson, 2003). This argument is very often found in texts which defend 'pornography addiction', where the claim is that masturbating to pornography prevents those people from forming meaningful sexual connections with others — we can see the similitude with Levinson's argument. Therefore, we find Levinson in the part of these arguments that corresponds with harms to the audience, and MacKinnon in the part that corresponds with harms to those making it, whom she also dehumanises. Scruton and his

theoretical 'wanker with the machine gun', a construct of a pornography user who eventually devolves into a violent attacker, are popular arguments with the anti-pornography lobby as well because they establishes a causal chain that supports the perceived harms model (as mentioned in Chapter 4). Since the result of NCOSE's powerful lobbying has been, according to sex workers themselves, the combined loss of their networks of safety, platforms, and huge quantities of their income (Blunt & Wolf, 2020), it is difficult for me not to see a direct relationship between these philosophical writings and the consequences I have seen my colleagues face. Philosophy has an impact in the real world, and in this case, it has not been a positive one. These philosophers may not be directly responsible for the way that their words have been used, but they have created the epistemological conditions that have made this lobbying possible.

My thesis is a direct, potentially naive, attempt at countering this by offering a philosophical alternative that engages with the lived experience of the workers of this industry, myself included, and the creative experience of pornography. Aesthetic experiences are mediated by the capacity to actually pay attention to what we are doing, which means that there is an inevitable relationship between time, intention and our material conditions. The entirety of the creative experience is affected by our material conditions, and those material conditions are affected by the way that life is legislated around us. In the time since I started writing this thesis, Gumroad and Patreon have decided to tighten their community standards and terms of service. This led to Celine Loup, pornographic and erotic comic artist and illustrator, to fall into a deep depression (which is consistent with Are and Brigg's findings about the emotional impact of

deplatforming creators (Are & Briggs, 2023)) because the comic they were currently working on was no longer a viable project for them:

you better po-lice that mou· @celineo · Mar 27 ···
I don't want to pitch my books to a publisher, are you fucking kidding me? I'd rather chew glass. Anything i could be doing to set up a patreon alternative with ccbill has to wait until I've found a way to support myself in another industry. I'm fucking heartbroken.

you better po-lice that mou· @celineo · Mar 27 ···
Drawing this book was how i was dealing with the stress of an ongoing, extremely painful relationship in my life that will literally end when one of us dies. Nothing in this book would be worse than anything Scorsese or Lynch have put on screen,

you better po-lice that mou· @celineo · Mar 27 ···
But the rules are different for me so i guess I'll just keep hurting where no one can see it. 🙄 god I'm so furious lmfao

Fig. 48 — Courtesy of Celine Loup

Creating pornographic work can be a deeply moving experience for artists and creators. But this is threatened when platforms, who seek to minimise their risk exposure and act in accordance with legislation, choke our artistic freedom. If Celine Loup can not sell their work, they simply can not afford to make it. The world is losing out on a potential masterpiece because Mastercard refuses to have dealings with people selling sexual material of any kind, because NCOSE has effectively been lobbying for this for the last 20 years (McDowell & Katrin Tiidenberg, 2023), because philosophers, so it seems, gave them an excellent playbook to do this by.

The choices that artists make, in terms of self-censorship, are heavily influenced by their environment (as seen in Chapter 2 and 4). For example, Caraglio made more conservative choices in his production of The Loves of the Gods than were made in the I

Modi, potentially to avoid the sort of censorship that I Modi had faced – and the particular consequences faced by Raimondi. Pornography, as a medium of artistic expression, as art, can be used as a tool of curation of our self-image, a tool of confirmation of belonging to a community, and as a tool of communion with said community. Five hundred years later, denying the artistic and aesthetic potential of pornography is not just short-sighted, but an attack to the lives of artists for two reasons: many artists support themselves through sex work, and many artists create sexually explicit art, and when these potentials are denied and their denial is codified into law, it is sex workers and artists that pay the direct consequences — and it is the rest of the world that misses out on the art they would have created.

5.5 Rise against: the productive powers of fear, shame and censorship

Throughout this thesis, I have used the model of the moral panic to identify different strategies that have been used to censor artistic works and queer lives. Often, powerful identities victimise themselves through the model of perceived harm in order to exert censorship against the lives, artwork and experiences of the oppressed. But I have also spoken about the Foucaultian productive power of censorship (Foucault, 1994), and briefly touched on the productive powers of violence, shame and fear. But who (and how) is wielding these powers to rebel against their oppression?

I have hinted at how dissident identities can harness fear, shame and violence and use them as a tool for rebellion against oppression; they do this through the exploration of these fears, the lack of safety and plunging into deep shame that is only reserved for the most extreme of all queer spaces. I have also argued for considering the application of violence an art, according to Gaut's cluster account. I don't think it is an accident that kink and queerness are so close together, and that so much of the kink avant-garde development has historically occurred in queer spaces — queer people experience inordinate amounts of violence, and they may wish to employ said violence to explore themselves and others (whether as an act of survival or of resistance). Since the existence of queerness (as part of western culture, in a white, eurocentric society) has always been paired with violence, I don't think its expression (sexual or otherwise) can bypass violence — nor do I think it should wish to do so when harnessing violence can offer interesting approaches to the (Kantian, and Schopenhauerian) sublime. I have also offered examples of how queer pornography is a community building tool, and how the pornographic experience can be a communal one for queer and kinky communities alike.

One of the most exciting discoveries for me has been that explicitness, as a pornographic device, is challenging to many audiences. I found this through my practice-based research and the audience survey in Chapter 3, but this is also consistent with my lived experience as a performer. Some arguments against pornography being art talk about its artistic value, such as Berger arguing that in its depiction of sexually explicit acts there is no artistic or literary value (Maes, 2012). My research shows that pornography can be explicit art because there is no lack of artistic value in depicting sexually explicit scenarios, and moreover, artistic value makes a pornographic work more valuable to the audience. If some forms of explicitness are pornographically challenging for some audiences, it follows that pornography must indeed leave something to the imagination. Bovens argues that pornography is immediate in its graphic nature (1998), and Levinson that pornography requires the medium to be transparent because it is aimed at sexual arousal (2003). This does not account for the fact that it looks like some audiences actually need some opacity and layers (and certainly, artistic value) in their pornography in order to engage with it in a pornographic way. The pornographic experience requires depth, opacity, and as opposed to arguments that make immediacy the cornerstone of pornography, some delay. Additionally an excess of explicitness, particularly when it features an element that is taboo (such as bodily fluids, blood, or faeces as in the Cloche series), can end up driving audiences further away from the pornographic experience. It does not, interestingly, drive them away from considering the piece art.

Parallel to this it seems to be easier to sexualise than to accept (or engage with) someone sexualising themselves. It is far easier to eroticise an image of a coy femme, to fill it with our own fantasies and preconceptions, than it is to eroticise an image of a femme masturbating. This speaks again of a need for space ('air', in the artistic sense) in order to engage erotically or pornographically with the image. However, it does raise some questions around sexualisation, objectification and the patriarchy. It could be that audiences are uncomfortable with an excessive confrontation with femme pleasure. As the interviews conducted by Rueschendorf suggest, self-sexualisation is somewhat problematic patriarchally speaking (2021) — which is consistent with Stanley's (2018) theories on fascism and its insecurities around deviant sexualities, because it is challenging traditional ideas of male strength and domination. On the other hand, the queer modes of viewing explored by Ryberg (2015) suggest that queer audiences have less of an issue with this, where their viewing of pornography is tied to a broadening of their pornoliteracy but also of their imaginative space around sex. This could hint at the idea that objectification (as a device for oppression) is in the eye of the beholder instead of being something inherent to an image. I still think that Nussbaum (1995) and Langton's (2006) list of characteristics of objectification is valid, what I call into question is the idea that the resulting objectification must always be a net negative for the person who is objectified. This would be consistent with my approach to objectification as a somewhat neutral framing device: meaning that it can be (and very often is) used as a tool for oppression, but it is not inherently one.

Finally the idea of pornography as a liminal space has come up time and time again throughout this thesis, both in the form of the Anatomical Venuses and the I Modi (and its pornographic programme, such as in Fontainebleau or Estienne's woodcuts), as well as through Harrison's work on fatism and death. Going back to the idea of audience discomfort, I believe this is a fundamental aspect of pornography fulfilling the role of a liminal space. In order to do this, it must straddle a space between discomfort and titillating the audience's interest. Throughout this thesis I have made it clear that I am concerned with creating beautiful images: if I can create a beautiful enough image, will the audience spend enough time with the piece to decipher it, even if the subject makes them uncomfortable? Entrancing the audience to spend time with pornography, to make them uncomfortably comfortable, has been my intention with all the work produced for this thesis, work that was intended to straddle these spaces and be a site of resistance. As such, I have sought to establish that painting and filming pornography can be aesthetic experiences in their own right. Dissident pornography is not just a site for communal enjoyment, identity building and comfort for dissident identities: it can also be a space that confronts and transforms us.

concupiscencia - have your say

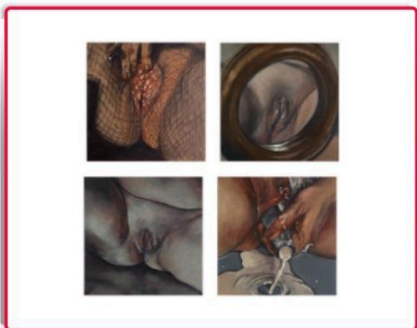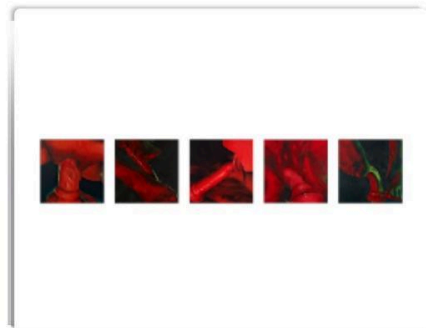Did the exhibition feel like a pornographic experience to you? *

○ Yes

○ No

◉ Maybe

Please mark which series/artworks felt like art to you: *
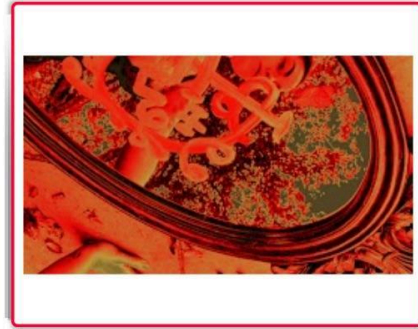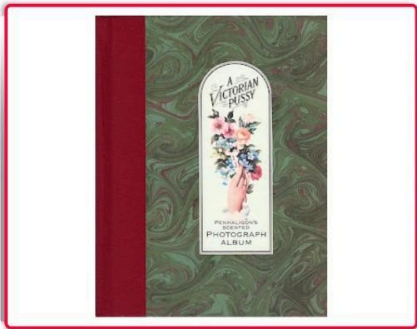
☑ Quickies
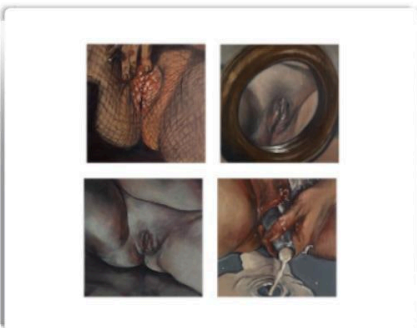

☐ Red Quickies

☑ V1/V2
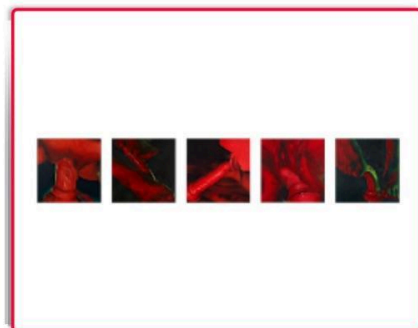

☑ evokation 32

☑ A Victorian Pussy

☑ Cloches

Please mark which series/artworks felt like pornography to you: *
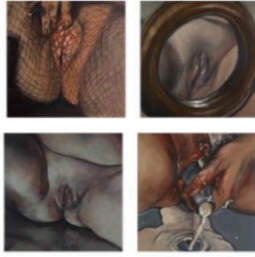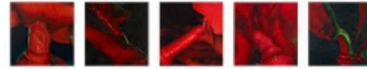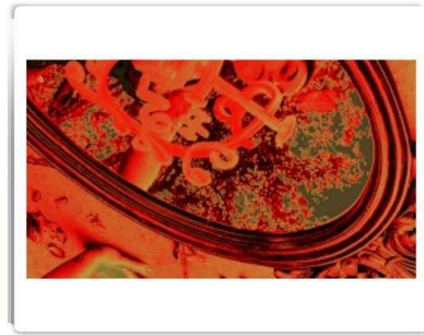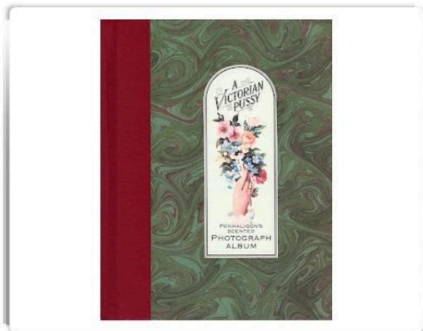
☐ Quickies

☑ Red Quickies

☐ V1/V2
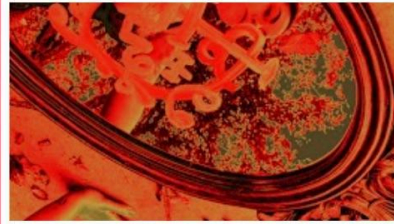
☑ evokation 32
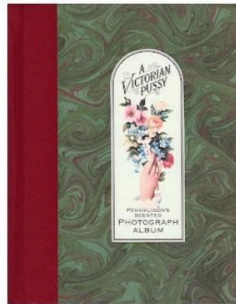
☐ A Victorian Pussy

☐ Cloches

Did you experience any of the following emotions/feelings while at the exhibition? *

☑ Admiration

☐ Adoration

☑ Attraction

- [ ] Awe
- [x] Beauty/Pleasure
- [ ] Boredom
- [x] Curiosity
- [ ] Deference
- [x] Engrossment
- [ ] Fluency
- [x] Interest
- [ ] Sublimity
- [x] Otro: Inspiration

I will be running a series of interviews with visitors, please leave your email here if you're interested in a 15-20m conversation that will help my PhD progress.

soundmatt73@gmail.com

If you'd like to, you can leave some written feedback about your experience at the exhibition here - don't hold back!

So many cunts! A bold, uncompromising exhibition with zero inhibitions. Exciting, striking and intensely personal. Certainly an exhibit to incite discourse.

concupiscencia - have your say

Did the exhibition feel like a pornographic experience to you? *

- ( ) Yes

○ No

◉ Maybe
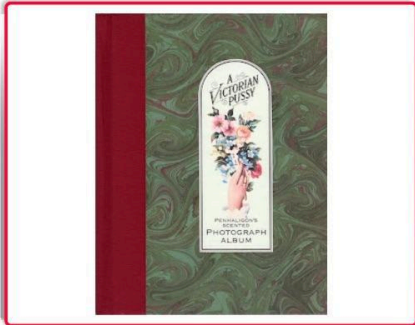
Please mark which series/artworks felt like art to you: *

✓ Quickies

☐ Red Quickies

☑ V1/V2

☑ evokation 32

☑ A Victorian Pussy

☐ Cloches

Please mark which series/artworks felt like pornography to you: *

☐ Quickies

☑ Red Quickies

☐ V1/V2

☐ evokation 32

☐ A Victorian Pussy

☐ Cloches

Did you experience any of the following emotions/feelings while at the exhibition? *

☐ Admiration

☐ Adoration

☐ Attraction

☐ Awe

☐ Beauty/Pleasure

☐ Boredom

✅ Curiosity

☐ Deference

☐ Engrossment

☐ Fluency

☑ Interest

☑ Sublimity

☐ Otro: _____

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....

If you'd like to, you can leave some written feedback about your experience at the exhibition here - don't hold back!

....

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concupiscencia - have your say

Did the exhibition feel like a pornographic experience to you? *

◉ Yes

○ No

○ Maybe

Please mark which series/artworks felt like art to you: *
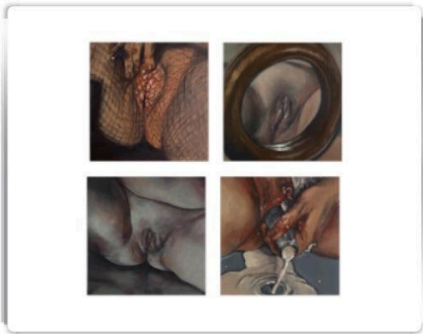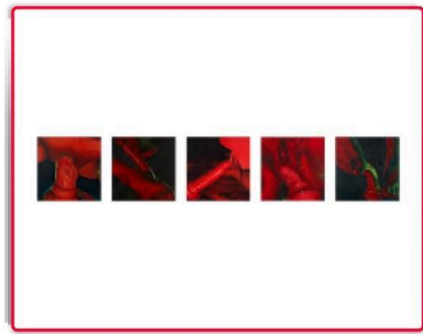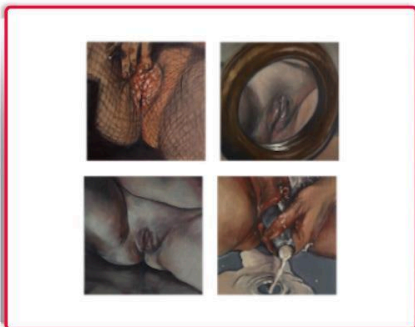
☐ Quickies
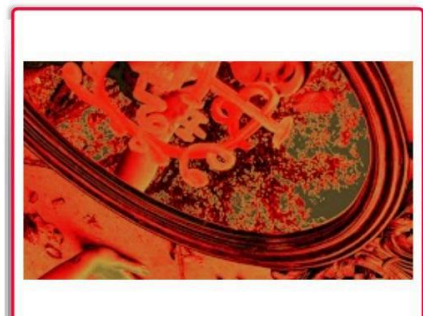
☑ Red Quickies

☑ V1/V2

☑ A Victorian Pussy

☑ evokation 32

☑ Cloches
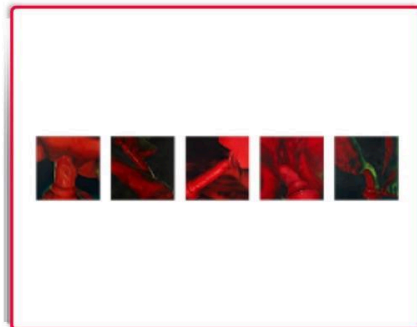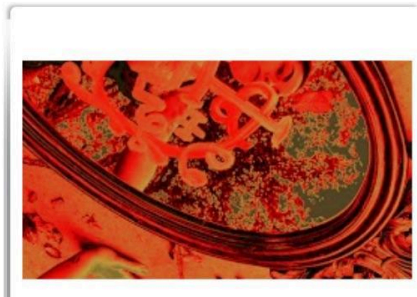
Please mark which series/artworks felt like pornography to you: *

☑ Quickies

☑ Red Quickies

☐ V1/V2

☐ evokation 32

☑ A Victorian Pussy

☐ Cloches

Did you experience any of the following emotions/feelings while at the exhibition? *

☑ Admiration

☑ Adoration

☑ Attraction

☐ Awe

☑ Beauty/Pleasure

☐ Boredom

☑ Curiosity

☐ Deference

☑ Engrossment

☐ Fluency

☑ Interest

☐ Sublimity

☑ Otro: Tittilation, Humor

I will be running a series of interviews with visitors, please leave your email here if you're interested in a 15-20m conversation that will help my PhD progress.

If you'd like to, you can leave some written feedback about your experience at the exhibition here - don't hold back!

Fun!

Google Formularios

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