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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Teaching Post-Pornography

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Abstract

This article introduces the term ‘post-pornography’, drawing on diverse texts from the last three decades. We propose that ‘post-pornography’ expands Porn Studies beyond its focus on explicit representations of sex. First, we outline the history of post-pornography as a concept that emerged in the sex-positive, anti-censorship and queer/feminist moment in the United States in the 1980s and 1990s and has subsequently been taken up by a diverse group of artists, activists and scholars to describe practices that both reference and attempt to move beyond pornography. We define post-pornography as characterised by three aspects—the denaturalising of sex, the de-centring of the spectator and the recognition of media and technology as inseparable from sex. We examine the history of Porn Studies in the university, including in our own faculty at UNSW Art & Design, and the singular influence of Linda Williams in defining its place and setting out its pedagogical methods. We propose post-pornography as a framework that can confront prevailing assumptions about sex and sexuality that underpin Porn Studies and its critique of pornography, and outline a set of concepts that have emerged from the development of the second- and third-year art theory course Post-Pornographic Bodies.

Introduction

In this article, we define the concept of ‘post-pornography’ and its relationship to critical pedagogy through the development and delivery of the undergraduate course Post-Pornographic Bodies at UNSW Art & Design. First, we outline the history of post-pornography as a concept that emerged in the sex-positive, anti-censorship and queer/feminist moment in the United States in the 1980s and 1990s and has subsequently been taken up by a diverse group of artists, activists and scholars to describe practices that both

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reference and attempt to move beyond pornography. We define post-pornography as characterised by three aspects—the denaturalising of sex, the de-centring of the spectator, and the recognition of media and technology as inseparable from sex. Next, we examine the history of Porn Studies in the university, including in our own faculty at UNSW Art & Design, and the singular influence of Linda Williams in defining its place in cultural studies and setting out its pedagogical methods. The study of pornography is assumed to have a cathartic, democratising and radicalising impact on students, which limits how and where it can be taught and who can participate. We propose post-pornography as a framework that can confront these assumptions, and in this article outline a set of concepts that have emerged from the development of the second- and third-year art theory course *Post-Pornographic Bodies*, co-taught for the first time in 2016 at Art & Design. The new course reflects our interest in contemporary forms of critical theory and pedagogy that look at themes such as sex and sexuality, biopolitics, queer theory and activism, intersectional feminisms, critical race theory, and theories of media and technology. We wrote the lectures as we went, responding to and building on each other's research as it was happening. This article is a reflection on that process and a summary of its key findings. Our aim is to provide, for ourselves, our peers and our students, some materials towards thinking about the post-pornographic as an apt frame for the critical study of contemporary culture and the bodies that inhabit and are habituated by its objects, images, processes and networks.

Defining post-pornography

Post-pornography has a curious history. A number of scholars claim that the term (or something like it) was coined by the Dutch erotic photographer Wink Van Kempen, and made popular by Annie Sprinkle as part of her long-term *Post Porn Modernist* project.¹ The 'Post Porn Manifesto' co-written by Sprinkle, Veronica Vera, Candida Royalle, Frank Moores and Leigh Gates in 1989 outlined a politics of that name, ostensibly a message of solidarity with communities affected by the AIDs/HIV crisis (and against the Reagan administration's silence and inaction in response to the crisis), as well as a message of sex-positivity in a moment characterised by the coalition between anti-porn feminists and evangelical Christian groups.² Sprinkle, Vera and Royalle in particular were figures of what is often referred to as the feminist porn movement that in the United States brought together sex workers, porn actors (as well as producers, writers and directors), performance artists and activists in the production of porn that functioned as both entertainment and education.

The feminist porn movement cannot be neatly summarised, but for the most part it was interested in challenging stereotypes about the way porn is made and consumed, and about the makers/consumers themselves; taking control of the production of porn; making and promoting porn that centred on women's pleasure; demystifying and destigmatising porn for women consumers; and promoting sex-positivity by emphasising educational uses of porn. The relation between this historical moment and more contemporary notions of post-pornography is both intimate and troubled—in the thirty years since the manifesto, the politics of post-pornography have shifted from issues of ownership (who has access to and power in the porn industry), representation (whose bodies are shown, whose pleasure is central, whose desire is normalised), and fun (who's allowed to want and like sex, how porn can be used as a marital aide) to issues of production (what constitutes a pornographic text and how pornography can be understood in a variety of ways), orientation (how sexuality functions, where sex is located) and distribution (the way bodies and sexualities interact and are transformed). In short, if feminist pornography was intent on doing porn differently, post-pornography in its more

recent explorations is about doing sex differently, or, to put it even more clearly, about showing *how sex is always, has always and can always be done differently*.

Our concern is with the more recent post-pornographic moment and its relationship, both explicit and implicit, to critical pedagogy. In the last fifteen years or so, post-pornography communities have developed with a strong focus on queer activism (in particular, trans and gender-variant politics), feminism, technology and media studies, public and performance art, hacking and DIY cultures, squatting, and so on. These communities have been committed to working towards a critical politics of sexuality responsive to the conditions of contemporary life. What, for example, are the possibilities of and for queer sex, or feminist sex, or anti-racist sex, or anti-police sex, or anti-capitalist sex, or anti-copyright sex? And what are the possibilities of and for discourses around gender and sexuality that are not dependent on stock narratives of heterosexuality, procreation, romance, the couple-form, biological ‘hardwiring’, and so on? The work of Paul B. Preciado, whose ‘Contrasexual Manifesto’ from 2000 (published in English in 2011) has been a key text for post-pornography, transgender and queer studies and more generally has been at the centre of the Barcelona post-pornography art/activist effort. Also, the Post-Pornography Politics symposium and subsequent edited books (2006 and 2009 respectively)—convened by the late Tim Stüttgen, a scholar, performance artist and organiser who lived and worked in Berlin—is another key site for post-pornography and its community.³ In the next section, we will break down some of the key propositions of post-pornography.

1. POST-PORNOGRAPHY IS INTERESTED IN DENATURALISING SEX

Post-pornography can be read as denaturalising sex and sexuality. If postmodernism was partly to do with ‘denaturalising’ that which is often thought of as prior to or unchanged by culture (by showing that nature itself is always cultural), then Annie Sprinkle’s idea of the ‘Post-Porn Modernist’ was about showing how pornography could play a critical role in the reconfiguration of sex and sexuality in these terms—that is, as cultural forms able to be different, able to speak to cultural difference and able to index shifts in cultural attitudes. Post-pornography, in its more contemporary iteration, continues and transforms this project, accepting the idea of nature and culture as co-constitutive and the idea of sexuality as determined by the natural-cultural mediation of bodies but rejecting the notion that a more ‘authentic’ sex can be experienced and represented by pornography. The first and most obvious subject of critique for post-pornography is pornography itself (most obviously what we call ‘hetero porn’), as a cultural practice that paradoxically trades on an affect of artificiality in the production of naturalised representations of sex.

We take ‘hetero porn’ to be pornography that is produced according to mainstream, popularised and naturalised ideas of sex and sexuality. This includes not just representations of ‘straight’ sex but also sex that complies with heteronormative narratives of transgression, fantasy, fetish and taboo. We refer to this as ‘hetero porn’ rather than, for example, mainstream porn, because we recognise that the mainstream/independent or mainstream/alternative distinctions are inadequate when describing porn as an industry, economy or textual form. We also refer to it in this way because we understand heteronormativity not merely as the assumption of straightness as natural or normal, but as the complex set of practices, institutions and discourses that constitute ‘heterosexual culture’ (to use Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner’s term) and that contribute to the naturalisation of behaviours connected to sexuality.⁴ We argue, therefore, that ‘hetero porn’ is any pornographic material that affirms heterosexual culture.

Post-pornography, by this account, refers to texts and materials that work against these naturalised assumptions about human sexuality and pornography's role as a mediatory or regulatory technology. Or, to use Lucia Egaña and Mirian Solá's useful construction (which they get from artist/scholar Klau Kinki) in their essay 'Hacking the Body', post-pornography posits that sexuality *itself is a technology*, that is, sexuality is that which allows for meaningful encounters between a subject and their world, or between sex as bodily experience and sex as a socially situated encounter—in their words, 'post-pornographic practices further elaborate creative and theoretical work on bodies and technologies, articulating them together in an extended manner'.⁵ This shift from pornography as a technology that regulates sexuality to sexuality as a technology in its own right registers an important shift in thinking about sex. If, for the pornographic paradigm, sex is motivated by unconscious/biological/primal urges, then for the post-pornographic paradigm, sex is something that offers a space for the critical consideration of urges as always and inextricably biological, technological, social, cultural and political. For the former, desire is an intrinsic character of the natural body; for the latter, desire is a critical agency of the social body. Critical perspectives on the nature–culture problem are ubiquitous in the cultural studies classroom, and post-pornography can contribute to such discussions by interrogating not only gender and sexuality (concepts that are by now understood as informed by social and cultural practices) but *sex itself*. Recently, scholars such as Elizabeth A. Wilson have examined how in cultural approaches to thinking gender and sexuality (for example, in social constructionism and late-twentieth-century feminist thought), a certain kind of anti-biologism means that the bio-body is taken as the fixed, rigid stuff of science and as incompatible with social and cultural critiques of gendered and sexed reality—a position that, as Wilson argues, manages to affirm biology as a static truth unrelated to social reality by leaving it excluded from discussions of gender and sexuality.⁶ A post-pornographic approach understands sex (as a practice), gender (as a complicated identity) and sexuality (as a set of orientations or modes of being in relation) as co-constitutive and, above all, inherently social. This approach can offer a more nuanced approach to thinking of nature and culture—that is, to thinking the natural history of culture.

2. POST-PORNOGRAPHY IS NOT ABOUT THE PLEASURE OF THE SPECTATOR, BUT ABOUT THE EXPLORATION OF SEX

What we're calling hetero porn is most often conceived in terms of its end user, that is, the viewer whose sexual gratification is the perceived goal. Pornography is understood as practical—it relieves, satisfies, satiates and, importantly, regulates sexual desire. Pro-pornography arguments tend to emphasise this pragmatic application of pornography as something that keeps sexuality in check, managing its excesses for the social good and providing avenues for autonomous experiences of sexual gratification and fantasy fulfilment.⁷ The visual language of pornography (the way scenes are shot, the way certain styles become mainstreamed, the way videos online are tagged, and so on) not only caters explicitly to the spectator, but also produces and limits modes of spectatorship. Hetero porn is therefore a positive feedback loop—it centres the presumed viewer whose viewing is organised by the presumption of what that viewer wants to see.

Post-pornography, on the other hand, does not presume to know, or seek to gratify, the viewer. Eric Pussyboy, for example, writes:

To me, post-pornography means being able to engage in explicit representations of sex without the primary goal of being arousing. Post-pornography comes from a

queer feminist positioning that is aware of the political dimensions of sex imagery and narratives, like racist and colonialist genealogies, the oppressive use of notions like ‘public health’ or ‘natural order’ coming from a moralizing scientific and medical discourse, or the exclusion from the realm of desirability and sexuality of people with disabilities.⁸

Pussyboy acknowledges that desire, arousal and satisfaction are described in terms of naturalised notions like fantasy, taste, fetish, preference, and so on, but are also and always conditioned by ideas of healthy and normal expressions of desire and limitations on the category of desirability and the right to desire. Post-pornography, as Pussyboy suggests, is not just about opening up these categories but also about problematising the role of pornographic texts as media for the expression and satisfaction of desire. That is, post-pornography understands desire and arousal as part of and productive in any number of social and cultural practices; as such, post-pornographic texts tend not to dismiss the possibilities of erotic engagements of viewers/consumers, but they also tend not to predetermine what those erotic engagements might be or mean. In this sense, the post-pornographic text facilitates non-reciprocal and multidirectional relations between producers and viewers.

One immediate consequence of the complication of pornography’s presumed use value is its subsequent use in the classroom. Bringing pornographic texts into the classroom is most often perceived as a de-eroticising gesture, a way of making arousal difficult, complex, unwanted or awkward (something we take up in detail below). But when pornographic texts are considered apart from the question of arousal, a different kind of reading experience is possible—not merely a ‘close reading’ of the text but also a reading of the abstraction of sex and the way that the sex act, when read laterally rather than literally, can become an instructive text in its own right. Or, put another way, post-pornography de-eroticises sex in order to engage with the erotic in an extended or expanded idea of sex, a gesture that reconfigures the capacity for an erotics that includes but is not limited to sex acts.

3. POST-PORNOGRAPHY UNDERSTANDS THE ‘PORNOGRAPHIC’ AS A HISTORICAL AND HISTORICISING CONCEPT THAT IS INTIMATELY CONNECTED TO TECHNOLOGY AND MEDIA

Though it would be overly simple to define post-pornography as that which comes ‘after’ pornography, we take post-pornography as a way of thinking about sex and its representation in a moment in which pornography is historicised. First of all, pornography as a coherent industry or set of industries has undergone, in the last few decades, radical changes that have made it a far more difficult thing to locate, define, typify and analyse. This is not particular to pornography, of course—almost everything has been radically altered by the internet and by network culture. But pornography’s shift away from super-profitable production companies making feature-length films has meant that what we now come to think of as pornography—what it looks like, where we find it, how it makes money, and so on—is a complex ecology with no discernible centre or mainstream. So one way that ‘post-pornography’ can be read is as a way of acknowledging that ‘pornography’ as a standalone concept is more or less inadequate at describing the contemporary media environment in which pornographic materials actually exist.

Another way to understand post-pornography is as an aesthetic mode and textual sensibility in which pornography is an ever-present subject of critique. By this we refer to texts that seek to deconstruct, reconfigure or deviate from pornographic tropes in order to produce different representations of sex and desire (we are thinking of writers like Kathy Acker, Chris Kraus

and Paul B. Preciado, as well as artists like María Llopis and Diana J. Torres). These texts take pornography as a departure point for a new vocabulary of sex and sexuality, and are the focus of post-pornographic scholarship. We are interested in how these texts can be studied in the classroom as well as how they can provide a framework for reading ‘back’ into pornography. The pornographic text under analysis in the classroom becomes demystified when it is collectively examined and deconstructed. At this point, the pornographic text is a post-pornographic artefact, able to be read anew. We are arguing that the pornographic is always post-pornographic in the classroom, but we are not then by extension arguing that the study of pornography is understood in these terms. What is needed, is a self-conscious framework of post-pornography that accounts for what happens when the pornographic text is taken up as an object of critical inquiry.

Porn Studies

Evolving out of feminist and queer theory and literary and film studies in the 1990s, pornography emerged as a field of research and a pedagogical focus simultaneously.⁹ The history of the teaching of pornography is well known, with Linda Williams leading the way in the United States with her groundbreaking courses and publications. Williams’s foundational text *Porn Studies* was written with the explicit aim to ‘become a useful tool for those who elect to teach and learn about pornography’.¹⁰ Williams’s field-defining Porn Studies approach consists of ‘an application of the already existing field of film and video studies along with various forms of gender and sexuality studies’, intersecting variously with disciplines such as ‘history, art history, anthropology, cultural studies ... [and] queer studies’.¹¹ The Post-Pornographic Bodies course at UNSW Art & Design builds on a Porn Studies course that ran for twenty years and was largely taught to Fine Arts and Art Theory students in a school both geographically and pedagogically separated from the university’s Arts and Social Sciences Faculty. The original Porn Studies course, *Pornography, Art and Politics*, followed the trajectory of Williams’s inquiry, and used cultural studies as a framework to justify and structure the way it was taught. Recent post-pornography scholarship presented us with an opportunity to update not only the content of the course but also the manner in which it is taught in the ever-shifting terrain of cultural studies. While established, pornography’s position in higher education is not certain and it remains a very small field of study. The first peer-reviewed journal dedicated to pornography, also called *Porn Studies*, began in 2014, and according to Williams there are less than twenty books that make meaningful contributions. Porn Studies is therefore still a ‘weedy field’ (Williams) that can be difficult to negotiate for both students and researchers. As Burke writes, Porn Studies scholars are usually tenured academics, who for the most part have not had to be overly concerned about their employment prospects and reputations in the face of public condemnation, dismissal, ridicule and discrimination because of their association with pornography. Porn Studies research and pedagogy vacillates between attempting to cement its place within cultural studies and playing on its transgressive appeal. This is captured in the name Porn Studies which adopts a familiar, colloquial tone also used by the industry (‘porn’) while at the same time self-identifying as a legitimate scholarly field. Porn Studies generates far more popular interest than other micro-research fields and continues to have a problematic relationship with this attention. Our move towards post-pornography was made with consciousness of the ambivalent position of pornography in the university, and awareness of what post-pornography scholarship offers in terms of teaching Porn Studies outside the bind of defensive methodologies and spectacular public appeal.

In Australia, Professor Jill Bennett taught the first Porn Studies course in 1994 at the Canberra School of Art (Australian National University), and it continued at UNSW Art & Design after her appointment in 1995. Williams's first Porn Studies course was also taught in 1994; as a field of study, it emerged simultaneously in both the United States and Australia (a fact that is not well known, to say the least).¹² The AIDs crisis, the nascent potential of the internet and the lack of consensus on pornography in feminist theory, in particular the pro-censorship positions of Catherine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin, produced the conditions in which Porn Studies courses were considered necessary.¹³ Despite inevitable differences between early iterations of Porn Studies courses, they have tended to be at once radical *and* normalising; as Kirkham and Skeggs note: 'The classroom brings with it myths of mastery of reason and control, the showing of pornography must make quite a challenge to those myths.'¹⁴ The actual experience of the classroom in which pornography is taught does not greatly differ from other non-pornographic courses; however, the context that surrounds it—the expectations and assumptions of students, their friends and family—has a large impact on how it is perceived. There are two classrooms, the space in which pornography is taught and the *fantasy* of a space in which pornography is taught. This fantasy is maintained by detractors and supporters who invest in the exceptional status of Porn Studies. As Peter Lehman states 'special issues surround the academic study of porn'.¹⁵ Many students enter the class with this fantasy, and because of this the classroom becomes somewhat paradoxical: a space in which transgression is both anticipated and quickly transformed into a mode of critique.

The fantasy of the pornographic classroom produces certain foundational limits and conceptual frameworks that are difficult to transcend. As Williams states, pornography consists of 'two contradictory things at once: documents of sexual acts, and fantasies spun around knowing the pleasure or pain of those acts. Pornography studies needs to remember that it must always exist at the problematic site of this limit.'¹⁶ This is the limit of Porn Studies and the pornographic classroom, and it is valuable to articulate these limits to understand how post-pornographic pedagogy attempts to shift the classroom beyond this fantasy. The key appeal of the pornographic classroom is that it is situated ambivalently within an institutional framework, while still maintaining the protection and imprimatur of the institution. It is assumed that under the guise of scholarly investigation, transgressive and transformative forms of learning can occur. These are not incidental, but part of the outcome of being allowed to view and discuss pornography in an open and 'uncensored' environment. This perceived openness allows for conversations to slip across traditional boundaries of the personal and the scholarly. In early reflections on the pedagogy of Porn Studies, there was an assumption that the material would immediately and personally affect students and staff, requiring careful navigation but capable of producing meaningful insight and intimacy. Assumptions about both the obscenity of porn (its capacity to shock and destabilise) *and* the reparative power of education generates an environment in which students enter the space of the classroom ready to be confronted and moved by the material. Perhaps because, as Kath Albury argues, 'there is no universal consensus as to what porn teaches its consumers and how it works as an educator'.¹⁷

A Porn Studies course is by default pro-pornography, even if it insists on objectivity; by considering it a subject worthy of investigation it confirms pornography as a critical field. This is partly to do with its emergence as a field of inquiry intimately allied with sex-positive and anti-censorship feminism of the late twentieth century. Pornography is one of the most exaggerated cultural forms, and critical methods that expose the underlying politics of pornographic texts are easy for students to engage with. Porn Studies appeals to explicit texts in order to teach a visual and cultural language of explicitness—this unwittingly produces a

canonical idea of pornography and its representations of sex, intimacy, transgression, perversion, and so on. Because of this, Porn Studies is not particularly conducive to interdisciplinary inquiry; its fixation on the explicit pornographic text means that it has a limited vocabulary for critique and analysis. This is especially so when it comes to the discussion of sex itself. Despite ongoing cultural debates as to what role pornography plays in shaping attitudes to sex (as mediator, regulator or liberator), in the context of Porn Studies, the link between pornography and 'real' sex is rarely questioned. This limits the definition of pornography for Porn Studies as a field, because more difficult, ambiguous and/or transdisciplinary texts are harder to critique and therefore often ignored. In this sense, pornography is used in the classroom in a very utilitarian manner and not dissimilarly to the way it is used for masturbation—as an instructive text and as a substitute for the real. Our intention with *Post-Pornographic Bodies* was to recognise these limits of Porn Studies and to develop an interdisciplinary approach to the study of contemporary gender and sexuality politics.

Post-Pornographic Bodies

The course is difficult to characterise in simple terms. Technically, it is a second- and third-year theory subject offered as one of the 'core' courses for the Bachelor of Art Theory. However, it is also offered as a 'Contextual Studies' course, one of a group of subjects that Fine Arts and Media Arts students can choose from to fulfil the theory component of their studio-focused degrees. In addition, it is available as an elective for students across the university.

As co-convenors, we developed the course and its assessments, and each delivered half of the lectures. Weekly themes included 'After Nature, After Nurture', 'Post-Porn Sex', 'Critical Desire', 'The Post-Pornographic 'Child'', 'Against Spectacularity', 'The Australian Pornoexotic' and 'The Pharmacopornographic Imagination'. Lectures included materials from modern and contemporary popular media, advertising, legal documents and policy, music and music videos, film and television, education and public health, professional and amateur pornography, art and literature, activism, and critical and cultural theory. Some examples of texts analysed include: post-pornographic readings of pornography such as the Sarah Palin-themed feature-length *Whose Naylin' Paylin* (2008) and films produced in Australia depicting a national sexual character such as *Outback Assignment* (1991); self-conscious post-pornography like the work of Diana J. Torres who practices a political performance art she calls 'pornoterrorism', Shu Lea Chang who works with the integration of sex and technology and our own work, both individually and together, which variously investigates the mediation of bodies and desire; art and popular media suggestive of post-pornographic themes such as Frank Ocean's 2016 record *Blond(e)*, Kara Walker's installation *A Subtlety, Or the Marvelous Sugar Baby* (2014), the photography of Robert Mapplethorpe and Catherine Opie, and novels of Kathy Acker and Chris Kraus; and finally, discourses of public health and safety such as the Australian government's campaign *Safe Sexting: No Such Thing* (2009) and the Northern Territory Emergency Response (known as 'The Intervention') (ongoing from 2007).

We lectured on alternate weeks, meaning that we were able to write the material in response to what had been established in the previous week. In this sense, the weekly lectures were conversational and collaborative. We did not take any of the three tutorials, and worked closely with two PhD candidates who shared the classroom teaching load. Because we were not 'in the classroom' with the students, we had to work to make the lecture space an engaged site for our collaborative pedagogy. To do so, we ensured that we were always present for each other's lectures and spoke together to the group at the beginning and end of each lecture, responding to questions, comments, current media or news, and so on. In lieu of a lecture in Week 5 of

semester we facilitated a group conversation in which students discussed their first assessment, working towards a collective definition of post-pornography. In the final week of semester, we facilitated a roundtable discussion with the four teaching staff and students around what we had learned, and how our shared understanding of post-pornography could be engaged as a way of doing theory and as a way of reading the body and embodiment in the context of the contemporary university, and, more broadly, in the contemporary media environment.

Drawing on a long history of critical pedagogy, our approach to lecturing aimed to encourage active, engaged and critical participation from our students at the same time as it did not attempt to performatively de-hierarchise the relation between the lecturer(s) and students. Following Shirley R. Steinberg, we understand critical pedagogy as an umbrella term that refers to a diverse set of teaching practices committed to insubordination: ‘Critical pedagogy can be theoretically-based scholarship, grounded in the understanding of the origins and underpinnings of power within society and in the fabric of schooling.’¹⁸ Recognising the impact of Paolo Freire’s foundational text *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* on critical pedagogy in the twentieth century, and acknowledging the considerable work that black feminist scholarship (for example, bell hooks, Angela Davis and Kimberlé Crenshaw) have done to make critical pedagogies intersectional in their approach and scope, we have attempted to develop a pedagogical approach that specifically asks how power can be analysed and challenged in the context of contemporary gender and sexuality politics.

Rather than trying to disavow *our* power in the space of the lecture theatre and as administrators of the course, we tried at all times to make our decisions and responsibility explicit. We talked through our approach to teaching, our vulnerabilities and desires regarding the material, our nervousness or embarrassment, our relation to the faculty and university and the negotiation of normative pedagogical responsibilities like learning outcomes, assessment criteria, and so on with our non-normative aspirations for the course, such as the hope that it would facilitate ongoing and meaningful conversations about sex, sexuality, intimacy, desire, consent and refusal. Above all we tried to emphasise the importance of difference—the differences that constitute experiences of gender, sex and sexuality and the differences that produce the conditions for meaningful learning. This emphasis on difference was especially critical in order to challenge the temptation to universalise sex and to assume that a natural sexuality united our collective experiences. Insofar as gender, sex and sexuality are all inextricable from power relations, we wanted to ensure that the material we engaged with and the modes of engagement we facilitated were predicated on an ethics of difference and with an idea of what informed consent might mean in the space of the classroom and in conversational spaces more generally.

Starting from the position that pornography needs no introduction in the classroom means that Post-Pornographic Bodies is already critical of what Porn Studies assumes about bodies, desires and pornographies. The central question the course asks is: Can post-pornography be taught without pornography? The course uses the term post-pornography as something for the students to define and discover throughout the course, in relation to a variety of material. We do not offer a singular definition of post-pornography and encourage students to think of post-pornography outside, as well as in relation to, both pornography and Porn Studies. This means that discussions about desire and its imaging can be engaged no matter what an individual student’s relationship to pornography and its consumption may be. Post-pornography is less interested in the distinction between the ‘education of desire’,¹⁹ and the education *in* desire which occurs in Porn Studies courses and treats desire as in need of analysis (both critical and psychological).

In our attempt to teach post-pornography without pornography, we did not assume the content would do the work of revealing and transcending the hierarchies of the classroom. We constantly made the students and each other (as co-lecturers) aware of the constructions that were being performed. We demonstrated how Porn Studies has historically accommodated students' personal experience as central to the transformative pedagogical outcome. What we attempted to reveal is that transformation in this sense is not universal, and that in the context of pornography, certain personal experiences are treated as more valid than others. An example of how this manifested during the course was in the final week's roundtable discussion. During this discussion an implicit assumption was made that everyone 'has' a sexuality, and therefore we could all relate to pornography in a basic embodied sense—whether or not we consume and enjoy it and whether or not we feel that it represents our desires. A student intervened to make the point that the discussion and its assumptions didn't take into account asexuality and the relationship to pornography that asexual people might have. At this point, as a group, we interrogated our ongoing effort to define and understand post-pornography in terms of the deeply held and often overlooked presumptions about sex, recognising the way heteronormative logics of desire and sexuality are naturalised even in spaces actively seeking to deconstruct and critique such logic.

In acknowledging that this course, above all, has been about the way 'pornography' is an apt frame through which to examine the intersection of gender, sex, sexuality, desire, race, class, ability, and so on, in the context of capital—that is, as an industry, economy and mode of representation that shows, in explicit detail, the production and reproduction of bodies as images for consumption in an erotic market—we have come to see 'post-pornography' as a possible response to the pornographic as a default mode of understanding sexuality and its representation. In other words, if pornography, by now, is a way of thinking about the way sex and desire are imaged, consumed, learned, reproduced, and so on, in the context of the long history of capitalism, then post-pornography is a way of thinking about how to engage with sex and desire without imagining sex as a natural resource mined by capital in the production of desire-as-commodity. By this account, sex is understood as, first, implicated in capital (a concept that is hardly new) and, second, available to engage as a form of critical intimacy—a way of experiencing the self and the other in a manner that claims neither naturalness nor perversion. This is, we argue, a version of sexuality at odds with the dialectics of repression/ expression (the affirmation of repressed desire via its explicit representation). Thinking of a post-pornographic sex, we're thinking of sex as a critical encounter, an opportunity to consider what it is that makes sex possible or not, desirable or not, pleasurable or not—and, an opportunity to think about the politics that are inextricable from sex: the politics of race, class, gender; the politics that come with technology and the politics of biologism; the politics of the state and the family; the politics of care and community, and so on.

Conclusion

The catalyst for Post-Pornographic Bodies was a recognition of the increasingly performed responses from students to the paradigms of Porn Studies. The growing disjuncture between students' lived experience of porn and the institutional and disciplinary structures that present pornography as an object of study necessitated, in our minds, a shift towards the post-pornographic. The course examines pornography as a way of interrogating contemporary ideas about the body, desire, sex and technology that cannot be reduced to seeking natural or truthful insights into sexuality and sex itself. During its first iteration the course de-emphasised explicit pornographic displays, introducing a variety of texts into the field. The students were very

receptive to this, and we realised that, for many, the distinctions between pornography, non-pornography and post-pornography were fluid. They, like us, were more interested in tracing the constructions of race, gender and sex through complex histories and systems that offer the possibility of diverse creative and critical interventions under the rubric of post-pornography. While personal revelations and disclosures were still present, these were often directed towards 'denaturalising' the revelations themselves; that is, recognising the social construction of the personal. The pedagogy of post-pornography is nascent; however, our experience in developing and delivering Post-pornographic Bodies suggests that students are capable of engaging in complex and critical deconstructions that understand pornography in an expanded sense.

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Notes

1. The exact origin of the term is hard to trace. David Church's recent book has what we believe to be an accurate account: 'In 1988, [Annie] Sprinkle adapted the term "post-porn modernism" from Dutch artist Wink van Kempen to describe a "new genre of sexually explicit material that is perhaps more visually experimental, political, humorous, 'arty', and eclectic than the rest".' Here, Church is citing Sprinkle's *Post-porn Modernist: My 25 Years as a Multimedia Whore from 1998*. David Church, *Disposable Passions: Vintage Pornography and the Material Legacies of Adult Cinema*, Bloomsbury, New York, 2016.
2. Scott Mackenzie, *Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures: A Critical Anthology*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2014, p. 382.
3. See, for example Lucía Egaña and Miriam Solá, 'Hacking the Body: A Transfeminist War Machine', *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly*, vol. 3, no. 1–2, 2016, pp. 74–80; Paul B. Preciado, 'The Contra-Sexual Manifesto', *Total Art Journal*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2011, pp. 1–6; Tim Stüttgen (ed.), *Post, Porn, Politics: Queer-feminist Perspective on the Politics of Porn Performance and Sex-work as Culture Production*, B-Books, Berlin, 2009.
4. Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, 'Sex in Public', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 24, no. 2, 1998, p. 552.
5. Egaña and Solá, p. 77.
6. Elizabeth Wilson, *Gut Feminism*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2015.
7. See, for example, Nadine Strossen, *Defending Pornography: Free Speech, Sex, and the Fight for Women's Rights*, NYU Press, New York City, 2000;
8. Interview with Eric Pussyboy, 'Neurosex: Sci-Fi Series Translates Sex Into Code Your Brain Can Download', *The Future of Sex*, <https://futureofsex.net/augmentation/neurosex-sci-fi-series-translates-sex-into-code-your-brain-can-download/>.
9. Some of the key pedagogical texts used in Porn Studies are: Linda Williams, *Porn Studies*. Duke University Press, 2004; Gillian Rodgeron and Elizabeth Wilson, *Pornography and Feminism: The Case against Censorship by Feminists against Censorship*, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1991; Susanna Paasonen, *Carnal Resonance: Affect and Online Pornography*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2011; Lynne Segal and Mary McIntosh, *Sex Exposed: Sexuality and the Pornography Debate*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, NJ, 1993; Peter Lehman, *Pornography: Film and culture*, Rutgers University Press, 2006; Brian McNair, 'Teaching Porn', *Sexualities*, vol. 12, no. 5, 2009, pp. 558–67; and Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the 'Frenzy of the Visible'*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1999.
10. Williams, *Porn Studies*, p. 10.
11. Linda Williams, 'Pornography, Porno, Porn: Thoughts on a Weedy Field', *Porn Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1–2, 2014, p. 25.
12. Williams notes a number of seminar papers and courses became constitutive of the field across a period of time in the 1990s, but refers to the first upper undergraduate course in porn being taught in 1994 at UC Irvine. Williams, *Porn Studies*, p. 12. Brian McNair charts an earlier history of porn being taught in the university (from the 1970s), but the pedagogy of Porn Studies as we know it today emerges in the 1990s, McNair, 'Teaching Porn'.
13. See Andrea Dworkin and Catharine A. MacKinnon, *Pornography and Civil Rights: A New Day for Women's Equality*, Organizing Against Pornography, 1988 and Andrea Dworkin, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women*, Plume, New York, 1989. Williams refers to feeling the need to respond to MacKinnon as a driving factor in teaching a porn course.
14. Pat Kirkham and Beverley Skeggs, 'Pornographies, Pleasures and Pedagogies in the UK and US', *Jump Cut*, no. 40, March 1996, 106–13.
15. Peter Lehman 'A Dirty Little Secret: Why Teach and Study Pornography?', in Peter Lehman (ed.) *Pornography: Film and Culture*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, NJ and London, 2006, p. 1.
16. Williams, 'Pornography, Porno, Porn', p. 37.
17. Kath Albury, 'Porn and Sex Education, Porn as Sex Education', *Porn Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1–2, 2014, p. 172.
18. Shirley R. Steinberg, 'Where are We Now?', in *Critical Pedagogy: Where are We Now*, ed. Peter McLaren and Joe L. Kincheloe, Peter Lang Press, New York, 2007.
19. Susanna Paasonen, Kaarina Nikunen and Laura Saarenmaa, *Pornification: Sex and Sexuality in Media Culture*, Berg Publishers, Oxford, 2007.