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Postscript to Special Section Clarissa Smith Centre for Research in Media and Cultural Studies, University of Sunderland, Sunderland, UK

This special section of the journal has been a long time in the system. When four of these articles were first submitted we were excited about their moving outside of the usual parameters of tone, form, and content expected in a scholarly journal. But then, we hesitated to publish them. Not that we doubted their quality or their ability to say something interesting about pornography, but in their mixing of factual and creative writing, their evocations of the ways in which, as Katherine Angel describes in the Introduction to this section, 'pornography pulsates in real encounters', we worried that these articles might be 'misread' by critics of the journal. Basically, they brought us up against some of the boundaries of the admissible in relation to academic study of porn and, as Anne Coughlin wrote of obscenity scholarship almost two decades ago, in our reaction to these essays we see the 'textual deposits that the taboo on porn leaves on pornography scholarship' (2002, 2146). Coughlin observes that reference to prohibited images is a necessary part of the porn scholars' writing, but the taboo against porn itself makes the scholar's task all the more daunting:

In effect, the taboo denies the scholar any neutral rhetoric within which to locate her argument. Neutrality is impossible because the taboo always thrusts upon her the question of whether and precisely how she will obey or defy its prohibition. The scholar must decide exactly what, and how much, she should say about the porn. Should her text be concise or expansive, terse or turgid? Like it or not, the taboo inevitably influences the composition of the scholarly text. (2002, 2146)

There are always forms of contagion at work in writing about pornography. Too much detail and one strays into the pulchritude of fleshy parts meeting other fleshy elements, the possibility of arousing more than academic interest in readers. As Ummni Khan (2014, 11) has suggested, it is difficult to address the topic without becoming the topic. We worried that this might be true of the articles published here. But in our discussions about whether and how to publish these pieces, we returned time and again to Ken Plummer's observation that 'the sexed body and its lustful desires' (2003, 522) are often left out of research accounts of sex and sexuality. What lies behind the disquiet in reading about lustful desires in an academic journal? That there is something ultimately unscholarly about the lack of distance from the object? The possibility of being aroused by the essay? The queasiness of knowing too much about the author? All approaches to porn – the academic, the personal, the critical, the anecdotal – have different social rules and expectations and display different conventions, and it is impossible to explain/observe/analyze 'dirty words' or 'smutty pictures' without invoking or repeating those modes of 'talk' even if their specific meanings may change according to context. The words that work to express or invoke sexual desire, the words that porn utilizes to manifest reactions, to arouse, risk contaminating the supposed space of erudition when they are taken into the academic space. Their contaminations can be multiple; not only might they risk arousing readers, they can also be experienced as confrontational, even part of the problem.

Of course, this confrontational form has been successfully utilized in some writing about pornography. Andrea Dworkin (1989), for instance, wrote with a passion and creative sense

of the possibilities of mobilizing bodily response in her readers. As Ariel Levy's (2011) *New York Magazine* profile argued, 'To say that she was anti-sex misses the point: She was obsessed with sex. Book after book, page after page of "cunt," "fucking," "penetration," "penis," "sucking," "balls," and so on.' Anyone reading *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* feels the vertiginous highs and lows of the rollercoaster as she pounds through the problems of pornography – but as Dworkin (1989) sought to mobilize disgust, anger, resentment, and political action through her words, she was seemingly entitled to deploy the vernaculars of pornography in order to flesh out her critique. The multiple descriptions of spilling flesh, naked bodies, and rhythmic penetrations are deployed in the service of a righteous and feminist argument against porn's bodily appeals, its reification of female sexual servitude and men's inherent sexual terrorism. For many, Dworkin's evangelical tone, the strident critique, and the sense of injustice which permeates every page may well work to stave off any possible sexual frisson in response to her prose. Yet, as Levy (2011) suggested, even Dworkin can be read pornographically – 'Sometimes, when you're reading Dworkin, it can be difficult to determine whether you are supposed to be offended or masturbating.' These are not issues that would stay Dworkin's pen – in the white hot rage of her excoriations of pornography, we feel the passion and the politics; it is righteous, it is real, it is feminist!

A different kind of arousal is invoked in Robert Jensen's writings; their confessional mode deals in the sad, sorry state of affairs for men who would wish to see pornography eradicated. His 'tearful' exposition that pornography is what the end of the world feels like (Jensen 2010) is a little too rich for my tastes but it is a writing style, a format, and a genre that is acceptable for masculine expressions of disgust at explicit sexual representation. As I read Jensen, I am always struck by the difficulties for heterosexual men to write about the pleasures of pornography without implicating themselves in the evils of porn, or demonstrating their lack of 'feminist' or 'ethical' politics. In this regard, Adam Jones' essay with its weaving of memories of erotic encounters and pornographic scenarios as part of his coming to terms with the politics of pornography has real resonance.

Feona Attwood and I have previously written about the ways in which tears, soul searching, condemnation, retribution, confession, and staying on message (Attwood and Smith 2013) have become the necessary indications of one way of having 'the proper attitude toward pornography' (Williams 1999, xvii). The 'proper attitude' recognizes the admonition that there must be division between writing about pornography and writing pornography – how then to convey the allure and the pull of images of sex; how to understand the ways in which pornography might have 'resonance' (Paasonen 2011) for each of us? In that context, it becomes very difficult to open up other ways of thinking about pornography that might highlight humour in porn, its ribaldry, its silliness, its joyous and even not so joyous trashiness, or that we might seek to understand the pleasures, the cultish possibilities of some of the outrageous, difficult, banal, and nasty pornographic materials which undoubtedly exist. Roscoe Hudson's essay highlights the ways in which pornographic forms can speak both to the body and its pleasures and to his sense of homo-community and belonging.

Part of the problem of writing about pornography is surely engendered in that division of debate into anti-porn or pro-porn positions. There is no need to re-visit the reflections on

the problems of researching pornography that we offered in our first issue (Smith and Attwood 2014) but trying to write beyond the simple bifurcation that tends to characterize popular accounts of pornography will require more than the objective languages of the social sciences in which we witness the paradox of 'vanishing sexuality'. Ken Plummer wonders what happens if the 'sweating and pumping, sensuous and feeling world of the emotional, fleshy body' (2003, 525) is included in our work. Too often what happens is the rejection of those accounts, the accusation that the analysis is flawed, too personal, too celebratory. The accepted 'dry' approach of academic discourse is made slippery by contact with the 'wet aesthetics' (Van Brabant 2016) of pornography. But it is precisely this slipperiness that expands these essays from the straightforwardly personal. This is not a vulgarization of scholarly language or of scholarly debate, these essays are not merely anecdotal – they offer reminders of the importance of the ways in which porn moves our bodies, and what those significances might be for thinking more expansively about explicit representations.

The cartographies of academic/anecdote, of dry/wet, of pro/anti, of male/female, can often simplify identity positions – whether academic or consumer – ossifying our understandings of the ways in which pornography might have broader significances to our lived sexualities. The academic identity which seeks to turn the spotlight onto the histories of the pornographic archive, the bringing into view of ignored spaces of production and consumption, and the textual analysis of images, movies, vignettes in order to analyze their generic conventions in the dry and dispassionate terms of the researcher are all very important, but they enable and indeed require the researcher to stand above and outside the circuits of desire that are so clearly on view in the pornographic object. The identification of sexist tropes, of racial themes, of gendered narratives, the working through the conventions of lighting, sound, dialogue, angles, and cuts, invites us as scholars to maintain a distance from the fleshy bodies and suspect pleasures of fucking and, particularly, to ensure that our entrance into the conversations about porno pleasures is couched in the dead tone of the properly academic/critical voice. The dead tone allows a crossing of the spaces of acceptability and respectability, cruising the boundaries of the obscene (Grosz and Probyn 1995, xi) while still remaining unsullied by the materials we study.

Each of these pieces, in different ways, through their different modes of storytelling and analysis refuse to adopt the dead tone in order to acknowledge the circuits of desire that play a part in their authors' engagements with pornography, where personal histories, auto/biographies, become central to their explorations. Becca Glaser's essay deals frankly with her ambivalences about Sasha Grey. Joanna Walsh admits that her interests began with an unwelcome discovery on a partner's computer. We see the writing of memory, of the revisioning of personal history and attitudes to porn through reflexivity and an awareness of the self fashioning occasioned through thinking about the self, the body, its history, the loves lost, the marking and making of the sexual self which may not be simply gendered. The need to compromise, to understand the difficulties of love and sex – the labours of love. There is undoubtedly a stickiness to the telling of these stories – there is a bravery to writing these articles, they were risky to write and arguably risky to finally see in print, because, as Elin Diamond (1996, 4) observes, 'questions of embodiment, of social relations, of ideological interpellations, of emotional and political effects, all become discussable'.

What do we learn from the articles in this special section? What other avenues of investigation are opened up through their more fleshy ways of thinking and writing about pornography? Running through each of these pieces are indications of the importance of fantasy and its complexities at different points in the life course, the sense of ambivalences, trajectories of pain and pleasure, the attempts to defy reality, to see and feel something differently. Questions of pleasure, of risk, and personal experience are woven through the essays and their assessments of pornography. Each highlights the impossibility of writing in 'neutral' terms about sex and porn – what might it mean to want to convey how one feels about porn and to recognize the 'fraught and complicated terrain' of desire (Nash 2014, 150).

The autoethnographic reflections of the articles go some way to acknowledging the formative and complex contexts in which individual authors are attempting to make sense of their own biographies of eroticism, sex, and sexual identity. But their subjective negotiations with the possibilities of the pornographic and the erotic, their ambivalences around pleasure and disgust, have wider resonance than mere solipsism. Certainly they offer self-constructions, performances which pose questions about the relationship between bodies, identities, and analyses. They open up questions about the relationships among bodies and identities, what sex means and in what spaces, how our feelings of love, jealousy, intimacy, fear, pleasure, and the languages we create to talk about sexual connections, bodies, and embodiment, and how those might be connected to our feelings, experiences, politics about pornography. They illuminate the ways in which identities and experiences are constructed, interpreted, and changed, they explore how pornographic fantasies, memories, discourses, and desires might contribute and reflect back on the sense of self, on sexual identities, on the bodies that desire and move in 'real life' – some of those stories begin with connection, others are stories of loss tinged with shame; there is celebration but as they unfold they produce possibilities for thinking about pornography in wider, more embodied, more relational, perhaps more honest modes of speaking. As such, perhaps they offer a means of understanding processes of 'becoming' sexual, that they might move us into other modalities of understanding pornography. As Grosz and Probyn have argued:

... sensuality does not undermine seriousness and rigour – indeed, it obliges a certain exactitude; that it is possible to engage a delight in thinking, writing, theorizing, punning; that a delight in sexuality can engage others, other modes of engaging, touching and connecting ... putting tangibility, touch and lucidity back into politics and critical theory. (1995, xii)

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