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4 BREATHING NEW LIFE INTO OLD FEARS: EXTREME PORNOGRAPHY AND THE WIDER POLITICS OF SNUFF

Clarissa Smith

On January 7, 2011, at Stafford Crown Court in the UK, Kevin Webster was described by Judge Michael Cullum as:

of previously good character. As a man of good character he is entitled to suggest he is less likely to be guilty as he has not offended before. He is not young. He has not come to police attention before or since. He has the choice to remain silent.¹

Some hours later, having seen the menu for lunch, the jury came to the unanimous verdict of “Not Guilty” on all charges. Arrested in August 2009, Webster has the dubious honor of being the first person to go to jury trial for the possession of “extreme pornography,” a charge made possible by the introduction of provisions in Part 5 of the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2009 (CJIA).²

¹Backlash, “A Judge’s Summing Up,” accessed December 2, 2014, <http://www.backlash-uk.org.uk/the-law/monitoring-prosecutions/a-test-of-realistic/a-judges-summing-up/>.

²I acted in this case as an expert witness for the Defence (as did Feona Attwood, then at Sheffield Hallam University) and presented testimony exploring the textual formation and history of the images charged, their production and reception. Such testimony is not presented as a *defence* of pornography but as a means of guiding members of the Court towards an understanding of the specificities of particular texts as *representations* and how and why they might fail to meet the provisions of the legislation, particularly around questions of *realism* and *likelihood* rather than *risk* of serious injury.

Also known as “The Dangerous Pictures Act,” the CJIA has been on the statute in England and Wales for almost six years and, as I write this, is currently being augmented by further provisions to outlaw images of rape to bring legislation into line with regulations in Scotland.³ This legislation, and its “refiguring of ‘obscenity’ from ‘an extreme explicitness of representation’ into ‘perverse’ representation”⁴ as well as its shifting of responsibility from production/distribution to possession, illustrates the continuing spectral presence of the “snuff movie” in discussions of pornography and its impacts. Indeed, as I will discuss, the UK government’s moves to outlaw “extreme” pornography seemed partly driven by a conviction that the snuff movie is not merely a chimera but, facilitated by the accessibility and anonymity of the web, a viable, if disgusting, commercial commodity. In this chapter, I examine elements of the legislation, the argumentation, and the research used to justify its provisions—the claims of the growth and the widespread availability of pornography glorying in sexual violence and assertions of its possible effects. Alongside that discussion, I explore some of the images prosecuted in *R v Webster* and how the trial illustrates a “crisis over the meanings of pornography” wherein “the identification of ‘extreme’ pornography has given voice to a range of anxieties about media spectacularization of the body”⁵ which have their antecedents in older concerns about the commercial possibilities of the snuff movie.

The legislation

Part 5 of the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act specifically outlaws the possession of any image if it is both “extreme” and “pornographic” and if it:

³Proponents of the provisions have suggested that harmonisation is entirely practical, but have yet to indicate why adopting the Scottish model is necessary (see Clare McGlynn and Erika Rackley, “Why Criminalise the Possession of Rape Pornography,” in *Durham Law School Briefing Document* [Durham: Durham University, 2014]). The Scottish statute has been in operation since 2011 and yet proponents of the changes to English law did not, during the consultation process, make any reference at all to successful prosecutions in Scotland, or to any (however small) changes in the status of women, reduction in violence towards women or to the prevention of sexual assault as a result of those prosecutions. The necessity for the changes to the law in England and Wales has not so far been evidenced but, as I finish this final draft, the legislation has received Royal Assent—discussion and debate of the additional provisions was minuscule. See Clarissa Smith, “The War on Porn: Questions of Representation, Realism and Research” (keynote presentation presented at *1984: Freedom and Censorship in the Media – Where Are We Now?* University of Sunderland, London Campus, April, 2014).

⁴Linda Williams, “Porn Studies: Proliferating Pornographies On/Scene: An Introduction,” in *Porn Studies*, edited by Linda Williams (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004): 1–6.

⁵Feona Attwood and Clarissa Smith, “Extreme Concern: Regulating ‘Dangerous Pictures’ in the United Kingdom,” *Journal of Law and Society* 37, no. 1 (2010): 171.

portrays, in an explicit and realistic way, any of the following—

- (a) an act which threatens a person's life,
- (b) an act which results, or is likely to result, in serious injury to a person's anus, breasts, or genitals,
- (c) an act which involves sexual interference with a human corpse, or
- (d) a person performing an act of intercourse or oral sex with an animal (whether dead or alive), and a reasonable person looking at the image would think that any such person or animal was real.⁶

These provisions were, in part, a response to Graham Coutts' murder of Jane Longhurst in 2003. During his trial, it was argued that "Coutts had been downloading pictures of dead women, strangulation, rape and murder as he had done for eight years"⁷ and, following the trial, the victim's mother gathered a petition of 50,000 signatures calling for a ban on websites such as Necrobabes,⁸ which Coutts had visited. Support for the Longhurst campaign came from various British newspapers and two Ministers of Parliament who argued that even if the images on those websites had not caused Coutts to murder Jane Longhurst, they had "normalized" his perverse sexual interests. Snuff movies were referenced during Labour MP Martin Salter's contributions to the second reading of the CJIA as examples of violent pornography. Home Office Minister Vernon Coaker argued in support of the new provisions suggesting that "The vast majority of people find these forms of violent and extreme pornography deeply abhorrent."⁹

Campaigners also argued that the UK's primary piece of legislation governing pornography—the Obscene Publications Act 1959—was no longer fit for purpose in the internet age when every conceivable sexual taste is catered to. As the *Daily Mail* thundered,

... it [Longhurst's murder] could have happened only in this high-tech age, committed by someone whose murderous fantasies were fuelled by appalling images freely available on the Internet.¹⁰

⁶"Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008 (c4) Part 5," accessed March 13, 2009, http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2008/ukpga_20080004_en_9.

⁷*Brighton Argus*, February 5, 2004, accessed June 8, 2015, http://www.theargus.co.uk/archive/2004/02/05/5097827.Jane_Longhurst___The_verdict/?ref=arc.

⁸This site is hosted in the United States.

⁹Coaker quoted in *Daily Mail*, "Victory for Victim's Mum in Crackdown on Web Sex Violence," August 30, 2006, accessed June 8, 2015, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-402874/Victory-victims-mum-crackdown-web-sex-violence.html>.

¹⁰*Daily Mail*, "My Sister was Murdered by a Man Obsessed with Violent Internet Porn. So Why Won't Anyone Help Me to Close These Websites Down?," September 30, 2004, repeated in the House of Lords by Baroness Buscombe, reported in Hansard, October 13, 2004, Column 366, accessed June 8, 2015, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200304/ldhansrd/vo041013/text/41013-31.htm>.

Interestingly, advocates of the provisions did not suggest that the acts depicted on Necrobabes and other websites of concern were actually *real*. Instead, particular emphasis was being placed upon the possibilities of “harm” being caused to viewers and the rest of society by the “normalizing” of practices of asphyxiation, bondage, domination, and submission. Tellingly, argumentation in favor of the provisions drew on narratives used in other campaigns against “problem media”: for example, assertions that “extreme pornography” was a *new* problem, that its images were more graphic, more violent, more real than ever seen before and that the technology exacerbated these problems, are all accusations leveled at media forms as various as the “horror comics,” the “video nasties” and video games.¹¹ As with these other “horrible” media, extreme pornography was regarded as a phenomenon produced outside the UK, utilizing new technologies to breach the boundaries of the island state and operating largely invisibly to the authorities. National newspapers reported Coaker as saying,

Such material has no place in our society, but the advent of the internet has meant that this material is more easily available and means existing controls are being by-passed. We must move to tackle this.¹²

With additional space, it would be possible to show how the campaign for the legislation was a textbook example of what Bill Thompson described two

This argument is strategic rather than factual. As Carline has argued, “To demonstrate the need for censorship Jane Longhurst’s death was presented as unusual. Yet the law has, for many years, excused men who kill their partners—some walking out of court with a suspended sentence after successfully pleading provocation (see McColgan, 2000). Femicide is far from uncommon and unusual, with statistics demonstrating that on average two women a week are killed by a partner or ex-partner (Povey, 2009: 21). Moreover asphyxiation or strangulation is the second most common method of killing women (Povey, 2009: 11). Thus to construct this murder, as tragic as it is, as an unusual event caused by the impact of extreme pornography is problematic, and its supposed remedy—censoring extreme pornography—will do little to prevent the deaths of women in domestic settings.” See Anna Carline, “Criminal Justice, Extreme Pornography and Prostitution: Protecting Women or Promoting Morality?,” *Sexualities* 14, no. 3 (2011): 318.

¹¹See for example Martin Barker, *A Haunt of Fears: The Strange History of the British Horror Comics Campaign* (London: Pluto, 1984); *The Video Nasties: Freedom and Censorship in the Media*, edited by Martin Barker (London: Pluto, 1984); Martin Barker and Kate Brooks, *Knowing Audiences: Judge Dredd, Its Friends, Fans, and Foes* (Luton: University of Luton Press, 1998); Martin Barker, Jane Arthurs, and Ramaswami Harindranat, *The Crash Controversy: Censorship Campaigns and Film Reception* (London: Wallflower Press, 2001); *Ill effects: The Media/Violence Debate*, edited by Martin Barker and Julian Petley (London: Routledge, 2002); and Henry Jenkins, “The War Between Effects and Meaning: Rethinking the Video Game Violence Debate,” in *Digital Generations*, edited by David Buckingham, et al. (London: Routledge, 2006): 19–31.

¹²Tania Branigan, “Violent Porn Ban ‘A Memorial to My Daughter’: Bereaved Mother Welcomes New Law,” *Guardian*, August 31, 2006, accessed December 2, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2006/aug/31/humanrights.ukcrime>.

decades ago as the “Hezekial” impulse, wherein campaigners feel a necessity to “blow the trumpet of doom” to ensure that no one is unaware of the threat about to befall society.¹³ Suffice to say that campaigners made extensive use of hyperbole in their claims about the nature and content of the material, bringing the hideous object into view through forms of *description*; as the dread of such imagery operates best if the majority have not and cannot see it, campaigners worked to render extreme pornography *unseeable*.¹⁴ This is a connected but perhaps more complex set of actions than the “contradictory gesture” which Linda Williams has described as “the very quintessence of on/scenity” whereby campaigners bring to attention material they define as obscenity to keep it off scene.¹⁵

This sleight of hand was apparent in the government’s Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA), which claimed that pornographic imagery is so problematic to even describe individual images was likely to render the work of the commissioned academic researchers “unscientific,” hence:

Direct quotes of...explicit descriptions [from the studies included] have not been repeated in this report because the nature of the material was “too extreme.” Instead, it has been described in more neutral terms. This has been done to avoid the risk that these descriptions would function as extreme pornographic material for the reader, producing sexual arousal and orgasm to material that depicts or enacts serious sexual violence, explicit serious violence in a sexual context, or explicit intercourse or oral sex with an animal (bestiality).¹⁶

In the official documentation then, pornography (of all kinds) was supposedly so “powerful” that even legislators, researchers, and other interested readers must be protected from themselves. Such framing re-energized the widespread suggestion that to even *engage on any level* with material designated as “extreme” by MPs, campaigners, and news media outlets was to lay oneself open to the possibility of

¹³Bill Thompson, *Soft Core: Moral Crusades Against Pornography in Britain and America* (London: Continuum, 1994).

¹⁴See Steve Jones, “Dying to be Seen: Snuff-Fiction’s Problematic Fantasies of ‘Reality,’” *Scope* 19 (2011). See also Misha Kavka’s contribution to this volume.

¹⁵Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the “Frenzy of the Visible”* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999): 288.

¹⁶Catherine Itzin, Ann R. Taket, and Liz Kelly, *The Evidence of Harm to Adults Relating to Exposure to Extreme Pornographic Material: A Rapid Evidence Assessment* (London: Ministry of Justice, 2007): 4. The very notion of a rapid evidence assessment is strange—actually, rapidity is the last thing needed right now; rather, some self-critical thinking about the state and status of evidence and understanding is essential. Specific problems with the REA are explored in Attwood and Smith, “Extreme Concern.”

copy-cat behaviors or, for those such as Conservative Peer Lord Hunt who spoke for the provisions, the likelihood of becoming very ill:

I actually felt very sick [seeing the images], because they were pretty disgusting images, and I frankly find it horrific that they are available and that people can see them. I am sorry, but I do not take this very liberal approach of “if it does no harm to the people taking part, why should we worry about it?” I do worry about it, and about the access that people have to that kind of disgusting material.¹⁷

According to proponents of the law, “extreme” material was, in itself, so powerful that it was too risky to allow the *sight* of fantasy scenarios:

... we should err on the side of caution. The stakes are too high: violent sexual crime committed against a person leaves serious harm and widespread distribution of extreme pornography creates a real risk (even though impossible to quantify) of such harm.¹⁸

At the same time, the British public was invited to respond as “ordinary people” to the horrors of this material—to recognize its inherent dreadfulness and to trust in its categorizations by the “experts” in favor of legislation. Writing in the academic *Journal of Information, Law and Technology*, Julia Hornle had no qualms in admitting her understanding of extreme pornography was based on assumption and trust:

Most ordinary people (including the author!) regard extreme pornography as disgusting and extremely offensive. Although *I have not conducted empirical research into this area, I assume that* many examples of extreme pornography depict violence by men against women in a sexual setting and if the new provisions contribute to preventing the social acceptability of such material, this *seems* an important step to protect the bodily integrity and dignity of women (or indeed other subjects of extreme pornography).¹⁹

¹⁷Lord Hunt of Kings Heath in House of Lords, reported in Hansard (HL Deb, April 21, 2008, c1357).

¹⁸Julia Hornle, “Countering the Dangers of Online Pornography-Shrewd Regulation of Lewd Content?” *European Journal of Law and Technology* 2, no. 1 (2011): 10.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 8, emphasis added. The significance of this studied ignorance is amplified when one realises that Hornle is also a member of the board of ATVOD, the body given delegated powers from OfCom to govern video on demand services in the UK and which has been given powers, introduced in the Audiovisual Media Services Regulations 2014, to prohibit content that is refused a classification by the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) on UK VOD services.

Such approving commentary seems to suggest that the legislation was intended to ensure that those appearing in pornographic imagery were not harmed in the production of it. In fact, such protection was *not* a primary issue for members of parliament or the upper house—as Lord Hunt clarified during the debate in the House of Lords:

We are targeting that material not on account of offences which may or may not have been committed in the production of the material, but because the material itself, which depicts extreme violence and often appears to be nonconsensual, is to be deplored.²⁰

As often happens when legislation arises out of emotive events and media outcry, considered contemplation of the evidence was jettisoned in favor of an insistence on consensus. Dissent was characterized as the selfish protection of personal interests: highly individual interests pitted against the harms being perpetrated on women as a class, and with the potential to cause further damage to the nation's children. The climate of consensus was made possible by commentators doing their utmost to condemn any interest in “this extremely nasty pornography that in no circumstances could be counted as art”²¹ as sick, pathological, dangerous, and the material itself as without ambiguity, straightforwardly expressing an interest in committing murder or violence against women. When such claims were met with counter-argument (about recognizing individual privacy, pornography as representation and not “acts of violence,” and the likelihood of consensual activities being caught under the purview of the law), proponents returned to “common sense.” In the last moments of the debate, Lord Hunt played his trump card: “it is plain common sense that when people continuously use some of these revolting images it has an impact on their behaviour.”²²

Extremity

The legacy of snuff is visible in these debates because, as Downing suggests, it “marks the nexus of a set of cultural fears and fascinations that cluster around fantasies about extremity, the exceeding of limits, and the exercise of violent power in the service of eroticism.”²³ Much has been written on the burgeoning

²⁰Lord Hunt of Kings Heath in House of Lords reported in Hansard (HL Deb, April 21, 2008, c1358).

²¹Hunt, Hansard (HL Deb, April 21, 2008, c1358).

²²Hunt, Hansard (HL Deb, April 21, 2008, c1361).

²³Lisa Downing, “Stuff and Nonsense: The Discursive Life of a Phantasmatic Archive,” in *Porn Archives*, edited by Tim Dean, Steven Ruszczycky, and David Squires. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015): 249.

of “extreme” texts in recent years and their rearticulation of the divide between obscene and on/scene. Images and practices previously associated with porn and obscenity have become recategorized as chic, cool (or indeed as unremarkable), while others are relegated to the realm of the taboo. The complaints about the Obscene Publications Act and its lack of fitness for the twenty-first century have some purchase when we note that “extreme explicitness of representation”²⁴ is no longer the measure of obscenity; instead, perversity is the particular issue. Linda Williams has argued that in the US, the prosecution of sex crimes has “moved away from the notion of explicit sex and towards the targeting of scapegoat-able ‘deviants,’”²⁵ and that sexual representations and villainous others “take their place as convenient objects of blame” for a variety of social ills.²⁶ We can understand this culture of blame through the concept of the “sex panic,” a scholarly paradigm for the extreme emotional reactions accompanying incidents involving sex. It builds on the notion that reactions such as “fear, anxiety, anger, hatred, and disgust” over sex have considerable force because they are conventional in a particular time and place.²⁷ Sex panics participate in a wider “politics of fear,” as they draw from and impact other areas of social life that are infused by fear.²⁸ We can see this in the UK where “child pornography” has come to stand in for the material abuse of children and concerns about violence are displaced onto consensual sex practices such as BDSM, onto the figure of “a homosexual sadomasochist stalking defenceless children,”²⁹ and onto extreme porn. As Lancaster has argued sex panics “give rise to bloated imaginings of risk, inflated conceptions of harm, and loose definitions of sex.”³⁰

Elements of these “bloated imaginings” can be seen in the responses to contemporary European art-house cinema, whose images of sex and violence are both graphic and seemingly intentionally confrontational,³¹ to the subgenre of torture porn and its spectacles of pain and terror³² and to the “shock” videos, which circulate on the internet as forms of twenty-first century *Grand Guignol*

²⁴Linda Williams, “Pornographies On/Scene, or Diff’rent Strokes for Diff’rent Folks,” in *Sex Exposed: Sexuality and the Pornography Debate*, edited by Lynn Segal and Mary McIntosh (New York: Rutgers University Press, 1992): 233.

²⁵Linda Williams, “Second Thoughts on *Hard Core*: American Obscenity Law and the Scapegoating of Deviance,” in *More Dirty Looks: Gender, Pornography and Power*, edited by Pamela Church Gibson (London: BFI, 2004): 166.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 170.

²⁷Janice M. Irvine, “Transient Feelings: Sex Panics and the Politics of Emotions,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 14, no. 1 (2008): 1–40.

²⁸Roger N. Lancaster, *Sex Panic and the Punitive State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

²⁹Williams, “Second Thoughts on *Hard Core*,” 170.

³⁰Lancaster, *Sex Panic and the Punitive State*, 2.

³¹*The New Extremism in Cinema: From France to Europe*, edited by Tanya Horeck and Tina Kendall (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011).

³²Steve Jones, *Torture Porn: Popular Horror After Saw* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

“self-scaring.”³³ As Feona Attwood notes, institutional responses to such imagery have expressed worries that culture is increasingly “*cruel* . . . a set of concerns which draw on familiar notions of media effects and the obscene [in which] media [are] immersive and contagious.”³⁴

In the drama of extreme porn, there is a collapse of anxieties about the growing sexualization and mediatization of society, exhibiting fears of a broader “turn to the extreme” across a range of cultural forms and about an appetite for graphic spectacles of the body.³⁵ This turn to the extreme is apparent, not only in porn, horror, or reality TV, but in scenes of “opening up” the body in television drama and documentary, and the portrayal of torture and terror in both fictional and factual media.³⁶ Such images are linked through their interest in extreme states—sexual or otherwise—and the strong reactions they evoke. In both instances, the body’s unruliness or its vulnerability are key. As Dean Lockwood notes, what the kinds of concern around extreme media highlight is the work of horror and porn as “body genres,”³⁷ presenting and provoking sensation and affect. In the current climate, both register as extreme and unruly.

The problem of course is that all pornography raises the problematic relation between representation and practice, performance and life, seen and concealed, fake and authentic, documentary and fiction, fantasy and reality. As long as the fantasies represented are “acceptable” and fit within the sanctioned boundaries of human sexual practice, pornography can be tolerated. As always, the problem lies with the fantasies that are more ambivalent, those which bring to the fore embodied performances, which bring the questions: How can those people do *that*? How can people *like* that? What on earth might these interests mean?

The Prosecution: R v Webster

The original indictment included more than 1,000 still images—a collection of around 80 photosets each comprising between 20 and 90 individual images telling a variety of stories with titles such as *Slave in a Cave*, *The Breathless Jogger*, *Going All The Way*, and *Security Breach*. The entire set was most probably purchased together from an online

³³Julia Kennedy and Clarissa Smith, “His Soul Shatters at About 0: 23: Spankwire, Self-Scaring and Hyberbolic Shock,” in *Controversial Images: Media Representations on the Edge*, edited by Feona Attwood, Vincent Campbell, I.Q. Hunter, and Sharon Lockyear (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013): 239.

³⁴Feona Attwood, “Immersion: ‘Extreme’ Texts, Animated Bodies and the Media,” *Media, Culture & Society* 36, no. 8 (2014): 1187.

³⁵Dean Lockwood, “All Stripped Down: The Spectacle of ‘Torture Porn,’” *Popular Communication* 7, no. 1 (2009): 40–48.

³⁶Steve Jones and Sharif Mowlabocus, “Hard Times and Rough Rides: The Legal and Ethical Impossibilities of Researching ‘Shock’ Pornographies,” *Sexualities* 12, no. 5 (2009): 613–28.

³⁷Linda Williams, “Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess,” *Film Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (1991): 2–13.

repository called the Progressive Art Project for a total of \$39.95;³⁸ at the time of the prosecution, individual photosets were also available from a number of websites located in the states including Sleepyrealm.com and some of its subsidiary sites such as Battlingbabes.com and Hypnobabes.com. All of the photosets on the indictment were credited to Drop Dead Gorgeous (DDG), a company which has specialized in highly stylized representations of women in various states of peril, often termed “dead-skirts,” “necro-porn,” or less pejoratively as “damsel in distress.” The Progressive Art Project’s collections of photosets were advertised as “photo-plays” alongside a disclaimer that the materials depicted fantasies, employed models conforming to USC2557 provisions,³⁹ and that no one was harmed in their production.

In the prosecution case, individual images were isolated from their “published” groups (as I have had to do to illustrate this chapter): the prosecution’s motive in singling out images reflects the tendency in academic and other discussions of porn to suggest that “the meanings of pornography” can be deduced from a single image, or indeed, from no image at all!⁴⁰ The images in *R v Webster* were not offered for sale as single “pin-ups” but in individual sets constructing narratives, with the protagonists being shown from different angles, often with a focus on the face, on the hands, and on the sexual organs. Thus, although they are still photographs, in *sets*, they offer storied movement and pace. Indeed, most of the images on the indictment could only be read as pornographic if they were seen as a set—on their own, many of the images are simply of women posing in nondescript rooms, or close-ups of a woman appearing to scream. Taken together as sets, there is an eroticised narrative but equally, taken together as sets, the artifice of the *mise-en-scène* and performance is clear, thus undermining the contention that the photos *realistically* depict injury.

Indeed, DDG favored a particular style of presentation and aesthetic sensibilities: highly colored, highly styled, and high camp.⁴¹ The majority of the photosets in the case featured Nikki Steele; Lissa Noble also featured in three of the sets and was credited as the main photographer for DDG.⁴² Noble’s work and DDG’s output are

³⁸DDG’s images had all been available on Necrobabes where they were available to purchase as individual sets, when that site was closed, the images were hosted at the Progressive Art Project and made available in lots of three or four sets or as the entire collection.

³⁹In the United States Code of Regulations, under title Title 18, Section 2257, no performers under the age of 18 can be employed by adult industry production companies. As part of the enforcement of the age restriction, all adult industry production companies are required to have a Custodian of Records that documents and holds records of the ages of all performers and must post a statement on all publications to the effect that their performers are all of age.

⁴⁰See discussion in Chuck Kleinhans, “Introduction: Prior Constraints,” *Cinema Journal* 46, no. 4 (2007): 96–101.

⁴¹Information gleaned from numerous websources—many of them members-only sites, I am not including the names of these sites in order to preserve the anonymity of individual posters.

⁴²Female performers are named in the blurb for the photosets. In the majority of cases males are not, except by first names—which may or may not be their actual or stage names.

described as “a throwback to porn past” on websites discussing different kinds of fetish material—specifically, the company offers an old-fashioned aesthetic which eschews “realism” and goes for an excessive and expressive artifice, even frivolous, play-acting. The particular pleasures of the images are partly dependent upon their parody of mainstream pornography alongside their depiction of the “damsel in distress” as a melodramatic character-type.





For example, in one set entitled *Bagging a Nurse*, Nikki Steele is photographed entering a room dressed in satin-look nurse's uniform. Sitting on a sofa, Nikki takes up a book and begins to read: the scenario is established as a nurse's workday break. As she reads, a man wearing a white mask pops up from behind the sofa. Nikki does not see him. The man then suffocates her with a plastic bag and through the following sixty or so images pulls the bag over her head, moves her around the room, onto a coffee table and onto the floor. She appears to die.

In this photoset, the scene is connected to mainstream pornography through the choice of vertiginous high heels, exaggerated make-up, and the satin nurses outfit which might be considered as trashily "sexy." All of these elements can be considered iconic of pornography but they have no place in a "realistic" portrayal of a nurse's staffroom break. The stereotypically saucy clothing combines with the elements of melodrama in the original "damsel in distress" narrative, to effectively parody both genres; if the "victim" is supposed to be sweet and innocent, why is she wearing such overtly sexualized clothing?⁴³ The scene also

⁴³To avoid any confusion, I am referencing the generic conventions of damsel in distress narratives, *not* victim blaming.

plays with the conventions of the horror film, with the male model dressed as the serial killer Michael Myers from the long-running and widely popular *Halloween* franchise (1978–2009). Both outfits would be recognizable to any viewer with even a passing familiarity with popular culture and are clearly cheap and cheerful joke shop purchases. Again, it is possible to read this as an ironic reference to the low production values and tawdry cliché of much mainstream porn production.

Interestingly, none of the 1000-plus images featured any actual sexual congress, no penises in orifices (in fact, no penises in sight at all), or any overtly or specifically sexual moves (where body parts were revealed this can be read as resulting from the photographed “struggle”). If we agree that most pornography inevitably features sexual congress as its main narrative element then the narrative progression here, where murder is the goal rather than sex, creates an ironic juxtaposition of cheeky sexiness and grotesque horror. I am not suggesting that the primary response to these images is to see them as a joke but that, coupled with the other parodic elements, the images have a playful intention. That humorous intent is reinforced by the fact that the nurse is reading a book by Iyanla Vanzant entitled *Don't Give It Away!*; if the double entendre is not clear, the book's subtitle—*A Workbook of Self-Awareness and Self-Affirmations for Young Women*—is clearly being sent up as the young woman reading it is totally unaware of the man emerging from behind the sofa to attack her.⁴⁴

Furthermore, the images are saturated in exaggeration—the poses, the facial expressions, the moves are all given excessive emphasis in ways reminiscent of mainstream porn's expressions of pleasure but also of camp-styles of horror acting and excess. As Attwood commented in her evidence to the Court, the images are very similar to stills from high camp “Hammer Horror” films a la *The Vampire Lovers* (1970, UK, dir. Roy Ward Baker) and *Lust for a Vampire* (1971, UK, dir. Jimmy Sangster).⁴⁵ While the female body *is* displayed for maximum visibility (so there is an appeal to sexual interest), the facial expressions are also significant for their appeal to a melodramatic sensibility. Taken together—the posing and the expressions—these conventions actually emphasize the pretense at the heart of the images. As was argued in court, these are important stylistic conventions which are part of DDG's “damsel in distress” narrative and which contribute to the constant fracturing of any stable notion of the ontological *real* in these images. Hence, these are not images of “the real,” or of a “real death,” or a “real murder.”

⁴⁴Iyanla Vanzant, *Don't Give It Away!: A Workbook of Self-Awareness and Self-Affirmations for Young Women* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999).

⁴⁵See, for instance, Peter Hutchings, *Hammer and Beyond: The British Horror Film* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993).

The photo-story *Bagging a Nurse* entails viewers recognizing and perhaps assessing Nikki Steele's ability to represent and perform feeling, physical and emotional effort, fear and humiliation, horror and surprise. Surprise and hyperbolic horror do seem to be a significant factor in these images. In Set 5, *Security Breach*, the almost identical *mise-en-scène* and posing is repeated again and again as Steele is shown being stabbed in the stomach by the man: the knife is pushed into her stomach up to the hilt, while Steele mugs her way through various poses, presenting her body as she stumbles back onto the furniture, slumps down the wardrobe, slides to the floor. Her wide-eyed expressions and grimaces convey none of the realistic pain and terror one might expect from a professional actress but that seems to be precisely the appeal: there is exaggeration and excessive demonstration of the same horrible moment over and over again. At the same time I think it is important to recognize that these images have none of the stylizing of "cruelty" others have explored in torture porn or extreme cinema⁴⁶—in their brightness and their absolute stageyness, they draw attention to a particular kind of pro-am production.⁴⁷

DDG is a recognized brand in this field of porn production (albeit a small niche market), yet the production values in these images are fairly basic. For more than twenty years, it has been possible to produce professional-looking images and film on not much more than a domestic camera. Indeed, domestic digital video cameras have even enabled the development of particular forms of *vérité* filmmaking, notably in genres such as horror (as other essays in this volume attest). Thus, it is rather remarkable that these images do not attempt any verisimilitude; the lighting is bright (almost clinical in the instance of the *Bath Toy* set), suggesting that *visibility* is key here rather than attempting to make the images appear as contemporaneous records or documents of an actual murder.

The make-up and blood are amusingly amateurish, and obviously so. For example, in image 10,044 (part of *The Park Bench Ripper* set), the camera focuses on Nikki's face and neck showing the "wound" after her throat has been cut. The "special effect" consists of a straight line clearly marked in purple with some red paint around it. No attempt has been made to render torn flesh or a gaping wound, in spite of the wide availability of such make-up on the high street. I was intrigued to find on a fan-site that it is precisely this amateurism that is prized by fans of

⁴⁶See Jones, *Torture Porn*. See also William Brown, "Violence in Extreme Cinema and the Ethics of Spectatorship," *Projections* 7, no.1 (2013): 25–42.

⁴⁷For a discussion of the various conventions of amateur and pro/am pornographies see Federico Zecca, "Porn Sweet Home: A Survey of Amateur Pornography," in *Porn After Porn: Contemporary Alternative Pornographies (Cinema Mapping Pornographies)*, edited by Enrico Biasin, Giovanna Maina, and Federico Zecca (Udine: Mimesis Press, 2014).

these productions. Fan commentary on these sites draw attention to an original etymology of “amateur” as someone who does something for the love of it and was posted in reference to Lissa Noble. Here then, amateurism is a marker of belonging





FIGURES 4.1–4.4 *Baggage: A Nurse* (Drop Dead Gorgeous).

to a community of sexually like-minded individuals in which productions are collaborative⁴⁸ and authentic.⁴⁹

Given that this *is* a professional production, I am not suggesting that these images are simply badly made. On the contrary, there are clearly aesthetic choices being made here and they demonstrate that there is a high level of ironic knowingness in the production of these images and the parodic elements of each of the undercut photosets, both the representation of the murder and the sexualized form of it. Therefore, the “amateurism” and its associated lack of realism is a key

⁴⁸DDG productions were often bespoke—made in response to a request (and payment) from a community insider.

⁴⁹On alt pornographies see Clarissa Smith, “It’s Important That You Don’t Smell a Suit on It: Aesthetics of Alt Porn,” in *Porn After Porn: Contemporary Alternative Pornographies (Cinema Mapping Pornographies)*, edited by Enrico Biasin, Giovanna Maina, and Federico Zecca (Udine: Mimesis Press, 2014).

component of the aesthetic conventions and pleasures for knowledgeable viewers of these images.

Furthermore, none of the easily achieved bodily “special effects” such as beads of sweat, or tears are used—throughout the various attacks the models’ make-up remains in place, hair hardly mussed up, clothes awry but not torn, extremely long fingernails remain intact and the “murderer” shows very little sign of effort on his part, apart from the theatrically gritted teeth. Thus, all the scenes stress their construction as precisely role-play, refusing documentary, or even more basic styles of indexical realism.

Of course, many feminist writers have argued that the point is the symbolic violence done to women in this kind of imagery, that it is not important whether or not the images are in themselves *realistic*, but that they conform to a particular way of thinking about the female body as inviting violence, an idea suggested by Jane Caputi in *Age of the Sex Crime*:

Amidst the incomprehensibility of the horror itself is yet another incomprehensible factor. There seems to be no sure way to discern on film what is a faked murder and what is a real one, which is a “symbolic annihilation” and which is an actual one. Here, the characteristic messages of the unreality of sexual violence and the insignificance/unreality of women fuse purely with the properties of the medium, as the camera itself works to confound the eye. This truly is phallic glamour.⁵⁰

Such a description of the camera’s power to confound the eye suggests a remarkably pessimistic understanding of media literacies. So too, the invocation of the “unreality” of sexual violence toward women and women’s “insignificance” refuses to acknowledge the very complex relations between fantasy and reality at work in media, including pornographic, representations.

Playing dead

Media studies’ research into audiences has demonstrated the fallacy of the “average viewer,” but if such a group did exist, I suggest they would be unlikely to interpret the images in the photoset *Mistress Blade* as a document of an actual murder. In this set of photographs, Paige Sommers is stabbed in the right breast by Lissa Noble, who chokes Sommers with her left hand. Sommers’ mouth is open as if screaming and Noble gives a sideways look to the camera. The image is extremely

⁵⁰Jane Caputi, *The Age of Sex Crime* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1987): 168–69.

camp: Noble is dressed in what can only be described as a dominatrix uniform of leather bustier, cap and long black gloves. Her glance to camera (complete with quirked eyebrow) is exaggerated and pantomimeish betraying that the scene is posed. Again, as with all the images in the indictment, there was no attempt to make the images in this set appear real: the knife is clearly a stage property; there are no signs of actual exertion on the part of either model and no indication of involuntary physical reactions to being stabbed or strangled.

Commentaries on the fan site, *Femme Fatalities* (Bluestone's erotic death fetish community website) suggest that Nikki Steele's reputation is secured as someone who is "great at *playing* dead" which would imply that those in the know absolutely understand that she has not been murdered to make a set of images. Added to this, the fact that Steele's output is cataloged on websites under her name, therefore, she clearly cannot be being killed in every one of the twenty or so photosets she stars in. From my own viewing and from research I conducted on various fan-sites and discussion boards, the fantasy on offer is not simply the murder *per se* but the process of loss of control on the part of the victim. Hence, the establishing shots of the victim being taken-unawares (*Bagging A Nurse*); the false sense of security of the victim: she thinks she is consenting to the SM scene (*Mistress Blade*) or she's enjoying a drink with a man (*Going All The Way*) but then the mood changes. The ensuing pictures illustrate the female protagonist's awareness of the fact of being duped, and then of the utter powerlessness of her situation. This seems to be an important pleasure for fans posting on fan-sites. The photosets need to appear "credible" but not "real": so her facial expressions need to express her horror and fear but no suffering. As one poster to a fan-site put it, "the woman being raped has to look credibly helpless ... but I have no interest in seeing scenes where someone might actually be suffering." And another, "There's a huge difference between movies that are made with the intention to appeal to those of us who like rape and torture, and movies that are made to show us how bad that is in real life."⁵¹

Indeed, if it looks "real" then it precisely fails in its eroticism. What this seems to suggest is that for those who are interested in these rape fantasies, or these necro sites, there is an understanding of the differences in modalities and representations of rape and/or torture which the legislation is ill-equipped to comprehend. It is important to recognize that the meanings of representations of death or murder have multiple valances, which the legislation also refused to acknowledge. In that refusal of the diverse and possible attractions of viewing death, the legislation (and proponents of it) also elides the historical antecedents of "death fetish" imagery. As Elizabeth Bronfen has demonstrated, eighteenth century romantic approaches to death in literature and art, posed death as "a moment of beauty ... a

⁵¹Citations are not given here, to protect the anonymity of posters to the site.

transformation ... to be yearned for with an erotic ache, and, in this sense, to be understood as the beginning or continuation of a narrative.”⁵² The eroticization of the death bed is a considerable symbolic pleasure in gothic, romantic, and sensation fictions,⁵³ however, modernizing and civilizing impulses during the Victorian era saw the eclipse but not complete disappearance, of such “gothic relish” for death, and it is still very visible in horror narratives and other forms of contemporary popular media. Thus, despite the steer for consensus around the exceptionality and “vileness” of “extreme pornography” outlined in earlier sections of this chapter, interests in eroticized images of “death” are neither new, nor without complexity.

“Disturbances of genre and category”⁵⁴

As was reported to MPs and Lords at the time of the Act’s passing through both Houses of Parliament, the original clause on realistic portrayals was confusing, badly conceived, and seemingly ignorant of the vast array of audience research into viewers’ complex negotiations and sense making of the relationships between fantasy and reality in, among other media forms, reality television, television drama, documentary, novels, children’s cartoons, action films, fantasy films, historical event films, and pornography.⁵⁵ Despite the many criticisms of the wording relating to “realism” and “appears to be real,” the amended form of words that made it into the Act was also drafted without any due regard to the research into modalities of reality.

For legislators and other commentators on the legislation, all this was lost in their disapproval for the fantasy of sexualized murder. Indeed, it is that linkage of sex and death that was particularly disturbing as if the breach of generic boundaries was a new phenomenon. The emotive mode used by prolegislation campaigners and by prosecutors draws on an established discourse in which “pornography” has been used, not to describe a media genre, but is employed as a figure of speech for texts which enact violence against women, showing them “... tied up, stretched, hanged, fucked, gang-banged, whipped, beaten and begging for more.”⁵⁶ A view expressed in the Rapid Evidence Assessment is that pornography

⁵²Deborah Lutz, “The Dead Still Among Us: Victorian Secular Relics, Hair Jewelry, and Death Culture,” *Victorian Literature and Culture* 39, no. 1 (2011): 130.

⁵³Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992).

⁵⁴Attwood, “Immersion,” 1192.

⁵⁵Clarissa Smith et al., “Memorandum Submitted by Dr Clarissa Smith et al (CJ&I 341),” 2006, accessed June 8, 2015, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200607/cmpublic/criminal/memos/ucm34102.html>.

⁵⁶Andrea Dworkin, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (London: Women’s Press, 1979/1999): 201.

“corrupts... desire” by fusing arousal and orgasm with violence, objectification, and degradation.⁵⁷ The impulse to separate off forms of amusement and to maintain strict boundaries between types of representation is not actually new. That kind of delineation began to occur in the late nineteenth century as part of regulation of leisure sites into particular kinds of licensed spaces, and the general disparagement of “uncivilized” entertainments. Contemporary classificatory agencies such as the British Board of Film Classification perform their duties with regard to possible “effects” on likely viewers, seeming most worried by materials that blur generic boundaries. For example, material that is “likely to encourage an interest in sexually abusive activity” is singled out for cuts to receive a certificate.⁵⁸ The guidelines also seek to classify harm as “includ[ing] not just any harm that may result from the behaviour of potential viewers, but also any moral harm that may be caused by, for example, desensitising a potential viewer to the effects of violence and reinforcing unhealthy fantasies.”⁵⁹ Other statements from the BBFC have indicated worries about “‘graphic rape or torture,’ ‘sadistic violence or terrorization’ and ‘sex accompanied by non-consensual pain, injury or humiliation’”—these may appear entirely reasonable given that the discursive construction of extreme porn, in Parliament and associated press reports, rendered any possibility of being aroused by this stuff abnormal and that all “right-thinking” viewers would recognise that fantasies of rape were surely unhealthy. But as has been argued in relation to the controversy over David Cronenberg’s *Crash* (1996), “very often the ‘meanings’ discovered are not those experienced (enjoyed, absorbed) by the analyst, but are ones attributed as possible ‘effects’ on others.”⁶⁰ Moreover, the refusal to recognize the common heritage behind many kinds of popular entertainment, and not just in their capacities to “move the body,”⁶¹ is part and parcel of worrying about “illicit” pleasures dating back to the *Grand Guignol* and earlier. Such worrying is intensely political, as Johnson notes:

In arguing for the criminalization of individual possession on the basis of claims about the protection of social morality, section 63 places the law firmly in the difficult terrain of regulating the private sexual life of individuals in relation to ideas about a common or shared morality.⁶²

⁵⁷Itzin et al., *The Evidence of Harm to Adults*, 37.

⁵⁸British Board of Film Classification, *BBFC Guidelines: Age Ratings You Trust* (2014): 24, accessed June 8, 2015, http://www.bbfc.co.uk/sites/default/files/attachments/BBFC%20Classification%20Guidelines%202014_5.pdf.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 3.

⁶⁰Barker et al., *The Crash Controversy*, 150.

⁶¹Williams, “Film Bodies.”

⁶²Paul Johnson, “Law, Morality and Disgust: The Regulation of ‘Extreme Pornography’ in England and Wales,” *Social & Legal Studies* 19, no. 2 (2010): 151.

The Court in Stafford required that expert evidence explore the textual formations of the images charged under the Act and allowed space for examination which moved beyond literal or ideological readings. Although the Court was interested in facts, there was space to introduce the possibilities for understanding the indicted material, and pornography in general, as material and embodied, producing affect, intensities of experience, bodily sensations, and sensory responses. In cross-examination, it was possible to suggest that the specific aesthetics, acts, and performances had particular resonances, which could not simply be read off the surface of the images as either positive or negative.⁶³

Even so, in the R v Webster trial, prosecuting counsel Darron Whitehead was not willing to let go of the possibility that the images are harmful. In his closing speech, Whitehead said:

We know the images were fake, we know it isn't a knife in someone's breast. The question is whether it is realistic or portrayed in that way. You have to be satisfied the people in those images are real. Plainly they are. The intentions of the persons within those images, the actors and actresses, are irrelevant. It is what is depicted in those images which is material.

Why is there a need for this new legislation? There is a need to regulate images portraying sexual violence, to safeguard the decency of society, and to protect women.⁶⁴

For all the talk about “realism” in these images, what really haunts legislation, prosecutions, and popular discourse alike is the idea of arousal, the pleasure, and the horror of being *aroused* by death, of having sexual fantasies about death. Even those who would want to reject the normative critique of regulation find themselves in difficult waters when genres are conflated. In his exploration of the BBFC's refusal in 2008 to give a classification to Rob Rotten's *The Texas Vibrator Massacre* (thereby rendering its distribution in the UK illegal), Thomas Joseph Watson concludes that “the film offers very little in the way of comic respite”⁶⁵ as if

⁶³Some might suggest that it is perfectly reasonable to test these issues in the Courts however in practice this means that an accused can be subjected to the considerable stress of a lengthy prosecution process—up to a year awaiting trial, considerable expense, the loss of employment, estrangement from family and friends—only to be acquitted because their specifically *sexual* interests in the images were not proven. There are significant costs to the public purse in prosecutions but more than that are the costs to individuals, as I write, one former defendant, Andrew Holland has launched a human rights challenge to the CJIA's Extreme Porn provisions. For details, see http://obscentylawyer.blogspot.it/2014_10_01_archive.html (accessed June 8, 2015).

⁶⁴Quoted in Staffordshire Newsletter, “Man, 47, Denies ‘Fake Images’ Porn Charges,” January 6, 2011, accessed December 2, 2014, <http://www.staffordshirenewsletter.co.uk/Man-47-deniesfake-images-porn-charges/story-20152291-detail/story.html>.

⁶⁵Thomas Joseph Watson, “There's Something Rotten in the State of Texas: Genre, Adaptation and *The Texas Vibrator Massacre*,” *Journal of Adaptation in Film and Performance* 6, no. 3 (2013): 397.

humor could rescue the film, or would remove the ambiguities of its conflation of genres, and its potentials for horrific and sexual affect. While Watson's argument referenced the BBFC's justification of its rejection of *The Texas Vibrator Massacre* on the basis of the film's "tone," it succumbs to what I see as the (understandable, but too often cowardly) reluctance of media scholars to grasp the nettle of problematic audience pleasures except where those pleasures can be accommodated through recourse to claims of artistic intent, irony, or humor.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have considered the legislative and judicial contexts in which so-called "extreme porn" has been discussed in the UK, with a specific focus on those instances where sexual violence is depicted and in which linkages are made between sex and death, and where "death" itself is eroticized. At the time of writing, the "extreme porn" provisions have been augmented by legislation outlawing possession of rape imagery in the UK. These new regulations, written into the Criminal Justice and Courts Act, came into force in 2015. Rape and "sexual violence" constitute a significant part of the phenomenon of "mainstream extreme cinema" and understanding audience engagements with and pleasures in these is a fraught and risky business. As is evidenced in the BBFC guidelines, the very idea of viewing sexual violence carries with it a host of perceived worries, in particular, that depictions of rape or "sexual murder" may cause sexual arousal—any depiction judged likely to arouse viewers, and especially male ones, is regarded as *per se* dangerous. There is, however, a powerful discourse of "redemption" for risky sexual representations (especially in "art house" cinema), whereby critics and regulatory bodies, such as the BBFC, redefine unusual, and/or dangerous images as "unerotic" to make them "safe," as in films such as *Baise Moi* (dir. Virginie Despentes, Coralie, 2000) or *Irreversible* (dir. Gaspar Noe, 2002). To admit that such films featuring violence *are also* sexually arousing is to attach a strong trace of danger to them, because within much public discourse arousal is seen as basic, compulsive, overriding, and therefore, likely to give rise to antisocial/copy-cat behaviors. While such films are the subject of much controversy, they ultimately circulate in a context of "art cinema," whereby assertions of serious (creative and/or political) intent recuperate their shocking and problematic depictions of rape and sexual violence.

Such redemptive readings are rarely accorded to avowedly pornographic materials—certainly not to the kinds of productions discussed here. The all-too-ready dismissal of pornography as a "functional" media means that its "purposes" are always already suspect and hence tend inexorably to "harm and deprave," contributing to (if not, in some accounts, causing) the "eroticization of violence" against women in the wider culture. Often the problem lies not in

individual instances of pornographic production themselves but in the conception of the “uses” to which porn might be put by particular groups. Martin Barker has suggested that institutionally funded research, at least in the UK, has played a significant role “in the construction of what I have come to call ‘figures of the audience,’ and that others have called ‘audience myths,’ or ‘audience presumptions.’ These are, in brief, culturally produced and -circulating claims about the nature of ‘dangerous social groups.’”⁶⁶

The model of pornography (always a singular entity), which underpinned the introduction of the “extreme porn” provisions and the forthcoming “rape porn” provisions, is a relic of the inchoate, but nevertheless influential, characterizations of snuff as the nadir of modern media. The repeated claims in the calls for legislation—that explicit sexual scenes containing any element of “violence” necessarily endorse or encourage violence against women—work with a formulation of explicit scenes as “unnecessary” elements in any representation. That construction can only work if coupled with a formulation of audiences as always and already “dangerous” by dint of their potential interests in the explicit, as Martin Salter MP suggested:

No-one is stopping people doing weird stuff to each other but they would be strongly advised not to put it on the internet. At the end of the day it is all too easy for this stuff to trigger an unbalanced mind. These snuff movies and other stuff are seriously disturbing. Many police officers who have to view it as part of their job have to undergo psychological counseling.⁶⁷

In this, I think it is imperative that media researchers must take a hard look at some of their own assumptions—the refusal of senior media academics to protest against the proposals in 2007 and again in 2013/2014 demonstrates a failure to stand by the evidence of a vast research tradition that rejects the putative figures of the “vulnerable audience.” The legislation against “dangerous” desires and fantasies is not equipped to understand the very representations it seeks to criminalize. As I hope I have demonstrated here, representations of “sexual violence” have their own generic specificities—well-recognized by those who engage with them—their eroticized “violence” is more complex than simple endorsement of “rape” or “strangulation.” And yet...

It is relatively simple to point out the stupidities of the legislation on a case by case basis—given access to some of the images prosecuted in the Webster trial,

⁶⁶Martin Barker, “‘Knowledge-U-Like’: The BBFC and Its Research,” in *Controversies: Histories and Debates in Film Controversy*, edited by Julian Petley and Stevie Simkin (Basingstoke: BFI/Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming).

⁶⁷Salter quoted in Chris Summers, “‘Extreme’ Porn Proposals Spark Row,” *BBC News*, July 4, 2007, accessed June 20, 2009, available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/6237226.stm>.

most readers of this chapter will congratulate themselves that they too would see the idiocy of the prosecution, indeed, may laugh at the ridiculousness of the images and exclaim how could these have been taken to Court? And yet ... I have to ask the questions, where were you when the legislation was being proposed, when the call went out for signatories to contribute alternative positions to the consultation process? Where are you when the cases are reported in the press? How often do you dismiss such things as *just* another moral panic?⁶⁸ ... But good for you if you see the stupidity in *this* case!

The usual oppositions of “real” versus “fantasy” prove themselves useless in understanding the meanings, the appeals, and the modalities of response to imagery like *Bagging a Nurse*, or indeed any of the media forms which have been likened, over the last forty years, to snuff. Media scholars have yet to formulate an alternative language for talking about “dangerous” narratives which absolutely do not fall back on that simple division. I have one place of agreement with would-be censors—that it is not good enough for *any* media scholar to suggest that what is on-screen (TV, cinema, or computer) or on the page “is *only* fantasy!” As if that simple statement explained anything! This book is about the cultural legacies of snuff. How amazing might it be if we went beyond noting the resilience of campaigns for prohibition to begin the difficult work of presenting an alternative, evidenced and robust position, to their cultural illiteracies?

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⁶⁸Of course, it is much more than that for those individuals whose lives are turned upside down by a prosecution. See reportage following the Simon Walsh (R v Walsh, 2012) trial for detail, but bear in mind that he was a man with powerful friends and a professional career he could resume. Others have not been so fortunate.