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## PORNOGRAPHIC ART

“**P**ORNOGRAPHIC ART” is an oxymoron. At best, pornographic representations can only be bad art and, at worst, they cannot be art at all. This is the received view.<sup>1</sup> But what underwrites such aesthetic contempt? There are three distinct lines of thought typically held to warrant the apparent truism. Purely definitional considerations are often cited as showing that pornography, as a matter of principle, cannot be artistically valuable. The purpose of sexual arousal is sometimes adduced as rendering the production of pornographic representations artistically indifferent. It is also suggested, albeit far less often, that though we may appreciate a work both as art and as pornography, we cannot do so at one and the same time, i.e. we cannot appreciate a work as pornographic art. I will show that not only is the received view without warrant but, moreover, there are works which are valuable as pornographic art.

### I

The dismissal of pornographic art by definitional fiat runs as follows. Pornographic representations are characterized as having the sole aim of eliciting sexual arousal. By contrast, although erotic representations might have this aim, they can also have other aims, including artistic ones. Hence, an erotic representation can qualify as art in virtue of its possession of, and possible realization of, artistic intent, but a pornographic representation can never be art, or be valuable as such, since by definition such a representation does not possess artistic intent.<sup>2</sup>

But what reason do we have to grant this characterization? Pornography essentially involves the explicit representation of sexual behavior

and attributes. Naturally this is insufficient to constitute pornography since anatomical drawings or medical textbooks may be sexually explicit without being pornographic. Pornography as such seeks, via the explicit representation of sexual behavior and attributes, to elicit sexual arousal or desire. How does the pornographic stand in relation to the erotic? The erotic clearly need not involve sexual explicitness. Corregio's *Io*, Degas's portraits of ballet dancers, Robert Mapplethorpe's flower studies, for example, are devoid of sexual explicitness and yet they successfully solicit sensuous thoughts, feelings and associations which are or may be arousing. The erotic essentially aims at eliciting sexual thoughts, feelings, and associations found to be arousing. Thus there are many things which are erotic but not pornographic—such as a representation of someone suggestively eating strawberries—but things which are pornographic are also erotic. Pornography is a subspecies of the erotic or erotica—it seeks to realize the aim internal to all that is erotic, but via the distinctive means of sexually explicit representation, which many other erotic representations do not utilize.

Of course a work whose primary aim, as an erotic representation, is sexual arousal may also have other aims, including artistic ones. An artist may intend to produce a work which is sexually arousing and, moreover, intend to do so in such a way that the artistry deployed conveys a certain view, cognitive-affective state, or attitude regarding what is depicted or the nature of the arousal elicited. This statement is no different in principle from the recognition that Eisenstein can intend and successfully produce a work that aims both to be propaganda and artistically valuable. Indeed a work produced solely in order to be sexually arousing, without any artistic intention, may yet artfully suggest an insight, view or attitude towards what is represented. Similarly, we recognize that someone may intentionally produce a religious icon with the sole intent of evoking religious devotion, and yet produce at the same time an icon of artistic worth.

Now, in terms of definitional characterization alone, we have no reason to suppose that, as a matter of principle, what is possible with respect to the erotic generally is precluded with respect to a particular subcategory of the erotic—namely the pornographic. What we require is a reason which explains why the pornographic may be inimical to the realization of artistic value. The possibility of pornographic art cannot be ruled out by definitional fiat.

Carving out the difference between the pornographic and other forms of the erotic in terms of sole and multiple intent may gain some

of its force from the kinds of representations adduced as paradigmatic. There are many representations we would consider to be both paradigmatically erotic and of high artistic value—for example, certain works by Klimt, Degas, Gill, Rodin, Canova, Tintoretto, Goya, Ingres, some of Shakespeare's sonnets, Ovid's *The Art of Seduction*, Scheherezade's *Tales of 1001 Arabian Nights*, or Buñuel's *Belle de Jour*, to name but a few. By contrast, if we think of paradigmatic pornographic representations, from late Victorian flick books to magazines such as *Hustler*, there seems to be no artistic intent or merit of any kind.

Yet, as with many apparently natural contrasts, this approach cannot do the work in sustaining the definitional distinction. It is obviously true that most pornographic representations possess no artistic intent or merit. But the same is true with respect to most representational forms generally. Most pictures in card shops, most novels in run-of-the-mill bookshops and many soap operas and films similarly possess little by way of artistic intent or merit. We do not take this as evidence that visual depiction, novels or films cannot possess artistic intent or merit. Indeed, in particular genres the ratio seems exceedingly high—photographic portraiture, romance, fantasy, or science fiction novels, for example, all seem predominated by formulaic, flat, and artistically uninteresting works. But this does not preclude some such instances from possessing artistic intent or of being of high value as art. Moreover, in certain genres, such as pulp fiction, much of the early work possessed little artistic intent or merit and only as the genre evolved did the first novels and films of artistic interest start to emerge.<sup>3</sup>

Even were one to grant that there are no pornographic works of artistic interest as yet, it remains an open matter as to whether this is due to the nature and limitations inherent in pornography, or if this is a contingent fact due to certain historical and sociocultural factors. It could be that, since pornography has been held to be deeply immoral, obscene and subject to stringent censorship, those who possess artistic talent are yet to exercise it in relation to pornographic subject matter. We would not really expect spivs looking to make money illicitly from pornography to concern themselves with artistic considerations. This might explain why pornography has not evolved in a manner amenable to artistic considerations, whereas other genres which emerged from the unpromising beginnings of pulp fiction, such as Westerns, adventure stories, and detective thrillers, have. Furthermore, it is far from obvious that there are no artistically valuable pornographic representations. In literature, Nicholson Baker's *Vox*, Georges Bataille's *Story of the*

*Eye*, the *Kama Sutra*, and, in visual art, some of the later work of Picasso, the Egon Schiele portraits, the work of Hokusai and Utamaro, or certain *Kama Sutra* illustrations, to name but a few, all seem to conform to the characterization of pornography and yet apparently possess both artistic intent and no little merit. Indeed, the sexual candor of much ancient Greek, Greco-Roman, Roman, and medieval Indian art may suggest that the paucity of art works in Christian influenced civilization which are sexually explicit and which solicit arousal is an anomaly rather than the norm. Now it could be that we are mistaken in thinking such works really are pornographic or possess much by way of artistic intent or merit. But the onus is on someone who would claim that our pre-reflective judgments here are in error.

## II

The definitional move does not stand up to scrutiny. The primary purpose of a representation as pornography does not preclude it from possessing other aims—including artistic ones. But a related thought, which I shall term the problem of purposiveness, is often cited as showing that pornography is inimical to the realization of artistic value. In essence, the sexual explicitness, and the inherently formulaic and fantastical nature of pornography, in the service of arousal, are taken to preclude artistic expressivity and significance.<sup>4</sup>

The claim has some initial plausibility. The more explicit the detail about the nature, size, and state of physiological arousal of the sexual organs, the greater the emphasis on showing the mechanics of sex, and the more our attention is drawn to signs of sexual attraction and desire, the more leaden, flat, tedious and uninteresting a representation seems to become. For the greater the explicit concentration on the physiological, biological, and more generally animalistic aspects of sexual behavior, the fewer the expressive possibilities apparently are. Hence, it is thought, sexual explicitness in the service of arousal cannot convey the states of mind, responses, and attitudes of characters, the nature of their actions (as distinct from behavior) or, thus, any perspective of interest the implied author may have upon what is represented.

On this view, a pornographic representation will have formulaic markers for certain states, characters, and situations but these are merely signaled in a minimal short hand manner rather than drawn out in any complex and interesting way—in order to make room for as much sexual explicitness as possible. So one is told that sexual

antagonism exists, that a character is in a state of desire, suffering or ecstasy, without one's being imaginatively engaged in any way. Hence pornography naturally converges on the most caricatured, simplistic, one-dimensional representations of characters, situations, and states of affairs. Thus pornography drives out the possibility of artistic expression. Furthermore, for this very reason, pornography is fantastical. When we talk about great art we not only focus on the unity, complexity, or intensity of its expressive aspects but, moreover, the ways in which what is expressed may be insightful or true to life. Yet pornography can bear no significant relation to reality. For the characters are mere ciphers, stereotypical substitutes, precluding any need on our part to imagine in any depth their feelings, beliefs, and attitudes. Similarly, the plots, such as they are in narrative pornography, remain ludicrous caricatures of implausible situations, presented as if they were ordinary, everyday occurrences. Thus, it is claimed, the artistic expressivity and content of pornographic works will naturally yield poor results when subjected to the kind of evaluations appropriate to a work as art.

But why should we grant that sexual explicitness in the service of arousal cannot be expressive? Explicitness as such cannot be the problem. Lucian Freud's often highly explicit portraits of his nude subjects are highly expressive—the way the mottled flesh tones, contrasting textures of different parts of the body and differing proportions are conveyed prescribes a fascination with and understanding of what it is to apprehend another just as a body. Presumably the thought is that Freud as an artist has a choice as to whether or not to be explicit. Only if there is a horizon of possible choices available to a maker can his choice of what to represent and the level of detail at which he chooses to represent it become significant. And in the case of pornography, there is no such choice. But, although in pornography there is no choice about whether or not to be sexually explicit in the service of arousal, it does not follow that there are no choices available which may be expressively significant. Choices remain concerning how explicit the representation might be and explicit with respect to what. More significantly there are multifarious choices concerning how the explicitness may be treated and conveyed. A host of possibilities remain, such as which act is being represented, the angle of portrayal, the perspective used, which if any character's viewpoint is privileged, the kind of lighting evoked, what responses are portrayed, how the bodily movements are represented (for example, whether they are aggressive or serene) what the facial expressions are, what parts are in or out of focus

or what coloration is used. In principle, these possibilities could all be put to expressive use in an artistically interesting and significant manner. Different choices with respect to these features—even if features of the very same act—may prescribe very different ways in which we are to imagine and understand what is being represented and how one is supposed to find it arousing. Hence sexual explicitness even in the service of arousal does not in principle preclude expressivity.

Consider an analogy. For a representation to constitute an icon the image must be a depiction, in the service of religious devotion, of a saint or personage as holy. Thus the representational content is strictly circumscribed. But which saint, how detailed the portrayal, and how the saint may be treated and conveyed leaves a wealth of choices open to the maker which can be put to expressive use. Many religious icons that serve the primary purpose of cultivating religious devotion are not of much artistic interest or value. Nonetheless some are, and this is precisely because, even within the limits of content imposed by the primary purpose and means of portrayal, there are choices to be made which can be used in an artistic and expressive manner. Similarly the content of pornography is tightly circumscribed—it must be sexually explicit and represent what it is explicit about as arousing. But, in principle at least, how and in what way this may be done affords a host of possibilities which could be put to expressive use. That pornography, as such, must be explicit with respect to sexual acts does not, as yet, afford any reason to suppose that pornography cannot, as a matter of principle, be artistically valuable.

Still, the problem of purposiveness suggested that what renders the sexual explicitness and representational content of pornography artistically mute is its inherently formulaic nature. The same kind of stock roles, sexual acts, and one-dimensional narratives crop up in pornographic representations time after time. This is no coincidence but a function of the primary goal of pornography—the elicitation of sexual arousal. For all features of the representation, from the crude sexual explicitness to the one-dimensional stock roles of characters, the hackneyed development of plot and trite narrative structure, are mere instruments in the service of the pornographic goal.

It should be conceded that the formulaic nature of most pornography is artistically indifferent. But it cannot be the formulaicness, as such, of pornography which determines its aesthetic impoverishment. First, most but not all pornographic representations are formulaic in the way described. Consider the sexual writings of Anaïs Nin. Much

narrative pornography conforms to formulaic elements: the descriptions proffered are schematic, the characters sketched are caricatured types, and the chronology of sexual activity is of little interest. In the writing of Nin, by contrast, there is a strong emphasis on sensuous evocation, the particularity and peculiarity of specific characters, a train of events which has a certain emotional interest. Nin's sexual explicitness is represented in the service of arousal but, contrary to the formulaic nature of most pornography, it is simultaneously done in the service of highlighting her active consciousness and desires, her differing responses to certain sensations, particular people, and distinct situations.

Second, even where a pornographic representation is formulaic this does not preclude it from realizing additional aspects of expressivity or originality. Consider, for example, many of Rodin's pornographic nude drawings, such as *Naked Woman Reclining with Legs Apart, Hands on Her Sex* or *Naked Woman with Legs Apart*, his many drawings of lesbians and female nudes masturbating, and his drawings that accompanied Octave Mirabeau's pornographic novel *Le Jardin des supplices*. They are formulaic in virtue of explicitly representing female models singly or otherwise in various standard sexual poses and acts. But they are delineated via Rodin's newly developing method of "instantaneous drawing." Unlike standard academic drawing of the time Rodin started from mere contour heightened by wash, drawing from the model's unstable pose without taking his eyes off her, resulting in many correction lines, heightening the sense of movement or animation. An additional effect of such incisive contour drawing, through foregrounding mass and volume with minimal shading, is to convey a sense of the subject's individuality rather than conformity to classical type. The manner of representation Rodin developed in his line drawing was far from formulaic and served not only to convey but to solicit sexual arousal from the viewer as one attends to these features. The explicit focus on the models' genitals, sexual acts, and sensuous stimulation is enhanced by Rodin's emphasis on the sense of movement and rotation of the body. In such drawings we have an emphasis on compositional and design elements, some of which are a striking deviation from classical nude studies, in order to evoke sexual stimulation by sexually explicit means—evoking sensuousness, fascination, and arousal. The important point here is that the specifically artistically innovative developments in Rodin's line drawing enabled him to characterize the lines of action, sexual embraces, and actions in a more athletic, impulsive, vigorous manner which enhances the evocation of sexual arousal. It is perhaps



no surprise that Rodin's sexual drawings were in great demand when compared to the formal, static and, by comparison, somewhat languid sexual fare that preceded him.

Lastly, generally speaking, being formulaic as such need not be an artistically bad-making feature. Consider Westerns. To qualify as a Western, for example, a narrative must conform to at least some of a cluster of standard features—set in eighteenth- to nineteenth-century North America, foreground the threat of violence from external lawless groups or individuals, identify a solitary hero, and so on. But such formulae need not be artistically impoverishing and may be an artistic boon if used imaginatively. John Ford's *The Searchers*, for example, has nearly all the formulaic features of a standard Western, including a confrontational contrast between the homesteading defenseless community of families and a lawless external world. Yet, in how this contrast is conveyed—for example via shots of the family, eyes shaded against the sun, waiting on the porch for a glimpse of the rider returning from war—Ford elicits a sense of human sentiment doggedly living on in hope against a hostile world. The compositional beauty of the landscape shots, small figures framed against epic landscapes, the outline of a rider against the horizon, are used to enhance our sense of small men struggling against a harsh, indifferent and threatening country. Such conventional elements are used imaginatively in order to convey and deepen our sense of a theme central to many Westerns—the importance and fragility of human affection faced with a harsh, violent, blood-soaked world. In this light, consider some of the prints from the Japanese Ukiyo-e school by artists such as Hokusai and Utamaro depicting, among other scenes, prostitutes, bath-house girls, couples, and even women with animals in varying degrees of sexual explicitness. Hokusai's *Awabi Fisherwoman and Octopus*, 1820–1830, is incredibly explicit in its sexual detail, conveying both the ferociousness and submission of self in sexual arousal. The prone woman, head back in utter sexual absorption, is wrapped by the octopus tending to every orifice and area which heightens sexual arousal. The subjects of the Ukiyo-e school, their expressive pictorial structures, and use of flat decorative color in the compositions are formulaic. Nonetheless, the formulaic elements are artistically deployed in a manner that serves not only to convey but to solicit sexual arousal from the viewer as one attends to these features.

Yet the challenge from purposiveness remains. For, while it may be granted that neither sexual explicitness nor formulaicness, as such,

preclude artistic expressivity, at the same time it may be claimed that the formulaic elements specific to pornography are fantastical and thus preclude the realization of artistic value. The thin characterization, use of stereotypical roles and situations, instrumental plotting, explicit concentration on sexual acts and body parts are significant only in so far as they promote sexual arousal. In order to achieve this the formulaic elements serve as one-dimensional backdrops sufficient to engage sexual interest but thin enough to allow for viewer projection with regard to their sexual malleability and pliancy. Thus pornography's conventional elements are immune to constraints of plausibility, truth to life, or insight.<sup>5</sup>

But this really won't do. First, the formulaic elements, fantastical though they may be in order to elicit sexual arousal, needn't be artistically indifferent if used imaginatively. Second, their fantastical nature need not preclude a pornographic representation from being "true to life." Third, being "true to life" is only one criterion among many of artistic evaluation, and it is often wholly inappropriate.

Consider Gustav Klimt's erotic drawings. The female subjects are represented in poses where they are revealing, prostrating, offering or caressing themselves before the viewer. The sole concern is with the women subsumed in sexual arousal and enjoyment in such a way as to solicit arousal from the viewer. The scenes represented are formulaic—absorbed female masturbation, passionately or languidly embracing females, and the like. There is no context, background, or allusion to any further meaning or significance, just the isolated outlines of the figures with little by way of detailed modeling of their bodies. The subjects' passivity, provocativeness, or autonomy are represented solely in terms of sexuality—self-absorbed in the sexual act, eyes averted or appealing to the viewers gaze and so on. The sole focus of interest is on the sexual aspect of the female body, its sensual, aroused and arousing nature. But although the formulaic elements of pornography are manifest, in so far as sexual explicitness and the fantastical representation of women are used in the service of sexual arousal, nonetheless the works are artistic. Formal artistic techniques are deployed in a highly imaginative manner in order to emphasize explicitly sexual parts, features, actions, and states—including the use of extreme close-up views, foreshortening, exaggerated perspective, distortions of posture and proportion, shifts in framing, heightened contrasts between right angles and curves of the body. The effect not only is beautiful in terms of the grace of line drawing and structural composition, but serves to

draw attention to sexual features such as the genitals, breasts, buttocks, and open legs. Furthermore these formal artistic techniques are used to emphasize our awareness of the states of sexual absorption, sensual pleasure, or languid sexuality represented.

Of course the Klimt nude studies are inherently fantastical in so far as they portray rather idealized, blank and even somnambulant subjects, and our interest in them is directed entirely toward their sexual features and aspect. But when art works are dismissed as being merely fantastical this is because they are construed as essentially a flight away from reality—they remain unconstrained by considerations of believability, plausibility, or truth to life. But Klimt's explicit portraits of intimate sexual arousal do not obviously fail to be "true to life." As a study in sexual self-absorption, which, as it happens, is being represented in order to be arousing, the line drawings seem to capture certain kinds of sensual states rather well. They do so in virtue of Klimt's imaginative, artistic treatment of the sexually explicit, formulaic, and fantasy elements that constitute the pornographic. Thus, even if we granted that works should be evaluated in terms of whether they are true to life or not, it does not follow that pornographic works cannot constitute good art on these terms. Conversely, if we denied that Klimt's drawings were "true to life," in virtue of their fantastical nature, it still would not follow that they are not highly valuable as art. For "truth to life" is not the only criterion of artistic evaluation and, moreover, it is not always applicable. In evaluating artworks we apply a cluster of general criteria which concern the quality of the imaginative experience afforded. There are many kinds of representations where considerations of "truth to life" are not applicable at all. Much of the work of Edgar Allan Poe, Jorge Luis Borges, Odilon Redon, and M. C. Escher, as well as the fairy tales of the Brothers Grimm, to name but a few, represent fantastical worlds and events to us which have their own internal intelligibility. They afford striking, complex, and coherent imaginative experiences and are valued highly as art. But such works are not meant to stand in close relation to the actual world and are not concerned with prescribing any putative insight into how we actually are. Thus they should not be evaluated on such a basis. Where no significant relation is prescribed by the work with respect to how we should understand the world, the question of whether it is "true to life" or not does not arise and is thus irrelevant to the quality of the imaginative experience afforded.

The argument against pornographic art based on the problem of

purposiveness fails. Pornographic works can make imaginative use of non-standard and standard formulaic elements in order to be artistically expressive and thereby afford a qualitatively high imaginative experience. Pornographic purpose does not preclude meaningful artistic aims.

### III

The third challenge to the very idea of pornographic art I shall term the problem of appreciation. The core thought is that even though a pornographic work may be created with and realize artistic intentions, it cannot be appreciated as both art and pornography at one and the same time.<sup>6</sup> For, even granting that a pornographic work can be created with great artistic skill and expressivity, nonetheless its aesthetic aspect cannot be appreciated to the extent that it is received as pornography. A pornographic interest concerns attention to explicit body parts and behavior in the service of sexual arousal and satiation. To the extent such an interest is taken in a representation, it precludes attention to and the savoring of a work's aesthetic aspect. If a work is being read as literature, then our appreciation focuses upon, among other things, the peculiarities, fascination with and play of language, imagery, and structural composition. But where it is being used pornographically, the interest in such aesthetic features cannot but be minimal, if not downright absent—since attention focused on artistically expressive features distracts the attention away from explicit body parts and sexual behavior which serve to arouse.

The notions of pornographic interest and artistic appreciation need to be spelt out a little more fully. The standard view of pornography construes it as soliciting a certain kind of objectifying interest in those represented. As Nussbaum has argued, the notion of objectification is a multiply variegated concept involving, at least, notions of instrumentality, denial of autonomy, inertness, fungibility, violability, ownership, and denial of subjectivity.<sup>7</sup> Nussbaum herself notes that not all kinds of sexual objectification are necessarily problematic, but identifies the kind of objectification present in pornography to be the most vicious kind. She argues that pornography objectifies by precluding a person's subjectivity and autonomy in virtue of presenting women (and presumably men) as objects who are substitutable, subject to the control and desire of the reader or viewer, and whose experiences matter not at all. Similarly Scruton identifies the pornographic interest, as contrasted

with the erotic, in terms of objectifying another person through conceiving of them as reducible to their body, thus precluding their first-person perspective.<sup>8</sup> So a pornographic interest is held to be one which involves the objectification of a person's body, in the service of arousal, by denying or precluding their first-person perspective. Thus characterized it would seem as if a pornographic interest in something or someone is inimical to an interest in the expression of particular cognitive-affective states and first-person attitudes. There is a strong tradition, within both analytic aesthetics and Western culture more generally, which holds that significant or valuable art is concerned with the representation and appreciation, via artistically expressive means, of our cognitive-affective attitudes to and understanding of ourselves, others, and the world. Art, in this cognitivist conception, is held to deploy particularly sophisticated and powerful means of prescribing our imaginings, emotions, and attitudes in order to afford us deeper and richer understandings of what certain situations and characters would or could be like. Artworks are thus highly valued to the extent that, through artistic means, they vivify, deepen, or even modify our understanding of ourselves, others, and the world. Hence, we tend to evaluate works in terms of their insight into the human condition, the interesting or complex ways in which they may expand or deepen our imaginative horizons or the ways in which the world may be viewed. But to appreciate something pornographically is, on the characterization proffered, necessarily to be uninterested in the first-person perspective of the subject represented, the subject's particular cognitive-affective states and attitudes. Hence, to appreciate something as pornography is inimical to its appreciation as art.

But the problem of appreciation relies on a mischaracterization of the nature of a pornographic interest. Once we see how this is so, it can be shown how certain works not only can be but are only properly appreciable as pornographic art.

Note, first, that there are many artistic works which solicit an interest which precludes the first-person perspective of the represented subject and yet are appreciable, on this basis, as art. Consider, for example, the literature of courtly love. The hero is represented as being in thrall to the all-consuming god of love and worships the saint-like object of his devotions. The literature's idealization of physical passion shares with Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* an emphasis on the exquisite delights and pains of being a slave to passion—the sighing, trembling, pale demeanor, sleeplessness, the suspense between happiness and despair, and the

contemplation of the idealized object of desire. Common to Ovid, the twelfth-century troubadour poetry of Bernard de Ventadour, Chrétien de Troyes's *Lancelot*, Froissert's *L'Horloge Amoureux* and his chivalrous romance *Méliador*, Francesco Petrararch's *Sonnets to Laura* and the thirteenth-century allegorical poem *Roman de la Rose* are representations of the female as an object of passion to be possessed, and her autonomy and subjectivity, except in relation to the aspiring male's desire, is precluded. A similar preclusion of the represented subject's first-person perspective is manifest in much visual art from Correggio, Rubens, the Pre-Raphaelites, Rodin, Eric Gill, the nudes of Courbet and Renoir through to the more recent work of Robert Mapplethorpe. It might be objected that, in at least some of these cases, the preclusion of the first-person perspective is not concomitant with a focused attention on body parts in the service of arousal. But consider Correggio's *Jupiter and Antiope*, Gervex's *Rolla*, Courbet's *Le Sommeil*, or much of the work of Eric Gill. All depict explicit nudes where the subject's consciousness is entirely precluded, in virtue of sleeping, and the viewer's attention is directed toward the subject's body parts in order to solicit an objectifying interest which gives rise to sensuous thoughts and arousal. Our attention is drawn to the tones and contours of flesh, and the sexual parts are framed by the structural composition of the works. The eyes are closed and the subjects clearly asleep so our attention is solicited with respect only to the physical nature of their bodies. Yet we would not be tempted to say that we cannot appreciate such works as art as we attend to them in the way prescribed.

Second, the characterization of a pornographic interest in terms of the preclusion of a subject's first-person perspective seems to mark out a kind of depersonalized interest. The assumption seems to be that we are uninterested in the subject, as a person, in whom we take a pornographic interest. Yet such interest, at least in many cases, seems to be essentially interested and personal. In order for sensuous thoughts and arousal to arise, far from being uninterested, we must usually be interested in the subject in some way. Consider the way much narrative pornography seems to work. The reader or viewer is not straightaway presented with nude bodies and sexual acts. Rather, characters are presented in some semblance of a situation and, albeit usually very crudely, a narrative develops, leading into sexual arousal and satiation. Now the stock roles and crude dialogue and paraphernalia enable the audience to make believe that their imaginings concern particular people with certain states, dispositions, and character traits. This is

essential in order to be interested in the (usually fictional) character as a person. If the characters represented were straight away represented in graphic sexual activity from start to finish, then it would be harder to take up a pornographic interest in them. In such a case, it would be easier to see them just as bodies or as we might view animals copulating, which constitutes a depersonalized interest but certainly not one likely to be found arousing. Indeed, many paradigmatic pornographic representations concentrate on the first-person perspective of those in whom one is prescribed to take up a pornographic interest. For, in order to elicit sexual arousal from the reader or viewer, our attention is directed toward what the characters putatively believe, desire, and feel. Now, the first-person interest and overarching narrative in most pornography is of little interest as such. But the point is, it need not be.

Consider Nicholson Baker's *Vox* in this regard. At one level the novel follows a pornographic formula—the novel introduces characters on a telephone sex line; they are somewhat coy, abashed, and the conversation banal. We are then led into their exchange of sexual fantasies and exploits, which are themselves of a fairly standard pornographic sort, in a familiar pattern of scenario set-up: sexual suspense followed by explicitly detailed consummation. It is not merely a novel about sexual arousal but seeks itself to be arousing in virtue of the way the conversation and fantasies are represented. Nonetheless there is much more to the novel than this. As one of the two characters tails off in relating a scene, the other person takes it up, modifying and developing it in a way the other person had perhaps not intended. The structure thus not only conveys a sense of the reciprocal nature of elaborating sexual fantasies, the nature and word play of seduction and sexual arousal, but brings out a kind of sexually competitive edge between the two characters. How will they manage to keep each other on the line when one could hang up at any moment? In so doing, Baker also plays with the peculiarities and oddities of language that the characters have, and the way they attempt to use it in relation to an apparently overly familiar and banal subject—the pornographic. In the novel's concern with the peculiarities and fascination of language, in its expressivity regarding the sexually mundane and explicit, the arousal both portrayed and solicited from the reader is symbiotically enhanced by the literary features of the work. It is a novel which aims to be and is only properly appreciable as pornographic art.

1. See, for example, Anthony Burgess, "What is Pornography?" and George Steiner, "Night Words: High Pornography and Human Privacy," in Douglas A. Hughes, ed., *Perspectives on Pornography* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1970); Joel Feinberg, *Offense to Others* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), chap. 11; Jerrold Levinson, "Erotic Art," in Edward Craig, ed., *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 406–9.
2. See Levinson, "Erotic Art." It should be noted, in addition, that Levinson characterizes pornography as essentially degrading to women, in terms of violence, domination or humiliation, whereas he does not see the erotic as thus characterized. This is either too narrow a characterization of pornography or it stretches the sense of terms like *violence* beyond meaningful limits.
3. This point is made and expanded upon by Susan Sontag in her excellent essay, "The Pornographic Imagination," included in her *Styles of Radical Will* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1969).
4. Burgess, Steiner, and Feinberg, note 1 above.
5. See Roger Scruton, "Fantasy, Imagination and the Screen," in his *The Aesthetic Understanding* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1983) and his *Sexual Desire* (Manchester: Phoenix, 1994), p. 318.
6. This is the view articulated by Kenneth Clark in his testimony to Lord Longford's committee on pornography as represented in *Pornography: The Longford Report* (London: Coronet, 1972), pp. 99–100, and is perhaps implicit in some remarks made by Levinson's, "Erotic Art."
7. Martha C. Nussbaum, "Objectification," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 24 (1995): 249–91.
8. Roger Scruton, *Sexual Desire* (Manchester: Phoenix, 1994), pp. 138–39.