A year after the publication of the first anthology of philosophical essays on art and pornography, Hans Maes’ second collection presents a somewhat different approach to the same topic. Some of the essays continue the philosophical themes discussed before: can a single work be at the same time pornography and art? How should pornography be defined and what are its distinctive features? Is pornography immoral? But the larger part of the book explores more specific issues. Discussed are particular examples of pornographic works of high aesthetic value, artworks inspired by pornography and sex, explicit art from Ancient Rome and Mediaeval Spain, differences between mainstream, feminist and gay pornography, social attitudes to pornography and explicit art, etc. The authors come from diverse backgrounds: philosophers, artists, gallery curators, pornographers and art historians. Here lies the greatest strength of Pornographic Art: it gives voice to a variety of writers who approach pornography and pornographic art from multiple viewpoints.

Maes’ two books complement each other: where Art and Pornography presented in-depth analyses of specific issues and focused on detailed arguments, Pornographic Art offers a broad and varied set of approaches and case studies which provide a body of evidence needed to support or falsify philosophical theories. This latter approach has been badly needed, making the book a long overdue and highly significant addition to the debate. To quote from David Bennet’s chapter, ‘aesthetic philosophers’ discussions of the art/pornography relationship often seem historically uninformed and politically naive – forgetful [that] the concepts of art and pornography have become thick with the grime of numerous, disparate, ideological, commercial, political and legal uses since they were first constructed as opposites in the Enlightenment’ (p. 183-4). Pornographic Art brings all those issues to the stage.

The book is neatly divided into five parts of three chapters each. The first part addresses the exclusive division between art and pornography. Mari Mikkola argues against such exclusivism, using Amie Thomasson’s work on artefactual kinds. She argues that there exists an in-between

category of porno-art, to which objects belong in virtue of being products of a ‘largely successful intention to create porno-art’ that requires the creators to ‘have a substantive concept of the nature of porno art (...) matching the substantive concept held by some group of prior porno-art makers’ and realise it ‘by imposing porno-art-relevant features on the object’ (p. 38). Stephanie Patridge takes a different approach: she argues that while there is no firm divide between art and pornography, we should maintain one for moral reasons. A person consuming typically inegalitarian pornography (or erotica, for that matter) ‘is guilty of a kind of moral obliviousness: he fails to see (...) that the meaning of this kind of imagery is partly determined by the context in which it is produced and consumed, namely, one in which the sexualisation of women has operated as a mechanism to undermine women’s autonomy and contribute to their oppression’ (pp. 53-54). Stephen Mumford agrees that there is no clear distinction between pornography, erotica, and art: what matters is how one views them, and one can view all of them pornographically, i.e. ‘sexually for the purposes of sexual excitement’ (p. 62). Incidentally, such viewing can put morality ‘on hold’.

Moral concerns are the focus of the second part of the book. Tzachi Zamir argues that pornography doesn’t involve acting, but merely ‘use of acting’ - this is meant to shed a new light on the exploitative, empowering or disempowering character of performing in a pornographic video. Shenyi Liao and Sara Protasi show that treating pornographic works as fictions can help us understand how some pornography can be responsible for the moral failings of its consumers. They stress that this influence is restricted to specific kinds of pornography – resigning of the un-nuanced universal quantifiers, they approach the phenomenon in all its complexity. Such detail is sadly missing in Edward Winters’ chapter, where he argues that all pornography belongs to the private, while all painting to the public realms. While the text discusses some interesting ideas, the evidence of the complexity and diversity of both art and pornography makes sweeping statements regarding the ‘nature’ and ‘aims’ of all art or all pornography seem too general.

The historical third part starts introducing a wider context. The chapters written by John R. Clarke and Stefan Trinks explore the differences and similarities between the Roman, Mediaeval and modern attitudes to explicit representations. As can be expected, in the pre-Christian Rome sex-themed paintings and sculptures were no big deal. Only in the 19th Century, as they were uncovered in sites such as Pompeii, were they deemed obscene and pornographic – ‘women, children and non-elite men were strictly barred from seeing’ them, lest their feeble minds become corrupted (p. 142). More surprisingly, some churches in Mediaeval Spain commissioned sexual representations to titillate and attract pilgrims – though most such works are far from arousing to a modern viewer unequipped with the cultural competence required to read them. This evidence can serve to support
Mumford’s, and possibly also Rea’s, reception-focused approaches to pornography, and undermine essentialist definitions: the same representations can be seen non-pornographically (by ancient Romans, people unfamiliar with Medieval iconography) or pornographically (by the 19th Century archaeologists, competent Medieval Christians). David Bennet concludes this part with an in-depth analysis of modern and postmodern attitudes to pornography, its recent rehabilitation in art and social sciences, and the consequences thereof. His nuanced account once again helps one appreciate the sheer variety of attitudes to the different kinds of representations, present in just the last few decades.

The last two parts explore the theory and practice of pornographic art. Through a detailed analysis of Wakefield Poole’s Boys in the Sand, Edward D. Miller explores the social and artistic value of the 1970’s gay porn. John Tercier draws parallels between porn and portrayals of death in the media and art. Analyses and descriptions of artworks inspired by sex and pornography follow: Kim Dhillon offers an account on Fiona Banner’s Arsewoman in Wonderland, while Michael Petry focuses on his own artistic practice exploring gay porn and sexuality. If the interpretations offered in these chapters are correct, it seems that the grey sphere between art and pornography might be quite substantial – and increasing in size. This suggestion is elaborated on further by Marina Wallace who was a curator of London’s Barbican exhibition Seduced: Art and Sex from Antiquity to Now. The stories of practical difficulties in reaching agreement over what is pornographic and what is acceptable for display, combined with historical accounts of similar past disagreements which arrived at rather different conclusions, further support the relativist or perceiver-dependant approaches to pornography.

The final chapter by Anna Arrowsmith presents the view of a pornographer, and challenges some popular assumptions. Arrowsmith created non-explicit pornography: through employing pornographic techniques and stylistic features, her work is (and is intended to be) arousing (to a specific kind of viewer, mostly women) despite the lack of sexual representations. She then explains why what has been criticised as ‘low production values’ of porn should be more appropriately called ‘genre-specific production values’ - while they might not make it good as art, they do make it good as pornography. Finally, Arrowsmith states that pornographers rarely actually aim at realism or transparency – instead most porn involves staged, conventional and idealised performance ‘meant to be more entertaining and arousing than perhaps people experience in their own lives’ (p. 296). In so far as philosophers are willing to take into account what artists intend, think or value about art, it would seem useful to hear to what pornographers intend, think or value about

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pornography.

Reading *Pornographic Art* makes one uncomfortably aware that analytic philosophy remains dominated by white heterosexual men. We would like to believe that our arguments are examples of purely rational thought which knows no gender or sexual orientation, but comparing previous discussions with chapters written by women and sexual minorities (and non-philosophers) places the reader in front of an uneasy realisation: not many philosophical arguments took into account the existence of pornography created by and for women or sexual minorities. On the contrary, many of them seem to either define or implicitly treat all of pornography, in a way which would apply more appropriately to the (admittedly largest) part created for the male gaze, i.e. for white heterosexual men. For example, arguments taking objectification or exploitation as necessary features of pornography leave out both gay and feminist porn which seem to avoid them; arguments which treat (aiming at) medium transparency as its distinctive feature forget that a fair amount of feminist porn or slash fiction (still mostly enjoyed by women) is opaque and relies on readers’ contextual knowledge. It is possible that some philosophical arguments work only because they ignore the works which are not created for the male gaze – thus marginalising the experiences and views of women and sexual minorities. In fact, the first two chapters, written by women, reject exclusivism partially because they are aware of works outside the mainstream created for the male gaze. It is a great achievement and success of Maes’ anthology that it gives voice to such authors.

I do not want to imply here that any particular philosophers are sexist or mean harm to women or sexual minorities. I suspect that any such omissions resulted from a limited experience with pornography, or the fact that despite the existence of other types of works, the great majority and the most obvious examples of porn are in fact created for the male gaze. The accounts given in this book offer a great way to make scholars aware of non-mainstream pornography and approaches to it, and can serve as healthy reminders that philosophers are not immune to the implicit biases which plague the rest of our society.

Most accounts presented in the book take a turn against essentialism and clear dichotomies. Can pornography be art or not? Is it morally bad or not? Is it public or private? Is pornographic acting real acting or not? Is the sex in porn real sex or not? The answer advocated by most authors seems to be: Some is, some isn’t. There are all sorts of porn and some of it fits into every category – quite similarly as with any cultural phenomena which developed historically. This may be of no surprise, but then it is hard not to agree with Arrowsmith who calls such questions ‘not very illuminating’ (p. 293).
But perhaps this comes down to the question of defining pornography. Two camps seem to have formed, one following essentialist or functionalist definitions, the other favouring relative or procedural approaches. Joining the former camp would allow one to resist much of the evidence provided in this book and maintain clear distinctions. If being explicit were necessary for pornography, then some of Arrowsmith’s works aren’t really pornography, and thus their artistic, aesthetic, moral, private, etc. character becomes irrelevant in this context. Or if being (successfully) intended to be arousing were a condition, some of Petry’s works, or works displayed at Wallace’s *Seduced* exhibition, could be porn rather than art. Or one could fit them in another category, be it erotic art, aesthetic pornography, or erotica. But the evidence of the diversity of objects produced as pornography presented in *Pornographic Art*, suggests that such attempts might come dangerously close to committing the ‘no true Scotsman’ fallacy. With this evidence, it seems that someone could simply re-write ‘The Role of Theory in Aesthetics’, substituting ‘porn’ wherever Weitz wrote ‘art’.

On the other hand, those favouring relative or procedural approaches might say that if something satisfies some cultural conventions, is made and consumed as porn, it is porn. Such a stance, often implicitly assumed by anti-exclusivists, would give justice to the diversity of pornography and could allow for contextual and historical changes in classification. Proceduralism might lack the explanatory power needed to justify the classification of particular objects, but perhaps Mikkola’s work on porn as an artefactual kind could be of help here. It would be useful to see more work done in this direction.

*Pornographic Art* is a valuable addition to the literature on pornography and aesthetics. Its main strength lies in providing diverse and nuanced accounts of works and attitudes outside of the mainstream, which the past discourse has often ignored. It is important that the future discussion on this topic takes such works and attitudes into account, and treats the phenomenon in all its real-world complexity. Maes’ anthology is a healthy reminder that we should move our armchairs closer to the window.

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