

Received: 30 November 2022 Accepted: 24 January 2023
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33182/agon.v17i1.3017>



Uses and Abuses of Modern Pornography: Pornography as Aesthetic, Ascetic, Anesthetic

Ben Muratovic¹

Abstract

*How should we evaluate the modern day use and abuse of pornography? Modern day video pornography has the hallmarks of film and cinema industry (lights, cameras, sets, actors, etc), but common sentiment is that it doesn't deserve the status of being called "Art". An exploitative media that gets a bad review may get labeled as "trauma" or "torture porn." Calling something pornographic indicates that the creators of a media had poor taste. In the section titled "On the Sublime ones" of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Z II), ² Nietzsche states "But all life is disputing of taste and tasting!" Nietzsche concerns over taste are directly related to his effort to maximize the role of aesthetic judgments in all parts of life. As the early Nietzsche states in the *Birth of Tragedy* (BT §5) "...the existence of the world is justified only as an aesthetic phenomenon." ³*

A Nietzschean investigation into the purpose of modern pornography requires a perspectivist and not a moral assessment. Kant's Critique of Judgement reflected on the topics of both aesthetics and teleology, suggesting the question of aesthetics must include a concern over purposiveness. Thus, what is the purpose of pornography? How does it juxtapose to the actual act of sex itself? To Erotic art? Is it akin to the violent Ancient Greek Doric Frieze? Lastly, in a civilization where pornography is of easy access to all, does this take away the prevalence of sex itself? This paper attempts a Nietzschean investigation on the subject and will touch on the themes of gender, domination, sublimation, and the consumption of media.

Keywords: *Nietzsche; Kant; Aesthetics; Pornography; Mass-consumption; Erotic Art; Sexuality; Ecology; Genealogy; sublimation*

Why Pornography?

Pornography marks the intersection between a fundamental human physiological phenomenon, sex, with another fundamental human adventure of reproducing images, words, and sounds that we enjoy. We normally refer to the latter as "art". Kant distinguished art from nature in that art is the result of human freedom of the will to make and produce intentional work, whereas nature only produces general effects (COJ 303). Kant further elaborates that Art also differs from other human endeavors such as

¹ Ben Muratovic, M.A. Candidate in Philosophy at the New School for Social Research, USA.
E-mail: Muratova@newschool.edu

² Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Translated by Adrian Del Caro, Cambridge University Press, 2006. Pp 91.

³ Nietzsche, Friedrich. "The Birth of Tragedy." *Basic writings of Nietzsche*, edited by Walter Kaufmann, New York: Modern Library, 1992, pp. 1-144. Pp 22.



handicraft. Pornography, etymologically translated as the writing about prostitutes,⁴ seems to be a craft that aims to produce arousal and an effect on the spectator. Kant may have called any form of erotic presentation that intended to elicit arousal as an example of agreeable art that merely aimed to appease the senses, and whose taste is akin to tasting food and communicating at a dinner party. Thus, Kant was more vested in what he called the fine arts to invoke “...the pleasure is not one enjoyment arising out of mere sensation but must be of reflection. Hence aesthetic art, as art, which is beautiful, is one having for its standard the reflective judgment and bodily sensation” (COJ 306).

However, Nietzsche on the other hand called into question this notion of a singular free will separated from the body. In *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche states that “...in every act of willing there is, to begin with, a plurality of feelings...” and that

...will is not just a complex of feeling and thinking; rather, it is fundamentally an affect: and specifically the affect of the command. What is called ‘freedom of the will’ is essentially the affect of superiority with respect to something that must obey: “I am free, ‘it’ must obey” (BGE 19)

Cheekily Nietzsche would end this aphorism with the play on the famous statement attributed to Louis the XIV, *L’etat c’est moi*, with *L’effet c’est moi*. Nietzsche’s understanding of the will is one where the dominant force of the body can command the other parts of the body. In *The Genealogy of Morals* man became calculable through a cruel process of collective punishment. Spectacles of punishments often coincided with the grandest of festivals (GM II 13). According to Daniel R. Rodríguez-Navaz, Nietzsche argues that we explore the “value of values” through 3 different perspectives: 1) psychological, 2) physiological 3) medical.⁵ Therefore, Nietzsche is redirecting us away from singular metaphysical interpretations when we engage with any branch of knowledge, including aesthetics. In the third treatise, he suggests there must be a “physiology of aesthetics” (GM III 18).

I propose that a Nietzschean assessment of pornography fits along with a project of understanding the physiology of aesthetics. In our modern world, we have access to digital technology that immediately captures, but can also deceptively alter, whatever is possible for us to directly experience. Thus, whenever we turn our recording devices to gaze at naked bodies, engaging in sexual play or not, we can immediately evaluate as spectators what effect this is having on us. Kant shuns bodily sensations, deeming them as being incapable of achieving the state of reflective judgment and instead aligns them with barbarism. According to Kant for us to truly evaluate the beautiful we must act according to “disinterestedness.” For instance, Kant says that if we see beautiful women, we can just tie it to the female figure (COJ 312). However, Nietzsche mocks Kant’s claim of disinterestedness (GM III 6). For Nietzsche, when we look at “robeless female statues”, we can’t ignore an erotic interest. Nietzsche says this claim to disinterest is really seeped with interest. Nietzsche uses Schopenhauer as an example. According to Nietzsche, Schopenhauer contemplated art to quell his despised sexual impulses. Therefore, Schopenhauer in his denial of sexuality, was engaging in an act of sublimation.

⁴ Hunt, Lynn. “Introduction: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity: 1500-1800.” *Invention of Pornography*. Edited by Lynn Hunt. Zone Books, New York, NY. 1993 pp 13

⁵ Rodríguez Navas, Daniel R. “Psychology, Physiology, Medicine: The Perspectivist Interpretation of Nietzsche’s Genealogy of Morality.” *Monist*. Volume 105. Issue 4. October 2022 Page 488.



Contemplation then is a form of sublimation. Therefore, when we gaze at pornography, what is the interest involved? And does it ever actually allow us to contemplate or evaluate the erotic? What is the role of taste in determining what is pornographic? Despite the plethora of availability, does pornography fundamentally misconstrue and flatten the role of the erotic in our life? To best evaluate these questions, I too will deploy a perspectivist method of engaging with the problem of pornography. The 3 perspectives I propose are 1) Aesthetic; 2) Ascetic; 3) Anesthetic. The First perspective explores the distinction between erotic art from pornography. The second engages how modern pornography is intertwined with the Ascetic Ideals that separated us from the earth. The Anesthetic perspective explores how pornography domesticates us and through it limits our ability to experience the erotic.

Pornographic Aesthetics

Calling a work pornographic robs it of potentially being called a work of art. Pornographic images are called obscene. Of course, what is viewed as pornographic in one cultural context is not necessarily the case in another cultural context, and in fact this idea of calling something pornographic can sneak in a moralistic judgment on an otherwise aesthetic work. In his earliest work, the *Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche is sensitive to the fact that it can be difficult for someone outside a particular culture to understand another culture, especially if they examine it through moral eyes. Nietzsche states that “whoever approaches these Olympians with another religion in their heart...” they will fundamentally be disappointed and misunderstand what is being conveyed by the Ancient Greeks (BT §3). If a modern were to come across the Doric Frieze that portrayed Amazonomachy we couldn’t help but notice the violent images of Greek males warring with Amazonian women. However, Nietzsche refers to Doric Art “... as the climax and aim to artistic principles” (BT §4). These 2 artistic principles, the Dionysian and the Apollonian, were constantly at war with each other to keep their sense of balance. Where the Dionysian represents the intoxicating orgiastic barbarism associated with the primal unity of the world and the Apollonian represents the process of ordering and individuating these elements. According to the Early Nietzsche, was necessary for the invention of tragic art. The function of tragic art was then to provide an aesthetic justification to the “horror of existence” (BT §3).

Today we might expect to see images of Ancient Greek art in some deemed modern sanitized setting such as a museum, a classroom, or in an art-history textbook. It’s not rare to come across nudity in ancient art. Even if we wouldn’t call the images displayed pornographic, we can admit to their violent and striking nature. To some extent we expect Art to often shock and introduce a rupture into how people normally think. At first the work of an artist might not even register as a piece of art. In *Daybreak* Nietzsche says this is not a rare phenomenon as he states:

What! Does one have to understand a work in precisely the way in which the age that produced it understood it? But one takes more pleasure in a work, is more astonished by it, and learns more from it, if one does not understand it in that way! Have you not noticed that every new good work is at its least valuable so long as it lies exposed to the damp air of its own age? - the reason being that there still adheres to it all too much of the odour of the market-place and of its

opponents and of the latest opinions and everything that changes from today to tomorrow. Later on it dries out, its 'timeboundness' expires - and only then does it acquire its deep lustre and pleasant odour and, if that is what it is seeking, its quiet eye of eternity. (D506)

There is a temporal and contemplative component for Art to stand the test of time. Art often engages in the process of challenging and seducing the expectations of the audience. Even landscape paintings that aim for realism still deal with illusions. They play with the spectator's capacities to receive information and to convince them of three dimensions when there are only two. Thus, Artists play with reality to an almost violent degree. In *Nietzsche's Aesthetic Turn*, James Winchester points out that in the *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche claims that Artists conduct raids on reality. It is comparable to a "rape", where they "...force the objects to correspond to their ideals".⁶ Artists are idealists because "...they enrich the objects of their attention out of their own inner richness". In *Words in Blood*, Babette Babich Nietzsche's artist who finds "joy of destruction" is a "...consonance of [Rainer Maria] Rilke's terror that is the meaning of beauty as violence..."⁷ Can we ever say then beauty or art is disinterested or moral?

Nietzsche begins the third treatise of the *Genealogy of Morals* discussing the types of humans who engage with Aesthetics. Nietzsche contrasts Kant's position of a disinterested spectator with Stendhal's statement that what beauty offers the spectator is a *une promesse de bonheur* (GM III 6). This follows the prior treatise where Nietzsche states that his Genealogy unveiled nature's self-assigned task of breeding "...an animal that is permitted to promise" (GM II 1). The capacity to make promises allows human beings to exhibit a sense of mastery across a lapse of time despite an uncertain fate that lies between the respective actions of making and fulfilling a promise (GM II 2). Thus, the idea that beauty or a work of art would make a promise of happiness, reveals the interest it provides to both spectator and artist. In comparison, what pornography seems to promise is immediate arousal. The end-result may be pleasurable but it's questionable to say it achieves a state of happiness. Nietzsche's notion of happiness (or perhaps more appropriately, self-satisfaction) is not that of mere utilitarian or calculable value. As Nehamas alludes to Nietzsche's *Gay Science* S309, beauty points to us what is uncertain.⁸ Thus, does pornography have to make any promises if its effect is certain and immediate?

How then does erotic art differ from pornography? Even erotic art can stimulate arousal and attract the attention of perverts. In *Only a promise of Happiness*, Alexander Nehamas provides the example of Praxiteles' statue of Aphrodite. The statue evoked so much arousal in one man that the emissions from self-stimulation remained on the statue for centuries (10).⁹ However, erotic art doesn't just aim for arousal, as a statue devoted to Aphrodite served other purposes. The ancient man who treated the statue pornographically had engaged in a vulgar erotic action. Lynda Nead in her work *Cultural Significance of Erotic Art* points to Lord Kenneth Clark's statement that pornography, like

⁶ Winchester, James J. *Nietzsche's Aesthetic Turn: Reading Nietzsche after Heidegger, Deleuze and Derrida*. State of New York Press. 1994 Pp 139

⁷ Babich, Babette E. *Words in Blood, Like Flowers: Philosophy and Poetry, Music and Eros in Hölderlin, Nietzsche, and Heidegger*. State of New York Press. 2006 Pp 155

⁸ Nehamas, Alexander. *Only a promise of Happiness: The place of Beauty in a World of Art*. Princeton University Press. 2007. Pp 131

⁹ *Ibid* pp 4



propaganda, aims to cause a form of action whereas art seeks to cause a “reflective imaginative transposition.”¹⁰ Nead adds on by stating the difference between erotic art and pornography is the following:

Arousal and contemplation - erotic art must remain forever between these two conditions for it to function as the point of distinction between art and pornography.¹¹

In *Daybreak* Nietzsche endorses the *vita-contemplativa* (D440). The act of contemplation is necessary for those who won't and can't act within the confines of *vita-practica*. However, the seclusion of contemplators is not the same as the act of the nun. For Nietzsche, the seclusion of the nun is a way to denounce the world. Earlier in *Daybreak* Nietzsche mentions that Morality was a way for moralizers to feel they were too good for the earth (D 425). We may stem this feeling of being too good for the earth to being too good for sex via the practice of chastity. Yet Nietzsche credits the nun, or more broadly Christianity, in making Eros and the love story as the most interesting thing. This was done via the constant demonization of sexuality (D 76).

Therefore, whenever the term “pornographic” is used by a critic, is it a question of their moralized attitude or is it an indictment of the work of art's failure to invoke contemplation? The 2022 Film *Blonde*, a fictional narrative of Marilyn Monroe's life, was highlighted as “thinly-veiled trauma porn” in a GQ Culture Article.¹² The same article also highlighted that “New Yorker's Richard Brody writes that the movie is ‘ridiculously vulgar ... the character endures an overwhelming series of relentless torments that, far from arousing fear and pity, reflect a special kind of directorial sadism.’”¹³ Another film that also stirred controversy at its release was the *Passion of the Christ* (2003). Ray Richmond of *Today* referred to it as “pornography for the whole family”.¹⁴ The depiction of passion plays or the crucifixion in paintings has historically been a sensitive matter. The New Yorker's David Denby stated that the movie and its director were only “meagerly involved in the spiritual meanings...”¹⁵ of the crucifixion. Denby further adds:

Even Goya, who hardly shrank from dismemberment and pain in his work, created a ‘Crucifixion’ with a nearly unblemished Jesus. Crucifixion, as the Romans used it, was meant to make a spectacle out of degradation and suffering—to humiliate the victim through the apparatus of torture. By embracing the Roman pageant so openly, using all the emotional resources of cinema, Gibson has cancelled out the redemptive and transfiguring power of art.¹⁶

This movie then presents a passion that directly stimulates its audience with either: 1) a sadistic enjoyment of seeing a body degraded or is 2) meant to make the audience guilty.

¹⁰ Nead, Lynda. “Above the Pulp-line’: The Cultural Significance of Erotic Art.” *More Dirty Looks: Gender, Pornography and Power* (2nd Edition). Edited by Pamela Church Gibson. British Film Institute. 2004. Pp 216

¹¹ *Ibid* Pp 218

¹² King, Jack. “Netflix viewers are calling *Blonde* ‘exploitative’ and ‘thinly-veiled trauma porn’.” GQ. October 9th, 2022. <https://www.gq-magazine.co.uk/culture/article/blonde-netflix-reactions-marilyn-monroe>

¹³ *Ibid*

¹⁴ Richmond, Ray. “Passion' -- pornography for the whole family?” *Today*. March 2nd. 2004 <https://www.today.com/popculture/passion-pornography-whole-family-wbna4428753>

¹⁵ Denby, David. “Nailed”. *The Current Cinema*. The New Yorker. GTNY 084 Volume 80; Issue 2. March 1, 2004

¹⁶ *Ibid*

Ironically, an almost pornographic depiction of the passion might also unveil Nietzsche's own writing about the hideous paradox of seeing "God on the cross" (GM I 8)

Coincidentally, both films are based on books. *The Passion of the Christ* follows the New Testament canonical gospels and *Blonde* is based on a book of the same title. Thus, here is an indication that media format might determine what is or isn't pornographic today. For instance, Marquis De Sade's novels, which at one time were considered obscene and banned, are now considered literary classics. According to Randall's *Freedom and Taboo*, literature differs from just pictorial representations in that literature engages with a character and how it may explore the states of mind of the character.¹⁷ Therefore, erotica is often evaluated as different from modern video-digital pornography. Feminists such as Gloria Steinem alluded that erotica is a higher form of art because it allows for the exploration of the free will of the reader, whereas etymology of pornography reveals distance between the subject and object.¹⁸ For Literature, words and language are the medium for the explanation of things. Whereas, in a pornographic video, the language is often viewed as hindrance or at best setting the stage of the physical act of sex to be depicted. ¹⁹According to Nehamas, Nietzsche's philosophy can be understood as the call for the individual to create a complex and simple character for themselves.²⁰ As Kristen Brown states in *Nietzsche and Embodiment*:

"That for Nietzsche the activity of writing and storytelling not only creates literature but also enacts and creates a lie-indeed an embodied life."²¹

Ascetic Ideals and Anthropomorphizing Sex

Throughout his works Nietzsche proposes we can evaluate different forms of life as being higher or lower. As Nietzsche states in the *Genealogy of Morals*, "man designated himself as the creature that measures values, evaluates and measures, as the 'valuing animal as such.'" (GM II 8). In *The Gastronomists: A seven course meal with Epicurus and Nietzsche*, Ryan J. Johnson points out that the question of "Taste" is crucial for both Epicurus and Nietzsche. Aristotle ranked taste as the lowest or most base of the 5 senses.²² However, Nietzsche examines our consciousness and daily experiences as comparable to a digestive system. In *Daybreak* experiences themselves are considered "...a means of nourishment, but the nourishment is scattered indiscriminately without distinguishing between the hungry and those already possessing a superfluity" (D 119). Thus "aesthetic taste" uses our sense of taste as a metaphor. As Keith Ansell-Pearson points out, Nietzsche reflected on the fact that the term Philosophy itself is not merely translated to the love of wisdom but sharp taste.²³ For Nietzsche etymology reveals a true history of concept (GM I 4) Philosophy derives from the term *sophos* which is related to *sapio*. *Sapio* means having a "sharp taste"

¹⁷ Randall, Richard. S. *Freedom and Taboo: Pornography and the Politics of a Self Divided*. University of California Press. 1989. Pp 71

¹⁸ Steinem, Gloria. 1995. "Erotica and Pornography: A Clear and Present Difference." In *The Problem of Pornography*, edited by Susan Dwyer, 31.

¹⁹ Randall 71

²⁰ Nehamas, Alexander. *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*. Harvard University Press. 1985

²¹ Brown, Kristen. *Nietzsche and Embodiment: Discerning Bodies and Non-Dualism*. State of New York Press. 2006

²² Johnson, Ryan J. "The Gastronomists! A seven course meal with Epicurus and Nietzsche" *Nietzsche and Epicurus: Nature, Health and Ethics*. Edited by Vinrod Acharya and Ryan J. Johnson. Bloomsbury Academic. 2020. Pp 26

²³ Ansell-Pearson, Keith. "Holding on to the Sublime": On Nietzsche's Early 'Unfashionable' Project". *The Oxford Handbook Nietzsche*. Edited by John Richardson and Ken Gemes. Oxford University Press. 2013 Pp 233



or being able to evaluate which branches of knowledge are worthy of following (KGW II.4: 217–18; PPP 8). For Nietzsche then, one must have good taste in their consumption. We can also apply his concern for consumption with that of our enjoyment of aesthetics and why pornography often makes for bad taste.

As stated above, modern pornography seeks to arouse the spectator or consumer immediately through explicit images. However, pornography indiscriminately reduces both its actors and the spectators to just their body or sexual organs. Pornographic films do not require elaborate settings or even a script, the mere recording of the sexual act is enough to accomplish its goal. Thus, nothing needs to be known about the participants who engage in the act besides a view of their body. The faces of the actors are not even required to be filmed, just the recording of the bodies engaging in intercourse can suffice to arouse the spectator. Pornography is then reductive of both its participants and the consumer. All bodies are made the same.

Pornography is deeply reductive in 2 ways: 1) At the level of the body it may reduce the erotic to just the arousal of our sexual organs; 2) At the level of the mind it may offer a “trivially streamlined versions of the Platonic ideal” where some can claim they just enjoy observing beautiful bodies.²⁴ The former reduction, which is only intrigued with the stimulation of our sexual organs, reduces the human being to just their respective sexual organ. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Zarathustra comes across a person who is described as just a “ear the size of a person” (Z II “On Redemption”). So much emphasis has just been placed on their receiving information through the ears, that the person has become an “inverse cripple”. So, when pornography isolates our eroticism to just the stimulation of our sexual organs, then can we imagine Zarathustra coming across giant phalluses or engorged vulvas? In the latter and more idealistic reduction, Babich points to the literary examples of Don Juan and Casanova. Nobody should believe that either character loved women despite their numerous sexual engagements. Instead, the characters represent the “...impotent philosophasters of the imaginary erotic, very like the ordinary fan of pornography and the fashion photograph.”²⁵

Nietzsche rejects Cartesian Mind/Body dualism and wants us “to study physiology with a clear conscience” (BGE 15). However, he doesn’t simply inverse the order because of what he perceives as a reductive materialism or atomism. In *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche gives an anti-cogito that if everything we perceive is filtered by our organs, then can we say absurdly say the whole universe is then our organs. (BGE 15). Nietzsche then argues that the “I” is a remains of the old atomism (BGE 17). According to Johnson, Nietzsche wants a more reciprocal relationship between mind and body.²⁶ Where we can have a two-way metaphoric relation between the body and our consciousness. Brown argues that Nietzsche notion of the body is akin to an interpretative field of metaphor.²⁷ This is why in the *Genealogy of Morals* Nietzsche is vested in uncovering the value of the ascetic ideal. There is a whole history where the “fixed ideas” play a role in how we relate to our own bodies (GM II 3). Where the willing of nothingness is better than not willing at all (GM III 1). In this history of Asceticism man becomes an “interesting” animal (GM I 6).

²⁴ Babich, Babette E. *Words in Blood, Like Flowers*: Pp 315

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ Johnson, Ryan J. “The Gastrophists! Pp 28

²⁷ Brown, Kristen. *Nietzsche and Embodiment: Discerning Bodies and Non-Dualism* Pp 111

Nietzsche's understanding of will in general can be understood as competition between the forces and impulses of our physiology and values. The history of language, morals, and values is too rich and influential for them to be cast aside for a certain Darwinian teleology of survival.²⁸

Therefore, a Nietzschean understanding of erotic enjoyment could also make use of ecological metaphors. An ancient philosopher that Nietzsche reflected on was Epicurus. Johnson states that “[w]hat Nietzsche admires most about Epicurus is the transformation of hedonic concepts into morsels of bodily wisdom.”²⁹ Epicurus thought that having a modest Garden would be enough to sustain happiness and that we should be cautious around the excesses of luxury. One theory is that civilization attempts to exceed natural limits. For instance, the concept of waste is a human invention, there is no such thing as waste in nature. Waste occurs when human desires chafe against natural processes and time frames. In addition, Epicurus is highly vested in the notion that what and how we consume things determines our health and pleasure. Throughout Nietzsche's own works he gives dietary advice to the reader. Of how one should remain aware of their gastrointestinal health and have a balanced diet. For Nietzsche, what we consume will influence our thoughts, but also our thoughts will influence what we consume.

Therefore, when we consider aesthetic taste and erotic consumption, we can metaphorically compare it to gastric-physiology or food consumption. In modern mass consumer society, huge segments of the population are divorced from the process of food production. The amount of meat consumed in today's mass-culture requires the existence of mass slaughterhouses.³⁰ For the sake of efficiency and timeless availability, there are mono-crop farms that more prevalently exhaust the soil and contribute to less nutritious vegetation due to less biodiversity.³¹ All of these aims to flatten nature's timeline or constraints to fit the timeframe of human desires and immediate gratification. However, our ignorance of food preparation allows us to deceive ourselves and for us to believe that current systems are sustainable and flattens our experience of enjoying food consumption. We don't merely consume food for calorie intake.³² The process of preparing food and exploring food may affect our own taste in food. Jensen argues that the “industrial sex” can be compared to “industrial food”.³³ Modern pornography, which is available on demand and time stamped, makes it seem like erotic action is always available and is reduced merely to the actual act of intercourse or orgasm. Modern pornography is then like fast food. It is cheap to make and easily accessible.

Nietzsche asks through Zarathustra not to “Sin against the earth” and to become what one is (Z Prologue 3). Thus, modern pornography is inherently illusionary. It makes it seem that sex is only a momentary process of intercourse, and that arousal is immediate. The bodies we may gaze upon are easily disposable as the next clip waits in the wing. Yet sex is not merely the intercourse that occurs. Our engagement of sex requires all the events

²⁸ Ibid Pp 110

²⁹ Johnson, Ryan J Pp 34

³⁰ Babich Pp 158

³¹ Johnson Pp 33

³² Jensen, Robert. “Pornographic and Pornified: Feminist and Ecological Understandings of Sexually Explicit Media.” *The Philosophy of Pornography: Contemporary Perspectives*. Edited by Lindsay Coleman and Jacob M. Held. Rowman & Littlefield. 2014 Pp 67

³³ Ibid



before the actual act and whatever occurs after. To perhaps contemplate or regurgitate on it in the same way that Nietzsche asks the reader in the *Genealogy of Morals* to read his books like an art, like a cow eating its own food (GM Preface 8).

Pornography as Social Anesthetic.

Nietzsche is often critical of how certain social customs or dietary habits act almost as an anesthetic or intoxication. In *Daybreak* Nietzsche states:

But this mob taste, which prefers intoxication to food, by no means originated in the depths of the mob; it was rather transported and transplanted thither, and is only growing up there most persistently and luxuriantly, while it takes its origins in the highest intellects and has flourished in them for millennia. (D 188)

In the *Genealogy of Morals* Nietzsche says that the Alcoholism of the middle ages was an example of physiological obstruction that required a cure (GM III 17). In *Daybreak* Nietzsche states that what was once the cure to life eventually becomes toxic (D 52). The medicine that was initially served as an anesthetic becomes intoxicating. When Nietzsche is critical of substances that he refers to as intoxication or as anesthetic it's because of their use to domestic individuals into the conventional mores.

Since we have already acknowledged the accessibility of pornography, it would be easy to say that we also live in a permissive culture that expects that everyone in civilization will engage with pornography at one time or another. To say that one hasn't come across a pornographic image or video would almost have one casted as asocial and somehow removed from civilization. In the *History of Sexuality: Volume 1*, Foucault that we can interpret the current state of civilization as following what he calls "The repressive hypothesis." The repressive Hypothesis assumes that in an earlier time of human civilization we were freer about sex and that the Victorian bourgeois culture for a time made us repress our own sexuality, Yet Foucault asks the question "...we must also ask why we burden ourselves today with so much guilt for having made sex a sin.?"³⁴ Thus Foucault, like Nietzsche, shows how power and views of the body disseminate and act as a controlling force in the mass body.

Pornography in its early days was associated with political turmoil and was seen as a challenge to a repressive church.³⁵ In the early modern period between the 1500's-1700's, books that were considered pornographic or obscene were put on the list of banned books along with political treatise that challenged repressive political and religious regimes.³⁶ The proliferation of pornography or the obscene followed the invention of the printing press. As Nietzsche comments in *Human, All Too Human* "The press, the machine, the railway, the telegraph are premises whose thousand-year conclusion no one has yet dared to draw" (HH "Wanderer and his shadow" 278). However, as Nietzsche tells us in the *Genealogy of Morals*, origins and purposes are 2 different things and to conflate the 2 in conducting a genealogy is a mistake (GM II 12). Thus, what is considered pornographic or how it functions today is not the same as with its origins. Today pornography is easily accessible

³⁴ Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1: An Introduction*. Translated by Robert Hurley. Random house Inc. 1978 Pp 9

³⁵ Hunt, Lynn. "Introduction: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity: 1500-1800." *Invention of Pornography*. Edited by Lynn Hunt. Zone Books, New York, NY. 1993 Pp 11

³⁶ *Ibid* 15-16

on the internet, and it's almost expected that most teenagers will come across pornography as their first experience of viewing sex. Pornography is then ushered in as a sex education. However, this commonness in terms of access to porn reduces the act of consuming pornography as part of the larger machine of mass culture. For Nietzsche, technology is the sign that human being is a "diseased animal."³⁷ Nietzsche states in *Human, All too Human*: "To what extent the machine debases us... we now seem to live in the midst of nothing but an anonymous and impersonal slavery" (HH Wanderer and his shadow 288).

Male pornography actors are often referred to as "studs". This is meant to highlight their virility, their ability to perform as needed in front of the camera. However, a "stud" also refers to a domesticated horse whose primary function is to help in the process of breeding more horses. Thus, the actors are being compared to actual live-stock. Should we imagine the fabled event in Turin where Nietzsche is said to have run and tried to protect a domesticated draft horse from being further beaten? Thus when we consume pornography, we are watching humans being referred to as livestock and if we ever try to emulate or recreate what we see in our personal affairs, can it be said that we act any differently than a domesticated animal? Is pornography then a way for us to sublimate and domesticate our desires according to the broader goals of civilization?

Zarathustra's project is one of "returning man to the earth" and de-deifying nature.³⁸ In the Speech "On the Sublime Ones" Zarathustra states that a sublime one should "...act like a bull; and his happiness should smell of earth and not of contempt of the earth... his bellowing should praise everything earthly!" (Z II, "On the Sublime Ones") There is an attempt to reintegrate man to what is natural and break from the stagnation that humans have devised for themselves in the harnesses of domestication and their anthropomorphic structures. In the prologue, Zarathustra compares the last man to the overman, The last man seeks to preserve his happiness and remain at the level of man. The being of the last man has already been shaped and herded into acceptance for its condition. According to Babich the target of Zarathustra's overcoming is "techno-scientific calculation", and she elaborates:

...techno-culture, we today are careful to reserve our enthusiasm not for a tragic affirmation of becoming (i.e., with a choral affirmation of coming undone), but, and instead, we keep our rounds for the latest banal invention and preservation. Adverting to the ordinary images of consumer culture, we will buy anything that promises to keep us healthy or beautiful and if we might avoid illness, accidents, or age....³⁹

Thus, if the pornography is merely an extension of our technological world that makes us creatures more technological than biological, then it can't capture the sublime self-overcoming of erotic love and betrays the earth.

Works Cited

Allison, David. *Reading the new Nietzsche: The birth of tragedy, The gay science, Thus spoke Zarathustra, and On the genealogy of morals*. Rowman & Littlefield Press. 2001

³⁷ Nusselder, André *Interface Fantasy: A Lacanian Cyborg Ontology*. The MIT Press. 2009 pp 23

³⁸ Allison, David. *Reading the new Nietzsche: The birth of tragedy, The gay science, Thus spoke Zarathustra, and On the genealogy of morals*. Rowman & Littlefield Press. 2001 Pp126-127

³⁹ Babich 150



- Ansell-Pearson, Kieth. "Holding on to the Sublime": On Nietzsche's Early 'Unfashionable' Project". *The Oxford Handbook Nietzsche*. Edited by John Richardson and Ken Gemes. Oxford University Press. 2013
- Babich, Babette E. *Words in Blood, Like Flowers: Philosophy and Poetry, Music and Eros in Hölderlin, Nietzsche, and Heidegger*. State of New York Press. 2006
- Brown, Kristen. *Nietzsche and Embodiment: Discerning Bodies and Non-Dualism*. State of New York Press. 2006
- Denby, David. "Nailed". *The Current Cinema*. The New Yorker. GTNY 084 Volume 80; Issue 2. March 1, 2004
- Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1: An Introduction*. Translated by Robert Hurley. Random house Inc. 1978
- Hunt, Lynn. "Introduction: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity: 1500-1800:" *Invention of Pornography*. Edited by Lynn Hunt. Zone Books, New York, NY. 1993
- Jensen, Robert. "Pornographic and Pornified: Feminist and Ecological Understandings of Sexually Explicit Media." *The Philosophy of Pornography: Contemporary Perspectives*. Edited by Lindsay Coleman and Jacob M. Held. Rowman & Littlefield. 2014
- Johnson, Ryan J. "The Gastrophists! A seven course meal with Epicurus and Nietzsche" *Nietzsche and Epicurus: Nature, Health and Ethics*. Edited by Vinrod Acharya and Ryan J. Johnson. Bloomsbury Academic. 2020.
- Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Judgment*. Translated by James Creed Merideth. Oxford University Press. 2007.
- King, Jack. "Netflix viewers are calling Blonde 'exploitative' and 'thinly-veiled trauma porn'. GQ. October 9th, 2022. <https://www.gq-magazine.co.uk/culture/article/blonde-netflix-reactions-marilyn-monroe>
- Nead, Lynda. "Above the Pulp-line": The Cultural Significance of Erotic Art." *More Dirty Looks: Gender, Pornography and Power (2nd Edition)*. Edited by Pamela Church Gibson. British Film Institute. 2004. Pp 216-223
- Nehamas, Alexander. *Only a promise of Happiness: The place of Beauty in a World of Art*. Princeton University Press. 2007
- Nehamas, Alexander. *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*. Harvard University Press. 1985
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Daybreak*. Translated by R.J. Hollingdale. Cambridge University Press. 1997.
- Human, All Too Human. Translated by R.J. Hollingdale. Cambridge University Press. 1986.
- On the Genealogy of Morals: A Polemic*. Translated by Mauremarie Clark and Alan J. Swensen. Hackett Publishing Company. 1998
- "The Birth of Tragedy" *The Basic Writings of Friedrich Nietzsche*. Translated and Edited By Walter Kaufmann.
- Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*. Translated by Adrian Del Caro. Cambridge University Press. 2006
- Nusselder, André *Interface Fantasy: A Lacanian Cyborg Ontology*. The MIT Press. 2009
- Randall, Richard. S. *Freedom and Taboo: Pornography and the Politics of a Self Divided*. University of California Press. 1989
- Richmond, Ray. "Passion' -- pornography for the whole family?" *Today*. March 2nd. 2004 <https://www.today.com/popculture/passion-pornography-whole-family-wbna4428753>
- Rodríguez-Navas, Daniel R. *Psychology, Physiology, Medicine: The Perspectivist Interpretation of Nietzsche's Genealogy of Morality*. *The Monist*, Volume 105, Issue 4, October 2022, Pages 487–506
- Winchester, James J. *Nietzsche's Aesthetic Turn: Reading Nietzsche after Heidegger, Deleuze and Derrida*. State of New York Press. 1994