

“The Obscenification of Everyday Life”

Representing Pornography in Anglo-
American Fiction since 1970

“De Obscenificatie van het Alledaagse”

Verbeeldingen van Pornografie in Brits-Amerikaanse Fictie na 1970

(met een samenvatting in het Nederlands)

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Abbreviations

Martin Amis:

M = *Money: A Suicide Note*

LF = *London Fields*

YD = *Yellow Dog*

J. G. Ballard:

AE = *The Atrocity Exhibition* (1990)

C = *Crash*

UDC = *The Unlimited Dream Company*

MNF = *Myths of the Near Future*

Thomas Pynchon:

GR = *Gravity's Rainbow*

VL = *Vineland*

ATD = *Against the Day*

IV = *Inherent Vice*

Jane Smiley:

TDH = *Ten Days in the Hills*

David Foster Wallace:

BIWHM = *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men*

Note on Referencing

Given that a full bibliography is included, the references follow the short form model recommended by the *Chicago Manual of Style*: “If the bibliography includes all works cited in the notes, the notes need not duplicate the source information in full because readers can consult the bibliography for publication details and other information” (14.14: Notes and Bibliography”).

Foreword

This dissertation examines the extent to which changes in the literary cultures of the United States and the United Kingdom since 1970 have been driven by the proliferation of technologies for the recording and transmission of sexually explicit content and, in particular, how this has been reflected by pornographic motifs in fiction.¹ It will show that once literary fiction's role as a ground-breaking purveyor of sexual content had been usurped, and much of the concomitant transgressive edge blunted, its subject could become the mechanisms and consequences of mediated sex. The central focus here is on literary works published since 1970 which have represented heterosexual acts between consenting adults. It will, however, also be shown that these discourses have come to incorporate same-sex, underage sex and paraphilic acts.

This history will proceed broadly chronologically since each new technology, each medium remediates its predecessor and each novelist and short story writer operates in the intertextual shadow cast by his or her predecessors. The pioneer of Porn Studies, Linda Williams, invokes a "historical model of perverse compensation" to explain changes in the "stag" genre up to 1970 and goes on to assert that, "at each new stage of visual intensification the previous institution of pleasure is questioned".²

¹ The rationale for 1970 as a starting point is both literary and socio-sexual. The earliest work to which this dissertation devotes extended discussion is J.G. Ballard's *The Atrocity Exhibition* (first published as a collection in 1970) and it also addresses novels by both Thomas Pynchon (*Vineland*, *Inherent Vice*) and Martin Amis (*The Pregnant Widow*) wholly or partially set in that year. It was also in 1970 that federal government in the United States formally recognized the sexualized society: "The Commission on Pornography and Obscenity set up [in January 1968] by President Lyndon Johnson, [...] reported in 1970. Set up in response to fears already being voiced about the pernicious social impact of the sex industry's rapid expansion (and that of pornography in particular), the commission, involving 18 members and a budget of \$1,750,000 over a period of two years, concluded there were no proven negative effects of sexually explicit material" (McNair, *Mediated Sex*, 11). See Hawkins and Zimring, *Pornography in a Free Society*, for a book-length study of the period between the mid-1960s and the mid-1980s which they term the "Era of the Pornography Commissions" (3). With respect to the authorization in October 1967 of the Johnson Commission by Congress, however, Kendrick notes that there had been congressional hearings on the subject during the preceding 15 years (*The Secret Museum*, 213). 1970 also arguably saw the birth of feminist literary criticism with the publication of Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics*.

² Williams, *Hard Core*, 91. See Thompson, *Black and White and Blue*, and Di Lauro and Rabkin, *Dirty Movies*, for histories of the stag, a term originating in the United States, which both use to indicate a short single-reel pornographic film shown covertly to a male audience up until approximately 1970. Regarding later films, I follow Di Lauro and Rabkin's distinction: "Those films which have been shown publicly in the United States since 1970 we

This interrogation is extended here beyond stag into the post-60s pornography industry and its impact on and presence in literary fiction. However, wherever these two processions inevitably fail to keep even pace with one another, liberties have been taken with the timeline of successive media; multiple formats from various eras may after all inform and impinge upon the oeuvre of a writer. Furthermore, this is a study of narrative fictions inspired by altered sexual media, and only in a secondary sense of the evolution of these media as such. Since the chapters were conceived as stand-alone papers, an extended conclusion will synthesize literary approaches to bodies reduced to postmodern fucking machines; the damage assessment of pornography; its seriality and ineluctability; Troilism and objectification.³

These disparate fictions have all contributed to a nuanced and complex understanding of a sexual landscape simultaneously fragmented through almost infinite diversification and homogenized through Californian commodification. The sexual consciousness has been buffeted by waves of technological innovation, crises of masculinity and clashes between rival feminisms. The texts treated here have invoked the total pornographic imagination and documented the social and psychological fallout into the grimy quotidian which is the consequence of mediated sex.

refer to as ' pornos.' They represent both a continuation of and a divergence from the stag genre" (*Dirty Movies*, 41).

³ Chapter 5 was published under the title used here in *Textual Practice* 29, no. 6 (2015) and Chapter 2 will appear, again under the same title, in *Thomas Pynchon, Sex and Gender*, University of Georgia Press, forthcoming in Fall/Winter 2018.

Introduction

A reboot of Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron* set in California during the 2003 invasion of Iraq abundantly illustrates the intrusion into fiction of the sexualized 21st century mainstream.⁴ Pornographic codes are never far below the surface in the unending conversations between ten Californians in Jane Smiley's *Ten Days in the Hills* (2007).⁵ In this novel, movie director Max's unmade film *My Lovemaking with Elena*, its working title self-explanatory, tests definitions of the pornographic. His wife and imagined co-star Elena says penetration would make the film into porn but Max (Nathan Maxwell, Anglicized from Milstein) argues that if this has a context then it would not do so (TDH 12). Max later similarly rejects his agent Stoney Whipple's characterization of it as pornography: "Not if they have a conversation" (TDH 113). Stoney also narrates Howard Greco's animated porn (TDH 246), a painstakingly hand-drawn encounter with a call girl, to draw a later conversation away from *My Lovemaking with Elena*. If the novel has anything resembling an overarching plot, this follows Max's Iraq invasion-induced impotence, recorded early on the video camera he gives Elena.⁶ At the end of day

⁴ See Attwood, "The Sexualization of Culture", for an account of this tendency: "The terms 'sexualization' and 'mainstreaming' are used to describe the ways that sex is becoming more visible in contemporary Western cultures. [...] Pornography and other sexually explicit media representations are much more accessible than before. [...] Porn stars are entering the mainstream celebrity, writing bestselling books, acting as sex advisers in lifestyle magazines and becoming the stars of lad mags. Porn has turned chic and become an object of fascination in art, film, television and the press. Porn *style* is also now commonplace, especially in music, video and advertising, and a scantily clad surgically enhanced 'porn look' is evident, not only in the media, but on the streets. (xii-xiv, emphasis original). Attwood's feminist perspective is broadly speaking non-judgemental about such developments: for a strikingly similar list composed by a self-identifying anti-porn feminist, see the preface to Gail Dines, *Pornland*, (xi).

⁵ Smiley, *Ten Days in the Hills*. Subsequent references in the text abbreviated as TDH.

⁶ The theme of sex and conversation in a safe space against the background of an American foreign war is highly reminiscent of the plotless *Blue Movie AKA Fuck* (1969), which Andy Warhol claimed began the phenomenon of porno-chic: "Producer/director/cinematographer Andy Warhol presents an afternoon in a Manhattan apartment where Viva and Louis discuss social issues while lying in bed. Louis makes sexual advances and Viva giggles; they indulge in sexual foreplay and then intercourse. They talk about the Vietnam War, watch television, get dressed, eat, discuss Louis's unhappy marriage, and finally take a shower, more and more aware of the presence of a camera. After more sex play in and out of the shower, Viva stares at the camera and asks, 'Is it on?'" ("alfiehitchie", "Andy Warhol - *Blue Movie AKA Fuck*"). The movie was seized by the New York City police on 31 July 1969.

nine he re(dis)covers his tumescence in the same mediated fashion: “She said, “Think some dirty thoughts,” but he didn’t need to do that. All he had to do was watch her face as she trained the video camera on his hard-on” (TDH 573). Technology is the turn-on: in this porn industry-generated simulacrum it is the filming itself that invests a physical act with a sexual frisson and there may be some doubt as to whether, for these characters, unmediated coitus will really still count as such.

Max’s daughter Isabel derived her teenage sex education from watching her friend Daria’s dad’s porn collection (TDH 72), and she gives Stoney an account of this while they have graphically-described sex. Later they copulate alfresco after a discussion about how “eighty-four percent of American men have a porn collection” (TDH 272) and when he becomes engorged she’s ready: “Oooh,” she said, knowing that it was important to be impressed and to show it” (TDH 274). This performativity of her sexuality and femininity is derived, second-order. Smiley here envelopes the feminist-theorist consciousness of Isabel in a spectrum which begins with and ends with porno. Elena’s son Simon is an absurd porn figure throughout. He shaves his head for the role of a human penis in a student play and reveals that: “the director picks the cast on equipment size rather than dancing ability” (TDH 292). He recounts tales of exposing his glans to women in shops (TDH 380). He has sex with a woman he thinks of as a MILF (Zoe), and a threesome with maids Monique and Magda.⁷ On the previous evening these self-proclaimed non-lesbian Russian women (who do, however, have girl-on-girl sex with one another in the performative dynamic so cherished by the adult industry) had tossed a coin to see who would have Simon and who Charlie.⁸ Monique tempts the older of the two with spanking and vibrator use before acquiescing to an unsatisfying penetration. In this California, sexual sensibilities and negotiations, and even theoretical discourse, are founded on industry vernacular and practice. Hollywood has scripted the lives of Californians across the globe, but still balks at revealing primary sexual organs of either sex or graphic evidence of orgasm. When it comes to scripting this “genital display” and “genital

⁷ MILF = Mother I would Like to Fuck.

⁸ On a contemporary note, see Pearson-Jones, "Porn has Changed Over the Last Ten Years", for an account of the most popular categories on the world’s largest pornographic website *Pornhub* (“In 2007, there were around one million hits to the website a day, now there's 75 million”) which was set up in the same year Smiley’s novel was published: “From 2007-2010 the most viewed categories were 'amateur' in 2011 it was 'Teen 18+', from 2012 to 2014 it was MILF and for the last three years it's been lesbian.”

action", pornography produced in the industry's worldwide home in the nearby San Fernando Valley (just 17 miles away) fills the gap.⁹ Smiley records in isolated microcosm a society in which sexualities operate within this ineluctable mediated hegemony.

Approaching the Real

He made notes for a plot in which a group of rich businessmen run a video porn operation. They go into business with Drinion, an IRS immersive so talented that he sometimes floats above his seat while he works. Drinion had helped seize the business on behalf of the service for unpaid taxes. He comes now to double as their male lead in the movies. His great virtue is that he is so pale that he can be digitally erased and the porn viewer can have his own image replace it.¹⁰

Although Shane Drinion, this man who levitates when he concentrates and has never felt sexual desire, appeared in David Foster Wallace's disordered, posthumous novel *The Pale King*, this concept of him as a pornographic surrogate did not materialise.¹¹ Had it done so it might have represented the climax of 20th and 21st century recording and broadcasting technologies and their acceleration toward realising the sexual imagination.¹² Slavoj Žižek has identified this 20th century longing

⁹ Williams, *Hard Core*. Williams uses these terms to define hard-core as distinct from soft-core.

¹⁰ Max, *Ghost Story*, 257. Max goes on to analyse this: "It was the "Infinite Jest" video cartridge one iteration further along: what could be more addictive than watching yourself act out an addiction?" (257). Chapter 4 further addresses pornography as an addiction among addictions.

¹¹ Wallace, *The Pale King: An Unfinished Novel*. The eponymous role in the edition prepared by editor Michael Pietsch for publication from the notes Wallace left behind is also an unfilled blank, an oblique reference to the unnamed predecessor of IRS manager DeWitt Glendenning (128). "[T]he title [...] may or may not refer to a nineteenth-century folk expression, "the pale king of terrors," meaning the melancholy fear of death" (Sullivan, "Too Much Information").

¹² Simon Hardy identifies, "[...] developments in the qualitative nature of the genre, which is being transformed by the rise of such overlapping variants as gonzo, amateur and cyberporn. Taken together, these new forms seem to mark a decisive shift towards the pornographer's long-standing goal of greater realism, such that it is more than mere rhetoric to say we are entering the era of reality porn" ("The Pornography of Reality", 60). Attwood also stresses this tendency: "Gonzo porn, realcore and sexblogs in particular are forms which

for the thing itself, “in contrast to the 19th century of utopian or ‘scientific’ projects and ideals” and applied it to the sexual: “Is not the ultimate figure of the passion for the Real the option we get on hardcore websites to observe the inside of a vagina from the vantage point of a tiny camera at the top of the penetrating dildo?”¹³ However, surrogacy in this virtual reality would have exceeded even such an ultrahigh definition (UHD) camera in simulating involvement. Had Wallace written it, readers might have been able to visualise the sex through the detail and emotional impact of his writing, perhaps simultaneously experiencing alienation and empathy, black humour and disgust. These are categories of affect not immediately associated with the reductive experience of deriving stimulation from pornography. Wallace’s unexplored idea interrogates the process through which the viewer engages with mediated experience. Virtual participation in the sexual diegesis would be enabled through the erasure of a character. However, the progressive sexualisation of the mainstream since 1970 has provoked the accusation that the inverse process has become dominant: consumers’ predilections erased and supplanted by pornography industry-conceived stock characters, copulations and expectations. One critic goes so far as to claim that:

[...] porn is actually being encoded into a boy’s sexual identity so that an authentic sexuality – one that develops organically out of life experiences, one’s peer group, personality traits, family and community affiliations – is replaced by generic porn sexuality limited in creativity and lacking any sense of love, respect, or connection to another human being.¹⁴

This alleged hegemony may represent, as a new wave of 21st century commentators have claimed, a damaging overexposure which has

seemed to simply document the sex lives of real people, suggesting that porn is not a representation at all, but the direct presentation of actual sexual action and authentic sexual pleasure" ("The Sexualization of Culture", xvi).

¹³ Žižek, *Desert of the Real*, 5-6. See also Badiou, *The Century*, on “the passion for the Real”.

¹⁴ Dines, *Pornland*, xi. Dines proceeds to make equally extravagant complementary claims about women, whose "sexuality is increasingly shaped by [pornography] as the men they partner with want to play out porn sex on their bodies. Whether their sexual partners pressure them into anal sex, want to ejaculate on their face, or use porn as a sex aid, these women are on the frontlines of the porn culture" (xii).

corrupted and re-scripted users' sexualities and legitimated abuse.¹⁵ Or it may signify what Brian McNair formulates as a "democratisation of desire" which has contributed in its way to sexual education, the emancipation of sexual minorities and the articulation of female libido.¹⁶ Either way, the hegemony of pornography has come to impinge upon the territory staked out by literary fiction since Modernism, including the rendering of intimate sexual experience in unscripted variety and emotional intensity. The responses of literary fiction to this radically revised sexual landscape, and to a medium of performance whose discourse has been too strong to resist, drive the central inquiry of this dissertation.

Stream-of-Consciousness to Internet Streaming

Pornification of mainstream culture has evolved over the last few decades and the world is unrecognizable. Before the late 1960s, the general public's exposure to explicit sexual images in the United States had been very limited.¹⁷ The earliest surviving American stag film *A Grass Sandwich*, a.k.a. *A Free Ride*, dates from 1915, but prohibition on principles originally established by the 1873 Comstock Law, named after a U.S. Postmaster General, kept the genre underground in the United States.¹⁸ Anthony Comstock used the *Hicklin doctrine*, dating from a British case of 1868, to seize and destroy materials with the tendency to

¹⁵ See for example Paul, *Pornified*, for an anecdote, interview and poll-based argument that consuming pornography damages relationships; Dines, *Pornland*, for a manifesto about the damage to female sexual identity and the desensitization of the male; Jensen, *Getting Off: Pornography and the End of Masculinity*, for an indictment of pornography's effects based on personal experience in anti-porn feminist campaigning; Walter, *Living Dolls*, for an account of pornography as one among many factors encouraging a regression to a more sexist society. These works concentrate on the demand-side of the industry.

¹⁶ McNair, *Striptease Culture*.

¹⁷ Thompson refers to stag as "the secret cinema" and adds that archival material is sparse and difficult to access (*Black and White and Blue*, 25).

¹⁸ Slade, *Pornography in America*, 145. "In his early twenties he had made his reputation as a crusader against vice. In 1873, at the age of twenty-eight, he set a standard for all future congressional lobbyists to shoot at: singlehandedly, he got Congress to pass the archetype of American anti-obscenity legislation. There are very few Acts of Congress that bear the name of anyone other than a senator or representative; the mark of the man is that this statute became known as the Comstock Act" (Rembar, *The End of Obscenity*, 21). Comstock headed the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice until his death in 1915. He was succeeded by John Sumner until the latter's retirement and the society's dissolution in 1950.

"deprave and corrupt" regardless of any artistic or literary merit they might exhibit.¹⁹

Across America, gatherings of men, often members of fraternal societies, saw films shown by travelling roadshows: "a communal experience [...] a room full of guys stoked on alcohol and adrenaline, the air thick with smoke and heavy with voices".²⁰ These flickering images in a tent on the edge of town composed an underground cinema completely distinct from the movies seen by the vast majority, who remained largely oblivious: "the majority of people had no idea such a thing even existed, or if they did, they had no way of actually seeing one".²¹ They were protected from contamination by the 1930 Hays Code, drafted after nine years of monitoring by the office of Hollywood's chief censor Will H. Hays, which shooed nudity and sexual embraces away from mainstream cinema screens.²²

In the underground stag era up to and beyond the Supreme Court's *Roth* judgement (1957) and even as late as the *Miller Test* (1973), stag reels tended to spurn anything non-essential to the sexual plot, and editing of individual films or splicing together from multiple sources created "the radical discontinuity that often occurs in the sex sequences of stag films".²³ Since these filmmakers intended their work for an illegal, underground subculture they had no motive to seek protection on the grounds of freedom of speech. Their obscene product would not only

¹⁹ Qtd. in Ladenson, *Books on Trial*, 125. See also De Grazia, *Girls Lean Back Everywhere*: "fashioned in 1868 by Queens Bench; this based the test for obscenity on whether the material in question had a 'tendency' to 'deprave and corrupt those whose minds are open to such immoral influences' - a test that subordinated the freedom of writers, publishers, and readers to the imagined effect books might have upon impressionable young girls. *Hicklin* thereafter became the legal standard by which the freedom of authors and publishers in the United States was measured - until 1933, when an enlightened federal judge sitting in New York ruled that James Joyce's *Ulysses* might enter the country and be published here without legal risk" (vi).

²⁰ Thompson, *Black and White and Blue*, 2.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 56.

²² The Motion Picture Production Code (the Hays Code in popular parlance) which the Motion Picture Association of America adopted in 1930 and enforced to sanitize Hollywood between 1934 and 1966 (when, eroded and outdated, it was finally abandoned in favour of the certification system which gave the world the X-rated movie) did not apply to foreign-language movies. Thompson lists "excessive and lustful kissing, lustful embraces, suggestive postures and gestures" and "complete nudity" among phenomena prohibited and quotes the code: "No picture shall be produced which will lower the moral standards of those who see it," (*ibid.*, xviii, emphasis original).

²³ Williams, *Hard Core*, 63. See Rembar, *The End of Obscenity*, for a detailed legal account of the *Roth* case, which he describes as being "hailed as a victory by those bent on suppression" (51).

have failed the *Hicklin* test used by American judges in the first half of the twentieth century, but would also have met the same fate as the literary erotica and nude photography of “veteran and unrepentant pornography publisher” Samuel Roth.²⁴ His 1957 conviction was famously upheld by the United States Supreme Court: “The premise of *Roth* was that obscenity, being “utterly without redeeming social value,” was not entitled to first Amendment protection. By the same token material with any such value could not be obscene”.²⁵ This landmark ruling underwent a series of refinements but by 1973 the social tide had turned, as is evinced by the Supreme Court’s ruling in the case of *Miller v. California*, which came to be known as the Miller Test:

In sum, we a) reaffirm the *Roth* holding that obscene material is not protected by the First Amendment; b) hold that such material can be regulated by the States, [...] and c) hold that obscenity is to be determined by applying “contemporary community standards” ... not national standards – Justice Berger.²⁶

Effectively this partitioned and fragmented the United States, allowing the sexual underground to announce itself to urban liberals in New York and San Francisco, but not to those who lived in conservative hinterlands, particularly Southern and Midwestern states, whose lawmakers chose to protect them by applying local community standards, usually strongly informed by notions of piety and sexual abstinence. It was also the concession that those values were no longer universal.²⁷

In Britain there was no roadshow tradition and the stag film industry did not emerge on any large scale until after the Second World War, “with the exception of a few dubiously attributed movies from the 1920s and 1930s”.²⁸ Loops were a later category which arrived en masse in the 1960s, distinct from stag films which, according to one

²⁴ Slade, *Pornography in America*, 209.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 209.

²⁶ Qtd. in *ibid.*, 217.

²⁷ Chief Justice Burger expressed the theory that it was, “neither realistic nor constitutionally sound to read the First Amendment as requiring that the people of Maine or Mississippi accept public depiction of conduct found tolerable in Las Vegas or New York City”, (qtd in De Grazia, *Girls Lean Back Everywhere*, 569). See *ibid.*, Chapter 28: “A Magna Charta for Pornographers”, for further discussion of *Miller vs California*.

²⁸ Thompson, *Black and White and Blue*, 217.

pornographer “were produced prior to 1970, were sold underground, were predominantly black and white and [...] made by amateurs”.²⁹ Men watched these 10 to 15-minute loops in the viewing machines of urban peepshows which were the “direct descendants of the original Nickelodeons and Mutoscopes”, machines patented by Thomas Edison and Herman Cassler in the mid-1890s to show the first films to single-viewer audiences.³⁰

While mainstream cinema remained a gated medium patrolled by boards of film censors on both sides of the Atlantic and largely untainted by these invisible underworlds of smut, the most energetic attentions of anti-porn campaigners and law enforcement remained focussed not on the moving image but rather on a plethora of printed media offering text, still images and illustrations. John Sumner’s Society for the Suppression of Vice boasted of seizing this inventory of obscenities in New York in 1934: “18,000 pamphlets, 16,000 magazines, 3,281 postcards, 5,125 bound volumes, 22 business cards and a comparatively small assortment of objectionable images ... and other novelties”.³¹ From the 1920s to the 1960s, while the sensibilities of huge majorities of Americans and Britons remained unthreatened by the moving image, public courtroom battles were fought over works of literary fiction now enshrined in the canon.

The novelists who, with their publishers, earned the ire of the censors fell into two camps. James Joyce in *Ulysses* recounted characters’ sexual acts, memories and fantasies. The adulterous Molly Bloom wanted to “shout fuck or shit” in the midst of a recalled orgasm; Privates Carr and Compton threw epithets like “fuck” and “bugger” at one another outside the brothel of Nighttown; Leopold Bloom thought of the “grey sunken cunt of the world”, and Joyce followed his hero into the toilet with a copy of *Titbits*, and later had him masturbate in public.³² In Joyce’s wake, D.H. Lawrence and Henry Miller used the same taboo language of the vernacular to represent coitus graphically.³³ Conversely,

²⁹ James “Dale” Chastain of the Blue Vanities company which markets DVD compilations, qtd. in *ibid.*, 202. See Herzog, “In the Flesh”, for a history of the peep-show loop in the U.S. after “the widespread establishment of the adult arcades in the mid-1960s through the early 1970s” (30).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 201.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 56.

³² Joyce, *Ulysses*, 18.588; 15.493; 4.227, 4.500, 13.850. Ladenson recounts how the phrase “grey sunken cunt of the world”, which she describes as “a metaphor of desolation both anatomically referential and anti-erotic”, was suppressed in the first published version of *Ulysses* at the behest of Ezra Pound (*Dirt for Art’s Sake*, 90).

³³ JG Ballard recalls reading *Tropic of Cancer* in Paris after WWII, “the ozone of sex rushed through Miller’s pages”, and celebrates Miller as “the first proletarian writer to create

Radclyffe Hall, E.M. Forster and Vladimir Nabokov wrote novels which navigated around the sexual act and eschewed taboo language, but narrated romantic relationships generated by sexualities which violated contemporary moral, if not legal, standards.³⁴ The courts took umbrage at these loves daring to speak their names. Hall's 1928 account in *The Well of Loneliness* of a lesbian relationship, showing nothing more than a single kiss on the lips, might now even in the field of literary fiction seem so tame as to court dullness in comparison, for example, to Sarah Waters' *Fingersmith* (2002).³⁵ Nevertheless, *The Well of Loneliness* was the first novel published in English to take lesbianism as its central subject and to display it in a positive light. "Hitherto the subject has been either treated as pornography, or introduced as an episode, or veiled. I have treated it as a fact of nature – a simple, though at present tragic fact," wrote Hall in a letter to her publisher.³⁶ After an outraged campaign by the *Sunday Express* newspaper, Judge Biron ordered copies of the book destroyed months after British publication in 1928. He applied the 1868 *Hicklin* Rule and prevented U.K. publication until 1949, six years after Hall's death. *Hicklin* applied in both the U.S. and the U.K. but application gradually became suppler and by the end of 1940s, judges appraised a book as a

a pornographic literature based on the language and sexual behaviour of the working class." ("A Working-class Proust" in Ballard, *Millennium*, 111). Kate Millett in *Sexual Politics* argues, "Miller simply converts woman to "cunt" – thing, commodity, matter," (279) but goes on to concede that he, "offers a compendium of sexual neuroses, and his value lies not in freeing us from such afflictions, but in having the honesty to express and dramatize them" (295). See Woolf, "Beyond Ideology", for an assessment of Millett's reading of Miller. Millett focusses on similar sexual synecdoche in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, quoting many taboo words including gamekeeper Mellors' highest compliment to Constance Chatterley: "Th'art good cunt, though, aren't ter? Best bit o' cunt left on earth ... Cunt! It's thee down theer; an' what I get when I'm i'side thee ... Cunt! Eh, that's the beauty o' thee, lass" (Lawrence, 185, qtd. in Millett, 239).

³⁴ "The Well differs from most of the other books famously suppressed on grounds of obscenity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – the other exception is *Lolita* – in that what made it dangerous was not any particular scene, or even an accumulation of offensive passages, but the subject itself" (Ladenson, *Books on Trial*, 116).

³⁵ This historical novel set in the Victorian period (1862) is noteworthy for its explicit, eroticized account of the lesbian sexual awakening of one character, Maud Lily, after a youth spent constrained in the enforced stewardship of a vast library of pornography amassed by her obsessive uncle. Hunt notes that the word pornography first appeared in the *OED* in 1857, and that it only emerged as a separate category of representation once pictures and writing became potentially accessible to the masses outside the social elite (*The Invention of Pornography*, 13). Maud's uncle Christopher Lily is a self-declared "curator of poisons" and his gatekeeping restricts access to men of his own class, with the exception of Maud, who is made to read the works aloud for their delectation. (Waters, *Fingersmith*, 198).

³⁶ Ladenson, *Books on Trial*, 108.

whole rather than on the basis of objectionable passages and recognized that publication for adults could not be governed by “rules designed for minors”.³⁷ The courts, however, were not the sole arbiters of the acceptability of literary homosexuality. Self-censorship and E.M. Forster’s apprehensions about public response meant that his novel *Maurice*, an account of a same-sex relationship written in 1913-14, was published posthumously in 1971.³⁸ Though lesbianism has never been illegal in the United Kingdom, homosexual acts between consenting men, over 21 in private, were not decriminalized until 1967. The consequence of the rolling back of censorship in the 1960s is that the gay novel not only became possible, but that same-sex action could enter the primarily heterosexual fictions treated here at the slightest pretext. It could be variation.³⁹

In a case apart, *Lolita*, with its subject of hebephilia, an adult man’s sexual preference for pubescent girls (a term coined in 1955 to refer to 11-14 year olds as distinct from paedophilia, referring to pre-pubescent children), retains its transgressive edge to this day and is entirely likely to continue to do so, regardless of its place on so many university and school curricula.⁴⁰ Nabokov had the novel printed by Maurice Girodias’ Olympia Press (known for publishing diverse countercultural works which might otherwise have struggled to get into print, ranging from erotic fiction to Samuel Beckett) in Paris in September 1955 after it had suffered rejections by four “horrified” American publishers.⁴¹ However,

³⁷ Rembar, *The End of Obscenity*, 22.

³⁸ Accusations have been levelled against Forster for cowardice because of his disinclination to publish during his lifetime for fear of outing himself (Curr, "Recuperating EM Forster's *Maurice*", 53). Nonetheless, Curr supports Fone’s assessment of the novel’s landmark contribution to gay identity: “*Maurice* can rightly claim to be the first and best homosexual novel because it predicts in every way what the best homoerotic novels of the twentieth century written before Stonewall would ultimately achieve: confrontation with the intention of changing society; the construction of a positive identity for homosexual readers; a rewriting of social myths of sickness, insanity, perversion, and universal effeminacy, without sacrificing the essentiality of difference” (Fone, *Male Homosexuality and Homophobia*, 175-76).

³⁹ See Woods, *Homintern*, for a full-length study of connections between gay authors both before and after the 1967 act, which legalized only those homosexual conducted in private.

⁴⁰ Glueck, *Crimes Involving Sexual Aberrations*.

⁴¹ De St Jorre, *The Good Ship Venus*, 122, 132. See *ibid.* (121-160) for an account of the highly complex publishing history of *Lolita* and its contention with various bans before eventual publication by Putnam in the United States in 1958 (150) and by Weidenfeld & Nicolson in London in 1959 (152). Girodias, claiming to have had more than 80 of the books he published banned, responded bitterly in the pages of the *New York Review of Books* in 1966

Lolita had come upon a literary scene caught up in accelerating change.⁴² Nabokov had blazed a trail which meant Thomas Pynchon who, as an engineering student took an elective called “Master of European Fiction” with the émigré master at Cornell in 1957-58, could incorporate sexual acts between adults and children in his fictions as metonyms of power relations.⁴³ Strehle, for example, contentiously reads the sexual encounter between the young Bianca Erdmann and Tyrone Slothrop in *Gravity's Rainbow* as one of several Pynchon versions of “Nabokov’s best-known characters, the nymphet and nympholept”.⁴⁴

Trials, bans and burnings in mid-century had ushered in the end of obscenity, to appropriate the title of lawyer Charles Rembar’s book on the subject, or at least the end of obscenity as a censorable category in print.⁴⁵ On the continent of Europe pioneering publishers made English-language texts available to a select public abroad earlier than in the English-speaking countries: *Ulysses* in 1922 (Sylvia Beach of Shakespeare and Company in Paris); *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* in 1928 (Pino Orioli of Tipografia Giuntina in Florence), *Tropic of Cancer* in 1934 (Jack Kahane of the Obelisk Press in Paris): *Lolita* in 1957 (Kahane’s son Maurice Girodias of the Olympia Press, Obelisk’s successor).⁴⁶ Beach had rejected all the

to Gore Vidal’s essay “On Pornography” in the same publication earlier that year, which in his view too glibly assumed that “our society has finally conquered total freedom of expression” (Girodias, “Pornography”).

⁴² *Ibid.*, 213. Lawrence and Nabokov’s works naturally did not fail to inspire exploitation cinema, such as, Henri Sala’s *Emanuelle e Lolita* (1978) and Just Jaeckin’s *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* (1981). The latter, but not the former, starred Sylvia Kristel, who emerged as a noted 1970s softcore icon in five of the seven films in the *Emanuelle* series which started with Jaeckin’s *Emanuelle* (1974).

⁴³ Strehle, “Pynchon’s Debt to Nabokov”, 37.

⁴⁴ Pynchon, *Gravity’s Rainbow*. Subsequent references in the text abbreviated as *GR*. *Ibid.*, 39n. Nympholept is an alternative term for hebephiliac. See Duyfhuizen, “Hinge of Doubt”, for a discussion of conflicting textual evidence pertaining to Bianca Erdmann’s possible real age.

⁴⁵ Rembar, *The End of Obscenity*. This campaigning, American obscenity-case lawyer’s predictions in 1969, with the inevitable benefit of hindsight, showed limited prescience: “If writing will remain free for a sufficient time, some balance will be restored. I do not mean, of course, that the evocation of sexual images and empathies will – or should – be eliminated from literature, nor do I mean that the perversion of sex to commercial purposes will disappear. But the present distorted, impoverished, masturbatory concentration on representations of sex will diminish as the restraints on expression recede. Pornography, which is in the groin of the beholder, will lose its force [...]” (492). His grand announcement of the end of obscenity does, however, coincide chronologically with the birth of on/scenity which Williams places around 1970.

⁴⁶ Ladenson, *Books on Trial*, 91, 144-145. See De Grazia, *Girl’s Lean Back Everywhere*, for an account of Beach’s publishing of Joyce and the ensuing obscenity trials.

latter three works.⁴⁷ Successive landmark obscenity trials on either side of the Atlantic between 1933 and 1973 gradually made it possible to publish with impunity fiction containing episodes of sexual description and taboo language.⁴⁸ In discussing the 1964 case involving *Tropic of Cancer*, First Amendment lawyer Edward de Grazia praises the “wise and courageous” United States Supreme Court Justice William J. Brennan for an objective and liberal rule, “which was so generously fashioned to protect literature that it led to the freeing of hard-core pornography”.⁴⁹ In De Grazia’s analysis, therefore, it was literary authors and publishers who prepared the ground for the previously invisible sex to reach the public via other means. The public accusation of obscenity was not withdrawn but rather, as the century grew older, levelled increasingly at the succession of newly hegemonic sexual media: film, television, VHS, DVD and internet streaming.⁵⁰

Modernist stream-of-consciousness techniques had been instrumental in sweeping away entrenched proprieties, entailing as they did the dramatization of erotic fantasy and recall. If the exterior world of war, politics and society was to be forsaken for the quotidian, the banal, the personal, then the mimesis of thought on the page could not be expected to skirt sexual concerns, and it did not. Joyce would not balk at baring the sexual thoughts of characters. Nevertheless, serialized chapters of *Ulysses* first appeared in the United States in Margaret Anderson’s avant-garde *Little Review* in 1917, after careful expurgation by editor Ezra Pound, a friend of the author’s. This lasted until the thirteenth episode “Nausicaa”, in which Gertie McDowell displays her undergarments and Bloom masturbates to orgasm, when Sumner and the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice brought a 1920 obscenity prosecution against it.⁵¹ Gertie’s performative sexuality and

⁴⁷ Ibid., 145.

⁴⁸ See Slade, *Pornography in America*, 141-165, for a chronology of judicial responses to obscene materials, including the 1934 *Ulysses* court of appeal case, *Roth vs. United States* in 1957; the 1959 Supreme Court ruling that *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* was not obscene; the 1964 supreme court ruling in *Grove Press v. Gerstein*, which terminated the prosecution of *Tropic of Cancer*. See Kearns on the United Kingdom’s 1959 Obscene Publications Act, the concomitant failure to prosecute the publisher of *Lolita* and the 1960 *Chatterley* case which tested the act for the first time and resulted in the famous acquittal (*Freedom of Artistic Expression*, 18-19).

⁴⁹ De Grazia, *Girls Lean Back Everywhere*, xii. As noted above, this provided an “efficient because nearly absolute defence for expression ‘not utterly without’ literary, artistic or other social value” (xii).

⁵⁰ See Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, for a taxonomy of these media and their relative immediacy (100).

⁵¹ Ladenson, *Books on Trial*, 91.

Leopold's voyeurism anticipate subsequent decades of mediated sex: it is a "thoroughly modern act" and onanist in the sense that it is unconnected with reproduction, an early literary representation of orgasm occasioned by a pornographic image.⁵² This "wondrous revelation", this "dream of well-filled hose", fetishizes not so much the female pudenda but rather accoutrements: "the garters were blue to match, on account of the transparent [stockings] ... and he could see her other things too, nainsook knickers".⁵³ Bloom has heard of this striptease, and perhaps seen it, in "Mutoscope pictures in Capel Street: for men only".⁵⁴ This primitive coin-slot peepshow worked on the principle of a flip book and permitted only a single viewer at a time, but by contemporary standards these machines could be highly arousing, as is evident from the nostalgic vantage point of *A Country Stud Horse*, a 1920s stag film which shows "a man avidly watching just such a film on an old-fashioned Mutoscope [...] and vigorously masturbating while he does so".⁵⁵ Even at this early stage the moving sexual image impinges upon the literature of sex.

Bloom's wordless act, as if in a silent film, is publically private, concealed from Gertie's friends gazing skyward at a firework display. It is ignited rather than hindered by the physical distance between them: the young girl with the limp is excited but "unsullied", retaining value as a marriageable commodity, and the married man does not entangle himself in the fantasies of adultery he has conjured for himself.⁵⁶ Gertie's consciousness grants us access to a romantic hero fantasy of Bloom, as his grants us sexual memories of wife and prostitute. His monosyllabic ejaculation is represented only by its aftermath: "Ah! Mr Bloom with

⁵² Brown, *James Joyce and Sexuality*, 60.

⁵³ Joyce, *Ulysses*, 13.724.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 13.794. The Mutoscope was a turn-of the century invention that consisted of a series of photographs mounted on a cylinder, which in order to use a viewer would put money in a slot, peer through a peephole, and turn a hand-crank to set the pictures in motion (Mullin, *James Joyce, Sexuality and Social Purity*, 145). The Mutoscope company's American Biograph machine, a competitor to Thomas Edison's Kinetoscope, was first exhibited in New York in 1896 (Cook, *The Cinema Book*, 3). "The Mutoscope, manufactured from 1895 on, did in fact show continuous photographs; but these were exhibited on the principle of the 'flicker books' (known since 1868): phase pictures on postcards, bound in book form, which create an illusion of movement when rapidly leafed through. In the Mutoscope, these 'postcards' are arranged on a horizontal axis which can be turned by a hand crank after a coin is dropped into a slot. The Mutoscope is undoubtedly the most stable of all early cinematographic devices" (Ceram, *Archaeology of the Cinema*, 91-2).

⁵⁵ Thompson, *Black and White and Blue*, 20.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 13.746.

careful hand recomposed his wet shirt".⁵⁷ As would later become the wearingly ubiquitous norm in the adult feature, the male orgasm finally punctuates the scene between them. However, Bloom does glance back at Gertie leaving and concede to himself: "[s]till it was a kind of language between us".⁵⁸ This sexual language spans a distance of perhaps a couple of dozen yards between the performer and the voyeur, and though later technologies would multiply the distance many times, this is an early instance of mediated, transactional sexual exchange represented in the most literary of fiction.

In response to the ban, the *Little Review's* Jane Heap defended the scene as a commonplace: "Girls lean back everywhere, showing lace and silk stockings; wear low-cut sleeveless blouses, wear breathless bathing suits; men think thoughts and have emotions about these things everywhere – seldom as delicately and imaginatively as Mr. Bloom – and no one is corrupted".⁵⁹ The retrospective imagination may see the obscenity as faded because of the tentativeness of the interaction: no physical contact, no nudity and no verbal interchange. However, it has also been overwritten by nearly a century of sex-bearing media which have followed, relocating immediacy, as we shall see below, in the still and moving image. "The episode culminated in Bloom's orgasm, but probably only the careful reader noticed that," speculates De Grazia.⁶⁰ Joyce's transgressive successors would require much less careful noticing from their readers, and filmmakers and photographers none at all.

Two years before Beach's first publication of the full 18-chapter novel in 1922 in Paris, it had been banned in the United States, despite the literary obscurity and difficulty defence mounted by attorney John Quinn, grounded in "the idea that he himself did not understand the book and felt Joyce had gone too far in his literary innovations".⁶¹ Before this even a text whose legendary inaccessibility engaged such a limited potential readership could be interpreted as a threat to public morals, and American customs seized and destroyed many copies.⁶² It could not

⁵⁷ Ibid., 13.851.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 13.944.

⁵⁹ Qtd in De Grazia, *Girls Lean Back Everywhere*, 10.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 10. De Grazia's speculation is in line with his claims about legal practice at the time: obscurity and difficulty were assumed to protect the populace.

⁶¹ Ladenson, *Books on Trial*, 94.

⁶² See De Grazia for an early textual history of *Ulysses*, including its destruction: "In 1922, the year of *Ulysses'* first publication, four hundred copies shipped to the United States were burned at customs; the next year, five hundred copies entering England at Folkestone 'went up the King's Chimney'" (*Girls Lean Back Everywhere*, 54).

be legally imported into the United States until Judge John M. Woolsey's landmark ruling of 1933, in which he asserted that "reading 'Ulysses' in its entirety [...] did not tend to excite sexual impulses or lustful thoughts", adding famously that "whilst in many places the effect of 'Ulysses' on the reader undoubtedly is somewhat emetic, nowhere does it tend to be an aphrodisiac".⁶³ This great novel, therefore, though it concerned itself with sexual thoughts inspired in its characters, could apparently be relied upon not to inspire them in its readers. Woolsey also paved the way for literary works to be judged on their effect in their entirety and signalled the beginning of the end of the age of expurgation. The first American edition of 1934 contained a foreword by Maurice L. Ernst, the attorney who had argued before Woolsey: "The *Ulysses* case marks a turning point. It is a body blow for the senses. The necessity of hypocrisy and circumlocution and literature has been eliminated. Writers need no longer seek refuge in euphemisms. They may now describe basic human functions without fear of the law".⁶⁴

Lawrence and, in his wake, Henry Miller, however, were to go far beyond basic human functions in their excitation of the senses: they would cram pages with sex as a pleasurable and ineluctable part of human interaction. They would construct plots driven by the sexual urges of the protagonists.⁶⁵ The template they created of erotic encounters or thoughts preceded, followed by and entwined in extended novel-length narratives largely set in the non-sexual world in some ways anticipates the adult feature.⁶⁶ This being said, however, hardcore rather reversed the proportions, using brief narrative segues to link extended sex scenes.

Lawrence's last novel *Lady Chatterley's Lover* may have been published privately in Florence two years before his death in 1928, but in Britain the unexpurgated version had to wait until after the Obscene Publications Act (1959), which made it possible for publishers Penguin to elude prosecution by arguing the material was beneficial to the "public good".⁶⁷ The act finally rendered obsolete the *Hicklin* doctrine, which had

⁶³ Woolsey, "Ulysses Case", xiii, xiv.

⁶⁴ Joyce and Ernst, *Ulysses*, vii.

⁶⁵ *Tropic of Cancer*, Miller's most contentious novel, would be adapted for film under the same name in 1970 by Joseph Strick, who also directed the first adaptation of *Ulysses* in 1967. Strick resisted "facile, media-driven readings of *Tropic of Cancer* as a quasi-pornographic novel" (Decker, "Literary Text, Cinematic Edition" 154).

⁶⁶ Or "premediates" it, to use Bolter and Grusin's term in *Remediation*.

⁶⁷ Robertson, "The Trial": "[...] what the prosecution failed to comprehend was that the 1959 Act had wrought some important changes in the law. Although it retained a

held sway for almost a century. In the context of this study it is worthy of note that, even at this early stage, the law recognizes (in Section Two of the Act as expanded by Section One of the 1964 Act) that “the impact [of an obscene activity] in the printed word will be less than the same activity shown in film or photograph”.⁶⁸ The ban was occasioned by the novel’s abundant descriptions of coitus and the characters’ use of taboo words, notably “fuck” and “cunt”. It is a commonplace (recalled wistfully by Philip Larkin in “Annus Mirabilis”) that the successive acquittals in the obscenity trials of publishers of *Chatterley* (United States 1959, United Kingdom in 1960) ushered in a new era of sexual freedom, on the page and off it. This opened the sluices for sexual description in all manner of printed materials, as Robertson ironically recalls: “The verdict was a crucial step towards the freedom of the written word, at least for works of literary merit (works of no literary merit were not safe until the trial of *Oz* in 1971, and works of demerit had to await the acquittal of *Inside Linda Lovelace* in 1977)”.⁶⁹ Perhaps the most notorious product of the new-found freedoms was *Tropic of Cancer* by Henry Miller which finally found its way into America under the Grove Press imprint in 1961, only to occasion obscenity trials in various states around the Union for three further years.⁷⁰ At this point it was no longer guaranteed that a literary character would meet a fate conversant with his, or more pertinently her, sexual conduct, as had been obligatory for Emma Bovary a century before. Miller, who later came to revel in “his own legend as King of Smut” was a provocateur: “Miller’s approach to sex was far more anarchic and amoral, or immoral, than anything that could be found in his predecessors” Joyce and Lawrence.⁷¹ The Act and the *Chatterley* trial also paved the way for British publication of *Lolita*, and John Cleland’s notorious *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, better known as

‘tendency to deprave and corrupt’ as the test of obscenity, books had now to be ‘taken as a whole’ – that is, not judged solely on their purple passages – and only in respect of persons likely to read them; in other words, not 14-year-old schoolgirls, unless they were directed to that teenage market”.

⁶⁸ Qtd. in Banks, “Editorial”, 5.

⁶⁹ Robertson, “The Trial”. Queen’s Counsel Robertson’s use of “demerit” indicates his view of the exploitative nature of this text, one of two pro-porn memoirs Linda Boreman published. She later claimed it had been written under duress. The jury found that it would not “deprave and corrupt the kind of person who would buy it” (Kearns, *Freedom of Artistic Expression*, 19). Lovelace, *Inside Linda Lovelace*.

⁷⁰ See Rembar, *The End of Obscenity*, 168-215, for a recounting of these legal battles.

⁷¹ Ladenson, *Books on Trial*, 181, 173.

Fanny Hill, first published in France in 1748-1749, finally became available in the UK in 1963 and the United States in 1966.⁷²

By the end of the 1960s, works such as John Updike's novel *Couples* (1968), with all its graphic, adulterous sex in an early sixties "post-pill paradise", would be in a position to evade the gamut of bowdlerizer, censor and courts. This markedly contrasted with the cautious pre-publication legal consultation in which Updike was caught up for *Rabbit, Run* (written in 1959 and published through Knopf in 1960).⁷³ In the plot of *Couples*, which culminates with an illegal abortion, Updike takes his male protagonist Piet Hanema into the beds of five married women in his social circle but eventually unites him in happy-ending second matrimony with Foxy Whitman. After discovering a sexually sadistic side of himself with one of his other lovers, he settles with the one among them who offers peccadillos which correspond in their variety to the pornographic "numbers" which would become the staple of post-*Deep Throat* adult features from the 1970s on. Their initial affair is driven by his pregnancy fetish, she boasts she can be as "whorish as she wanted" with him and "slyly asked if it had made it more exciting for him, her pretending to resist".⁷⁴ The fantasy persona she inhabits for him crucially incorporates admiration of the money shot: "she gave herself to him in slavish ways as if witnessing in her mouth or between her breasts

⁷² Rembar, *The End of Obscenity*, 402. The United States Supreme Court ruled in *Memoirs v. Massachusetts* that *Fanny Hill* did not meet the Roth standard for obscenity.

⁷³ Updike recounts, in an interview, his response to a letter from his publisher Alfred A. Knopf on the matter of censorship, which serves well to indicate the climate of the times: "The reservations turned out to be (he could tell me this only face to face, so legally touchy was the matter) sexually explicit passages that might land us - this was suggested with only a glint of irony - in jail. Books were still banned in Boston in those days; no less distinguished an author than Edmund Wilson had been successfully prosecuted, in New York State in 1946, for *Memoirs of Hecate County*. My models in sexual realism had been Wilson and D. H. Lawrence and Erskine Caldwell and James M. Cain and of course James Joyce, whose influence resounds, perhaps all too audibly, in the book's several female soliloquies. Not wishing, upon reflection, to lose the publisher who made the handsomest books in America, and doubting that I could get a more liberal deal elsewhere, I did, while sitting at the elbow of a young lawyer evidently expert in this delicate area, consent to a number of excisions - not always the ones I would have expected. It was, I thought, a tactful and non-fatal operation. The American edition appeared toward the end of 1960 without legal incident; in England, Victor Gollancz asked for still more cuts and declined to publish the Knopf text as it was, but the youthful firm of André Deutsch did. The dirty-word situation was changing rapidly, with the legally vindicated publication of Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*. Censorship went from retreat to rout, and when I asked Penguin Books, late in 1962, if I could make some emendations and restorations for their edition, they permissively consented" (*Higher Gossip: Essays and Criticism*, 449).

⁷⁴ Updike, *Couples*, 434.

the tripped unclotting thump of his ejaculation made it her own".⁷⁵ This is the woman for whom Piet leaves a first wife, who admits to no experience of fellatio.

Updike may have inspired feminist critical ire but the impunity with which he and his contemporaries were able to publish underlined that an era of literary censorship and disapprobation was at long last ending. Philip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint* (1969), an extended treatment of adolescent masturbation, and Gore Vidal's *Myra Breckinridge* (1968), with its transsexual protagonist, BDSM and orgies, were among novels which conservative critics branded pornographic, but which propelled their authors to celebrity and the best-seller lists.⁷⁶

In terms of the ability to break taboos and occasion outcry from the public and press, written fiction had been overtaken by the still and moving image, and had, aside from a very few exceptions, forfeited forever its place in the vanguard of transgression. Ever since *Ulysses*, it had been hampered in this by perceived difficulty and inaccessibility, but also because its lack of immediacy requires a leap of imagination. Bolter and Grusin compose rankings of immediacy of erotic representation, starting with written or printed pornography without illustration and extending through graphic works like comic books and illustrated sex manuals to photography. It is the photographic image which occasions censorship and possible criminal charges:

The assumption is that the human models must have actually performed the act revealed in a photograph and that the image is caused by the reflected light that traveled from their bodies to the film. It is as if the erotic impulse could pass through the photograph to touch the viewer. Film and video

⁷⁵ Ibid., 434. See Williams, *Hard Core*, for the centrality of the external ejaculation as proof of male pleasure in film and video pornography.

⁷⁶ William F. Buckley, in a 1968 televised debate with Vidal watched by 10 million Americans, described *Myra Breckinridge* as pornographic (Parini, "A Life in Feuds"). It was seventh on the 1968 fiction bestsellers list (Unsworth, "20th Century Bestsellers"). By 1975, six years after publication, *Portnoy's Complaint* had sold nearly half a million copies in hardback in the United States, three and a half million in paperback. Roth had received a huge 250,000 dollar advance, but within months of publishing *Portnoy's Complaint*, "Roth was angrily, publicly denounced. He had fomented anti-Semitism; he had shamed the tribe; he had degraded the foundations of the examined life" (Avishai, *Promiscuous: Portnoy's Complaint*, 111). See Avishai for a full survey of hostile reviews, including a lambasting by Kingsley Amis, father of Martin (112). It was 1969's best-selling American novel (Unsworth, *ibid.*).

are even more threatening because they are regarded as photographs in motion.⁷⁷

The damage that the printed word could inflict became gradually subsumed under emerging technologies of representation, which remediated the sexual. Concern widened beyond the work's depraving and corrupting the reader or viewer to encompass potential moral or physical damage suffered by the model or performer. The law evidently does not seek to protect novelists and publishers from the acts of creation and distribution, but in both the United States and the United Kingdom it may seek to protect porn stars from the consequences of acts of mediated sex, primarily addressing concerns of transmission of disease and age of consent. Two documents are required to work in the Californian adult film industry: a birth certificate and a doctor's note, no older than six months, to the effect that the performer is HIV-negative.⁷⁸ Anti-porn feminist critiques are also based upon unproven notions of cyclical remediation and recapitulation: the pre-damaged sexual performer recreates traumatic sex on-screen which occasions further traumatic sex off screen, and so forth.⁷⁹ In *Yellow Dog*, the focus of Chapter 3, Martin Amis writes a performer and producer named Cora Suzan/Karla White whose life story follows this pattern.⁸⁰ She announces her qualifications for a career as porn star by listing her physical attributes, but also by recounting her childhood experience of daily incestuous rape at the hands of her father for a number of years.

⁷⁷ Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, 100.

⁷⁸ "In 1988 the California Supreme Court, in *People v. Freeman*, found adult film production to be protected as free speech under the First Amendment, since such films were not considered obscene based on prevailing community standards. [...] Adult film production companies are required to have a Custodian of Records to document and retain records of the age of all performers, to enforce the age entry restriction. [...] After four performers contracted HIV in 1998, Sharon Mitchell, a former adult film performer, founded Adult Industry Medical, a clinic to counsel and screen performers monthly for HIV using a PCR test. [...] Performers are required in most cases to pay for all screening tests, and to sign a consent form that permits disclosure of their test results to other performers and producers before filming" (Grudzen and Kerndt, "Time to Regulate?").

⁷⁹ See for instance Dworkin's characterization of the archetypal porn performer: "She will feel ignorant. She will tell a first person story about her own experience in prostitution, in pornography, as a victim of incest, as a victim of rape, as someone who has been beaten or tortured, as someone who has been bought and sold" (*Pornography: Men Possessing Women*, xv-xvi).

⁸⁰ Amis, *Yellow Dog*. Subsequent references in text abbreviated as YD.

Amis implies that this is not an unusual entry on the adult performer CV.⁸¹

During the mid-20th century, sexual passages in literary fiction gradually slipped down the imaginary rankings of perceived threats to public morals, as new media (alongside reliable oral contraception and legal abortion) changed sexuality in the culture. Fiction acquired a new subject: the documentation of this process of adjustment. As the sixties drew to a close, photographic and film images of sexual acts, to borrow Linda Williams' term, migrated "on-scene": they made their way out of the private and into the public sphere.⁸² Although it could be argued that Joyce had addressed text, sex and technology in writing about Gertie McDowell, Leopold Bloom and the Mutoscope, it was only in the 1970s that the triangular relationship became a widely addressed topic. Since then, literary fiction has engaged with pornography and the media it has sustained. Amis and David Foster Wallace are chief among the writers examined here to have assessed the damage caused.

Porno Chic

"Porno chic; 'Hard-core' grows fashionable-and very profitable", ran the headline of Ralph Blumenthal's influential five-page *New York Times Magazine* article in 1973, which charted the public phenomenon of the newly-invented full-length adult feature. Most notoriously, *Deep Throat* (Gerard Damiano, 1972) allowed hardcore to be shown outside red light zones and established the willingness of censors to admit adult features into the public consciousness.⁸³ Indeed *Deep Throat*, "one of the first hard-core features to be seen by large numbers of women in theatres", and in its wake *Behind the Green Door* (James Lloyd Mitchell and Artie Jay Mitchell, 1972) and *The Devil in Miss Jones* (Damiano, 1973), brought overarching erotic narratives into mainstream cinemas in major cities.⁸⁴

⁸¹ The backstory Amis creates here directly recalls a further claim made repeatedly by Andrea Dworkin, for instance: "There are many thousands of them in the United States, not all first put in pornography as children though most were sexually molested as children, raped or otherwise abused again later" (*Pornography: Men Possessing Women*, xvii).

⁸² In the sense of being unseen or, "obscene, in the literal sense of being off (*ob*) the public scene" (Williams, *Porn Studies*, 3). All subsequent uses of the terms "on/scene" and "on/scenity" follow Williams' coinage.

⁸³ Blumenthal, "Porno-chic".

⁸⁴ Williams, *Hard Core*, 25.

This coinage of the term *porno chic* has been adopted to define the era by many subsequent commentators, notably Brian McNair.

Blumenthal even envisaged a potential merging with mainstream Hollywood cinema. This failed to materialize but was not as improbable as hindsight might make it seem. There had been a period during the late 1960s and early 1970s when *Playboy* magazine (established by Hugh Hefner in 1953) helped a soft-core version of porno-chic to make incursions into mainstream movies. In its pages, associations with glamorous partially-unclothed actresses functioned as a kind of testament to male urbanity, affluence and sophistication: these women were exhibited as consumable commodities and aligned with prescribed male tastes in cars and clothes, cigarettes and liquor. Actresses from mainstream movies posed for “images of objectified, sexually available women different from post-1960s pornography only in their explicitness”.⁸⁵ Joanna Pettit’s four page seminude pictorial in the February 1968 issue, under the headline “The Lady in *Blue*”, was framed by textual reference to her role in Silvio Narizzano’s western psychological *Blue* (1968) and her appearance a year earlier as the daughter of James Bond and Mata Hari in *Casino Royale* (1967).⁸⁶ The *Playboy* camera dwelled on her nipples and buttocks, but pubic hair was not yet acceptable. The many who followed her included Brigitte Bardot, announced as “Bébé Bares All”, (April 1969) and the star of Michelangelo Antonioni’s *Blow-Up* (1966), Jane Birkin (November 1970). Eventually the circle was closed with appearance of *Deep Throat*’s Linda Lovelace in the April 1973 issue. During this period soft-core porno-chic seemed to be making incursions into mainstream film genres. J.G. Ballard wrote of sex entering science fiction as Jane Fonda “cavorted naked in a fur-lined spaceship” in Roger Vadim’s *Barbarella* (1968), and the “interplanetary sex adventures of the French comic-book heroine are elegantly transferred to the screen.”⁸⁷ Bernardo Bertolucci’s *Last Tango in Paris* (1972, Italian: *Ultimo tango a Parigi*) was Franco-Italian drama of erotic obsession incorporating a notorious anal rape scene. Woody Allen’s *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex* (*But Were Afraid to Ask)* (1972) was a sex comedy parodying both various other film genres and Dr. David Reuben’s controversial 1969 sex manual of the same name.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ McNair, *Mediated Sex*, 113.

⁸⁶ Schiller, Lawrence (photographer), “The Lady in *Blue*”.

⁸⁷ Ballard, *Millennium*, 19-20. Ballard exaggerated somewhat – no nipples were visible.

⁸⁸ Reuben. *Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Sex*.

The hard-core features which emerged in this climate were built to withstand the “utterly without redeeming social value” test inherent in *Roth* and, while *Miller* kept them off screens in small towns in conservative states, in Manhattan celebrities were publically vocal about having seen them. Arthur Knight, a film critic for *Saturday Review*, testified that, “*Deep Throat* had redeeming social value because, as Blumenthal wrote in *The Times*, “it helped people to expand their sexual horizons and particularly emphasized that a woman's sexual gratification was as important as a man's.”⁸⁹ The quest for this gratification, though, took somewhat cruel and unusual forms: female stars underwent extreme, sometimes physically impossible or supernatural experiences. Linda Susan Boreman (porn name Lovelace) achieved orgasmic satisfaction in *Deep Throat* after discovering an unusually located clitoris in her pharynx; Marilyn Ann Briggs (porn name Marilyn Chambers) was kidnapped and initiated into interracial sex at a psychedelic orgy club in *Behind the Green Door*; Shelley Graham (porn name Georgina Spelvin) committed suicide in *The Devil in Miss Jones*, only to return from limbo to a life of nymphomania. These were not perhaps the most probable of plots but cinema had seen nothing of their like before.⁹⁰ With the 1970s, the mainstreaming of mediated sexuality and the encroachment of “on/scenity” had taken off. So began the first Golden Age of Porn.⁹¹

□□□□□□

Fiction and the Succession of Formats

This dissertation is shaped according to two intertwined chronologies: that of the four main writers concerned (two American and two British) and that of the succession of platforms which mediated sex has sought out and helped to make successful. Still and moving images derived from hardcore film and men's magazines found their way into mass consciousness via television, popular newspapers (particularly red-top tabloids in the UK) and mainstream magazines, advertising in all media which eroticized hitherto non-sexual products and, above all, Internet.

⁸⁹ Qtd. in Dargis, “A Cautionary Tale”.

⁹⁰ These hard-core plots are hardly more outlandish than, for instance, the account of a 41st century astronaut's space mission to find an evil scientist in *Barbarella*.

⁹¹ Paasonen and Saarenmaa, “The Golden Age of Porn”.

Home viewing was to become the mass market, and porno has often been credited with backing the winners of wars between recording formats.⁹² VHS dominated sales and rentals from 1976 to 1997, when the DVD was introduced to the American market.⁹³ Blu-ray, launched in 2006, won the format war (2006-2008) over HD DVD to supersede, but as yet not entirely replace DVD.⁹⁴ Softcore filled slots on subscription cable television while Internet streaming technology pumped up the Californian industry from the late 1990s onward. The latter platform had profound effects on the length and narratological structure of the material in both its professional and *amateur* variants. In 2014, Sarah Schaschek identified “the loss of a format, the pornographic feature film, which now increasingly gives way to the episodic and postepisodic formats online”.⁹⁵ Her investigation of the new internet phenomenon of user-generated porn films also discovered some very tight parameters: “it is remarkable how quickly the larger user society has agreed that an average successful sex video is about six minutes long. Performers who need longer to achieve the goal of orgasm have to crop a video down to the right size if they want to be successful online”.⁹⁶ This apparent full-circle return to vignette-based timings somewhere between the loop (perhaps as short as two minutes, five such segments often viewable in series with five coin insertions) and the single-reel stag film (around ten minutes) demonstrates abundantly how pornographic content, duration of performance, and narrative style has been driven by the media of dissemination.

J.G. Ballard (1930-2009) began publishing science fiction stories in *New Worlds* and *Science Fantasy* from 1956.⁹⁷ He had returned to Europe after WWII following internment in a Japanese camp in Shanghai and initially became a medical student charged with examining cadavers

⁹² “Since 1988, US audiences have watched the majority of their movies on a video platform, be it VHS, Laserdisc, DVD, Blu-ray, Video On Demand (VOD), or streaming media. Different video platforms come and go, but prerecorded video as a distribution model continues to structure motion picture production and consumption. In other words, movies are now primarily videos for both their makers and their viewers” (Benson-Allott, *Killer Tapes and Shattered Screens*, 1).

⁹³ “In 1997 all of the MPAA [Motion Picture Association of America] member-studios joined the DVD Forum, a multi-industry organization to promote digital video discs (DVDs) (Ibid., 102).

⁹⁴ Noonan, Fleischmann and Rowe, “High-Definition DVD Titles Exclusively in Blu-Ray Disc Format”.

⁹⁵ Schaschek, *Pornography and Seriality*, 181.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 182.

⁹⁷ Holliday, “J.G. Ballard: A Collector’s Guide”.

forensically, engendering a fascination with the body exhibited in medical textbook and sex manual. He later joined the Royal Air Force. His formative years therefore pre-date the sexual revolution detailed above. Thomas Pynchon (born 1937), a later product of 1960s hippie counterculture, emerged as a novelist in 1963 as battles against literary censorship were being waged. Martin Amis (born 1949) began to publish fiction which engaged with sexual experimentation and drug use during the hedonistic 1970s, though his heyday as novelist did not arrive until the 1980s. David Foster Wallace (1962-2008) published his first novel *The Broom of the System* in 1987 during a decade characterized by a “feminist backlash against pornography” but waited to publish substantially about mediated sex until his essay “Big Red Son” in 1998, well into the Internet era.⁹⁸

Andrea Dworkin’s highly influential 1981 text *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* defined this backlash, appropriating the vocabulary of torture and rape to describe industry practice and deploying the extreme metaphor of the concentration camp to condemn pornography: “Dachau brought into the bedroom and celebrated”.⁹⁹ These images were the obverse of those interrogated and assailed by Susan Sontag in her 1975 essay “Fascinating Fascism” on the cult of Nazi filmmaker Leni Riefenstahl. Sontag investigates the “definitely sexual lure of fascism” with reference to its aesthetic appeal and finds a clue in the “predilections of the fascist leaders for highly sexual metaphors [...] Hitler regarded leadership as sexual mastery of the ‘feminine’ masses, as rape”.¹⁰⁰ Ultimately, Dworkin saw all pornography, without exception, as the enactment of male power and Phallocentrism, concluding: “The boys are betting that their penises and fists and knives and fucks and rapes will turn us into what they say we are – the compliant women of sex, the voracious cunts of pornography, the masochistic sluts who resist because we really want more”.¹⁰¹ This was one side in what has come to

⁹⁸ McNair, *Porno? Chic!*, x.

⁹⁹ Dworkin, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women*, 69. This and subsequent quotes are from the 1989 Plume edition

¹⁰⁰ Sontag, “Fascinating Fascism”, 102.

¹⁰¹ Dworkin, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women*, 224. Ballard was scathing in 1994 about this position: “I’m interested in the freedoms that feminist movement has won over the past 40 years. But there in an extremist fringe represented by people like Andrea Dworkin who are female separatists wanting to break the social contract between men and women and put nothing in its place” (qtd. in *Quotes*, 232). See Freer, *Thomas Pynchon and American Counterculture*, for an extended discussion of Pynchon’s attitude to anti-porn feminism, in particular “Chapter 5: Feminism Moderate and Radical in *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Vineland*: Pynchon and the Women’s Movement”. Although statements from Pynchon on the subject

be known as the Porn Wars, making porn the “leading feminist issue of the eighties” and enduring topic of debate today.¹⁰² Sex-positive feminist responses have frequently highlighted the alliance between this lobby, led by Dworkin and Cathleen McKinnon, and the moral authoritarian Christian right, and also suggested that this discourse mimics that of the object of its condemnation. Lynn Segal is among many proponents of a more nuanced view, abundantly critical of the excesses of pornography but addressing not whether it should exist but in what form. “Instead of insisting upon the literal truths of pornography, other feminists [...] have seen sexual representation as a site of political and discursive struggle – including struggle around just those sex acts which some find self-evidently ‘degrading’ and ‘dehumanizing’”.¹⁰³ Attacks on anti-porn feminist positions have often centred on their reliance upon anecdotal evidence: “Such logic invests virtually any isolated example of pornographic material with metonymic abilities that again enable knowledge over pornography as an assumedly single entity.”¹⁰⁴ Refuting arguments of this kind has proven problematic.

Ballard appropriated images from surrealism, pornography and medical textbooks to illustrate the shocking collages of *The Atrocity Exhibition* (1970) and the car-crash fetishism novel it ultimately generated, *Crash* (1973).¹⁰⁵ *The Atrocity Exhibition* is an assembly of 15 “chapters” in turn compiled from ostensibly non-sequential single-paragraph vignettes, or “condensed novels” as Ballard called them, with intertitles in bold print.¹⁰⁶ Jeanette Baxter reads these “separate-paragraph” texts as “interchangeable documents within a Surrealist

have not been forthcoming, Freer provides considerable textual support from his fiction to suggest that while identifying with feminism in general, Pynchon would be unlikely to align himself with its radical variant. Wallace briefly satirised the tendency in *Infinite Jest*, creating the “Female Objectification Prevention and Protest Phalanx”, which in a footnote he describes as a “Dworkinite heavy leather organisation” (307, 1004n). See Chapter 3 for a discussion of correspondences between Amis’ position in *Yellow Dog* and that of Dworkin.

¹⁰² O’Toole, *Pornocopia*, 31. See Brunskell-Evans, *Medical Authority of Pornography*, for a collection of essays amounting to an extended radical feminist manifesto still heavily indebted to the Dworkinite position as recently as 2016.

¹⁰³ Segal, “Contradictions of Anti-Pornography Feminism”, 62.

¹⁰⁴ Paasonen, “Epilogue: Porn Futures”, 169.

¹⁰⁵ Ballard, *The Atrocity Exhibition*. The original edition was first published in Great Britain by Jonathan Cape in 1970; a revised, expanded, annotated, illustrated edition was first published in the USA by Re/Search Publications in 1990; a revised, expanded, annotated, illustrated edition was published by Flamingo in Great Britain in 2001. All subsequent references, abbreviated in the text as *AE*, are to the 1990 Re/Search edition, unless otherwise indicated.

¹⁰⁶ Sellars and O’Hara, *Extreme Metaphors*, 51.

narrative collage".¹⁰⁷ Moreover, Ballard's "Author's Note" to the 2001 *Flamingo* edition recommends reading them in random order, since this would be the same way as the book was written. Baxter further argues that *The Atrocity Exhibition* "flaunts a structure of repetition which works to erase familiarity, linearity and sequentiality".¹⁰⁸ This is another way in which the book echoes the structures of pornography: scenes are reiterated to furnish variations with constant tiny reminders of their predecessors. This is why various chapter titles and intertitles, including "Venus Smiles", "The Sixty Minute Zoom", "Concentration City" and "The Terminal Zone" are also the titles of earlier Ballard stories.¹⁰⁹ In examining whether pornography can be considered a genre of film, and in the process holding it up for comparison with other genres, Schaschek finds that it "seems to make a particularly excessive case in terms of quantity and quality of both repetition and variation."¹¹⁰ This phenomenon is apparent throughout *The Atrocity Exhibition* even to the point of still-recognizable variations in the naming of the mutable protagonist T-figure: Talbert, Traven, Travis, Talbot.

As William Burroughs notes in his preface to the 1990 RE/Search edition, "the magnification of the image to the point where it becomes unrecognizable is a keynote of *The Atrocity Exhibition*". These blown-up textual close-ups dismantle pornography "as a series of fragmentary, passionless, alienated responses to a set of stimuli".¹¹¹ As such, in purely formal terms, *The Atrocity Exhibition* is more akin to a collection of stag films or gonzo vignettes, than to a narrative porno feature with an overarching if potentially asinine plot. Stag was also a platform in which film editors very frequently cut in shots from pre-existing footage and recycled scenes into longer reels, sometimes called "potpourri" films.¹¹² Gonzo was the *ostensibly* plotless porn sub-genre which rose to

¹⁰⁷ Baxter, *Surrealist Imagination*, 60.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 80.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 80.

¹¹⁰ "Camera work, sexual positions, and characters resemble one another to the point that the scenarios become not only predictable but possibly exchangeable. At the same time pornography does not cease to split into a growing array of subcategories as random and diverse as "anal", "amateur," or "Asian", each accentuating certain variations on the repetitive formulas of sexual practices, narrative style, or fetishized identity" (Schaschek, *Pornography and Seriality*, 31-2).

¹¹¹ Introduction by Andrea Juno and V. Vale to the 1990 Re/Search edition of *The Atrocity Exhibition*.

¹¹² Slade, "Eroticism and Technological Regression", 38.

dominance in the late 1990s.¹¹³ I say ostensibly because gonzo may offer copulations as narrative action rather than interposing narrative between sexual interludes, in the tradition established by generations of features directors. Nonetheless, the manner in which gonzo vignettes are offered online recalls the way Ballard envisaged the texts in *The Atrocity Exhibition* being accessed.¹¹⁴

The term “gonzo” originally emerged in 1971, derived from Hunter S. Thompson’s concept of gonzo journalism, a technique associated with the New Journalism of the time.¹¹⁵ In porn it eradicates the clear distinction between performers and directors and camera operators, who often participate in the action. It focusses on tight shots of genitalia and other body parts and eschews elaborate sets and costumes. Gonzo prefers the handheld, subjective camera and attempts to locate the viewer within the action, aspiring to an effect comparable to that envisaged for consumers who were to put themselves in Shane Drinion’s position cited earlier in this chapter. Stag filmmakers, striving for the same authenticity via a different route, “deliberately subverted not only realism but also the medium through conscious ineptitude: the performers knocked over light stands, or the cinematographer intruded into the frame”.¹¹⁶ Both stag and gonzo therefore appear to correspond to Bolter and Grusin’s definition of hypermediacy: “A style of visual representation whose goal is to remind the viewer of the medium.”¹¹⁷ Perversely, though, gonzo can also approach their second strategy,

¹¹³ In *Pornland*, Dines offers two definitions of gonzo: “that genre which is all over the Internet and is today one of the biggest money makers for the industry – which depicts hardcore, body-punishing sex in which women are demeaned and debased” (xi), and “often referred to as *wall-to-wall* because it contains sex scene after sex scene with no attempt at a plot or storyline, this type of porn is, according to a 2005 article in *AVN* [*Adult Video News*] ‘the overwhelmingly dominant porn genre since it’s less expensive to produce than plot-orientated features. [...] [It is] the fare for the solo-stroking consumer who merely wants to cut to the chase, get off on the good stuff” (xxii).

¹¹⁴ “*Vivid*, one of the most prominent pornography studios, makes 60 films a year. Three years ago, almost all of them were feature-length films with story lines. Today, more than half are a series of sex scenes, loosely connected by some thread – “vignettes” in the industry vernacular – that can be presented separately online” (Richtel, “Forget the Script”).

¹¹⁵ “Reporting that draws upon fictional techniques to describe non-fictional situations. [...] It engages the public in a prose style that tries to replicate the feeling of that direct experience. Often taken to mean a privileging of participation over observation and of style over substance, various literary features – such as hyperbole, exaggeration, profanity, extended first-person narrative and satire– characterize its output to varying degrees” (Allan and Zelizer, *News and Journalism Studies*, 51).

¹¹⁶ Slade, “Eroticism and Technological Regression”, 12.

¹¹⁷ Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, 272.

which they see as opposed to hypermediacy, i.e. that of immediacy: “a style of visual representation whose goal is to make the viewer forget the presence of the medium [...] and believe that he is in the presence of the objects of representation”.¹¹⁸

Ballard’s fiction later propagated the transcendence of the everyday through indiscriminate pan-sexualization, the focalizer’s ungovernable urge to sexually engage with everyone encountered in *The Unlimited Dream Company* (1979), and envisaged entry of interactive porn into private spaces in the stories of *Myths of the Near Future* (1982).¹¹⁹ Chapter 1 will show how Ballard, by excising part-images from their context, identified pornography as a new grammar, geometry and anatomy of interpersonal and technological relationships.

“The first pornographic novel based on technology,” was the Ballardian boast about his *Crash* (September 1973).¹²⁰ Zadie Smith identifies a useful duality in this claim, “he referred not only to a certain kind of content but to pornography as an organising principle”.¹²¹ However, Ballard might just as easily have conferred this plaudit on Pynchon’s third novel published earlier the same year (28 February 1973). To reverse the current of Ballard’s causality: in *Gravity’s Rainbow* technologies are enacted in the human sphere through pornographic episodes. Unseen forces manifest themselves through the couplings of bodies. What is more, though his projection of himself as a public absence contrasts with the fragrance of Ballard’s occasional media stunts, Pynchon’s co-option of the pornographic is unapologetic and it is readily apparent as both content and organizing principle in his novels, particularly *Gravity’s Rainbow*, as he exhibited sexual material which rattled the unsteady boundary fences of post-*Chatterley* censorial tolerance and assailed the literary establishment. Weimar cinema, sadomasochism, fetishism and prosthesis are among the sources of sexual imagery mapped onto power relations in the wider world. Chapter 2 will read *Gravity’s Rainbow* alongside *Vineland* (1990) and *Against the Day* (2006) to show how extreme sex in Pynchon, though mutating along with the pornographic zeitgeist through eras dominated by different media, nevertheless constantly returns to the trope of

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 272.

¹¹⁹ Ballard, *The Unlimited Dream Company*. Subsequent references in the text abbreviated as UDC; Ballard, *Myths of the Near Future*. Subsequent references in the text abbreviated as MNF.

¹²⁰ Ballard, *I-D* 1987, qtd in *Quotes*, 278.

¹²¹ Smith, “Sex and Wheels”.

Troilism, as male characters employ female lovers as a means to communicate with other men.¹²²

Martin Amis's 1980s novels *Money* and *London Fields* might on first reading appear tainted by complicity with "pornification", particularly because of their siren heroines in complex underwear.¹²³ In the former Selina Street traded glamorous sex for access to a joint bank account, and in the latter Nicola Six manipulated a villain through video recordings of herself in sexual performance. However, this all presaged his re-evaluation of the issue in *Yellow Dog* (2003). Just as Ballard before him, Amis addressed the fear of child abuse and the shortening of youth. Ballard's aviator anti-hero Blake, earthbound after a small aircraft crash in *The Unlimited Dream Company*, poses a sexual threat to everyone he meets. Similarly, a blow to the head and subsequent concussion impair Amis's protagonist Xan Meo's sense of sexual morality, and make him a danger to his infant daughters. Chapter 3 follows the transition of Amis' position in his fiction from edgy exploiter to self-appointed feminist critic and anti-porn crusader.

As the analogue image viewed "on-site" capitulated to the digital image "online", David Foster Wallace, in *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men* (1999), addressed how technology has fuelled sex addiction, furnishing us with a moral critique of intimacy in relationships in the age of porn.¹²⁴ Amis also joined Wallace in re-addressing the colonization of relationships and marriage, and furthermore exposed the tawdriness of British popular journalism and the "Californication" of the global porn industry.¹²⁵ Ballard, Amis and Wallace all engaged with the publically sexual outside their fiction. Ballard, an apologist for and proponent of pornography as a force for social change once hired a woman to appear

¹²² Pynchon, *Vineland*. Subsequent references in the text abbreviated as VL. Pynchon, *Against the Day*. Subsequent references in the text abbreviated as ATD.

¹²³ Amis, *Money*. Subsequent references in the text abbreviated as M. Amis, *London Fields*. Subsequent references in the text abbreviated as LF. In this context the OED gives only the verb *pornographize* but, given this project's focus on visual porn, I will follow numerous commentators, including Paasonen, Nikunen and Saarenmaa in *Pornification: Sex and Sexuality in Media Culture*, in using the more concise *pornify* and its attendant noun *pornification*.

¹²⁴ Wallace, *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men*. Subsequent references in the text abbreviated as BIWHM.

¹²⁵ This term emerged as the title of the Red Hot Chilli Peppers' 1999 album of that name, and was appropriated by TV series producer Showtime as the title of a David Duchovny vehicle (2007-2014). I use it here to denote the pervasive influence of Californian media tropes from both Hollywood and the San Fernando porn industry far beyond the state itself. Conveniently, it also incorporates "fornication".

topless and interview visitors to his public art exhibition of crashed cars.¹²⁶ Amis loitered on the fringes of a porno set interviewing both industry predators and damaged performer victims for “A Rough Trade”, and Wallace published embedded reportage from the *Adult Video News Awards* in the essay “Big Red Son”.¹²⁷ Chapter 4 will show how this informed Wallace’s book about sex, *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men*, and his estimation of the harm occasioned by limitless access to mediated sex.

Finally, *Inherent Vice* (2009), Pynchon’s reboot of 1970 California, imbued its characters’ interactions with sexual charges ignited by subsequent, intervening generations of images.¹²⁸ His exhibition of the sexual charisma of celebrity, in this case Charles Manson and his atrocities, recalls Ballard’s deployment of political figures like Ronald Reagan and Jacqueline Onassis, and screen actresses including Marilyn Monroe and Elizabeth Taylor. Chapter 5 offers a separate case study of *Inherent Vice* as an exemplar of how the sexualized mainstream can drive character interaction, even retrospectively in Pynchon’s West Coast nostalgia trip.

Stag reels, booth loops and top-shelf magazines sexualize the late 1960s of Ballard, who fuses these media with the anatomy textbook and the dissecting room. He reduces the sexual image to catalogued components which can be reassembled in myriad re-combinations, and in doing so chronicles the death of affect, which he articulated as a numbing of emotional response to the sexual image. Chapter 1 will examine this in response to the fourth criterion Susan Sontag lists in an influential 1969 essay titled “The Pornographic Imagination” to distinguish between literature, the subject of which is “the relation of human beings to each other, their complex feelings and emotions,” and pornography, which in contrast, “disdains fully formed persons (psychology and social portraiture), is oblivious to the questions of

¹²⁶ Ballard was shocked at the response to *Jim Ballard: Crashed Cars*, which took place at the New Arts Laboratory in Covent Garden, London between 4-28 April 1970: “I have never seen guests at an art gallery get drunk so quickly. There was huge tension in the air, as if everyone felt threatened by some inner alarm that had started to ring.[...] Wine was splashed over the car, windows were broken and the topless girl was almost raped in the backseat of the Pontiac,” (*Miracles of Life*, 239-40).

¹²⁷ Amis originally published “A Rough Trade” as “Sex in America” in *Talk* magazine, February 2001: 98-103, 133-35, then under this title in *The Guardian* on 17 March 2001 and in De Luigi and Amis, *Pornoland*. Wallace originally published “Big Red Son” as “Neither Adult Nor Entertainment” in *Premiere* magazine, September 1998, under the pseudonyms Willem R. de Groot and Matt Rundlet and later under this title in *Consider the Lobster*, 3-50.

¹²⁸ Pynchon, *Inherent Vice*, 274. Further references cited in text abbreviated as *IV*.

motive and the credibility, and reports only the motiveless tireless transactions of depersonalised organs.”¹²⁹ The sexual code of Wallace’s men and women is written by the video booth, the underwear catalogue and the appropriated mainstream television programme. Amis engages with all formats and all media: strip bar, peep show, magazine, gutter press tabloid, phone sex and text message, VHS, DVD and streaming video. In dramatizing the rise of abusive gonzo hardcore, Amis examines the damage to male consumer, female performer and even complicit female purveyor. Wallace and Amis document a rising anhedonia, in tune with alarms sounded by 21st century anti-porn agitators like Gail Dines and Pamela Paul, which had been seemingly inconceivable in the pansexual 1970s of Pynchon and Ballard.¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Sontag, “The Pornographic Imagination”, 208.

¹³⁰ See also Wolf, “The Porn Myth”, for a persuasive account of declining male libido in a pornified world: “For the first time in human history, the images’ power and allure have supplanted that of real naked women. Today, real naked women are just bad porn”. This feature article evinces a perverse nostalgia for early 1970s porno-chic era: “*When Behind the Green Door* first opened, clumsy, earnest, missionary-position intercourse was still considered to be a huge turn-on”.



Figure 1. A Neural Interval

Chapter 1 - Edited Sexual Images and Part-Objects in the fiction of J.G. Ballard

The Atrocity Exhibition (1970), *Crash* (1973), *The Unlimited Dream Company* (1979), *Myths of the Near Future* (1982).

This Sinister Hobby

Anne Godwin was shaking her head to herself. She had turned from Sheppard and was examining with evident distaste the pornographic photographs pinned to the wardrobe doors. The glossy prints were overlaid by geometric diagrams, which this strange tenant of the motel had pencilled across the copulating women, a secondary anatomy. (*MNF* 30)

Images on paper are defaceable, corruptible, over-writable. Ballard himself overwrote/annotated images when he purchased space in *Ambit*, *Ark* and *New Worlds* magazines for "Advertiser's Announcements", five full-page spreads which synthesised "textual inventories and visual materials".¹ The third among them is "A Neural Interval" (Figure 1): a black-and-white photograph from a bondage magazine featuring a woman wearing a facial harness and complex gag, a relatively modest leather ensemble and fetters, apparently at sea in a small boat.² The image is not revealing in a physical sense but nonetheless fetishistic and intentionally disturbing because of the restraints and the potential danger. This power to excite distaste was an important component of Ballard's presentation, not intrinsically but in juxtaposition with textual material. Incorporated in the frame is this caption: "In her face the diagram of bones forms a geometry of murder. After Freud's exploration within the psyche it is now the outer world of reality which must be

¹ Baxter, *Surrealist Imagination*, 67.

² This image was among those drawn from the archive of Eduardo Paolozzi (1924-2005), who made collages, assemblages and other art and worked on the editorial team of *Ambit* with Ballard in the 1960s. Ballard saw in him a species of collaborator, albeit working in a different art form: "On publication, this work was welcomed as Pop Art, but through Ballard's eyes it was closely related to his own literary project that sought to analyse the media landscape for its libidinous content" (*ibid.*, 2009). For an extended conversation between Paolozzi and Ballard covering surrealism, encounters with machines and what Paolozzi termed, "the pornography of human values" (41), see Whitford, "Speculative Illustrations".

quantified and eroticised.”³ There is a degree of irony because most of the woman’s face is obscured, perhaps the most of epitomic portent of what David Punter has termed the “strong erasure of character” in Ballard’s fictions.⁴ The overlaying of text instils in the overtly sexual image what Ballard was often inclined to call a new grammar, which could equally be the “secondary anatomy” above. Over a decade later, Anne Godwin, despite her misgivings about the pornographic photos in the above-cited passage from “Myths of the Near Future” (1982), is co-opted into participating in this quantification and eroticising of reality. This young psychologist is persuaded to exhibit her body repeatedly and graphically in mad scientist Sheppard’s video collage project to “construct a metaphor to bring [his] wife back to life”.⁵ From “Advertisers’ Announcements” and *The Atrocity Exhibition* up to this story and beyond there is progression in Ballard’s fiction from still to moving image. His fascination with dividing and repurposing the sexual began with anatomy textbooks, sexology research and magazines, progressed through the peep-show loops and stag reels and imagined the potential of Polaroids and VCRs. He acknowledged pornography’s currency and impact in his writing and without compunction advocated its proliferation. His calculations of its impact upon the culture were based on positive belief in its politically transforming value (AE 36).⁶

Sexual partial images excised from context, magnified and redeployed came to prominence in Ballard’s fiction of the early 1970s. This was a period of accelerated mutations in the erotic landscape, during which mediated sexual content emerged from the clandestine environments of the loop and stag reel and out into the open as the full-length adult main feature. This was the time when speaking sex moved “on/scene”. During the history of still photography and moving image, pornography has composed and recomposed itself as collages of, respectively, rearranged and re-sequenced sexual images. In this period, it also supplies raw material for Ballard’s “flickering video-collage in

³ Black, *Terminal Atrocity Zone Ballard*, 24.

⁴ Punter, *The Hidden Script*, 9.

⁵ Ballard, *Myths of the Near Future*, 32.

⁶ Ballard expressed this idea in a polemical annotation to the 1990 edition of *The Atrocity Exhibition* cited at length below (36). Ballard was a frequently-interviewed man: his pronouncements have been variously collected in Sellars and O’Hara, *Extreme Metaphors: Interviews with JG Ballard 1967–2008*; Ballard and Vale. *JG Ballard: Conversations*; Ballard., Vale and Ryan. *J.G. Ballard: Quotes*. Ballard. *A User's Guide to the Millennium: Essays and Reviews*.

written form” of postmodern life.⁷ During the middle decades of the twentieth century, in painting, collage and sculpture, the surrealist project to expand the limits of desire had relocated part-images of the (usually female) erotic body into uncanny spaces.⁸ Following the path beaten by his antecedents, his excision of these part-images from their context engineered what Ballard repeatedly termed “the death of affect” (AE 70, 72, 75, 77).

In this era, illicit photographs and playing cards circulated and still shots ripped-out from discarded top-shelf magazines (*Penthouse* and *Playboy* showed photographs of pubic hair for the first time in 1969 and 1970 respectively) or British red-top tabloids (*The Sun* started its page 3 topless feature in late 1970) littered pavements.⁹ However, it was still a few years before the VCR and VHS would take hard-core into the privacy of suburban homes and the sources of the moving image were still public, evolving rapidly from covert and illegal stag into legitimate and legally-exhibited porno. These Ballard cut and juxtaposed with the Hollywood film, the celebrity publicity image and the wartime television newsreel and subjected them to processes of massive photographic enlargement. Finally, the former medical student whose autobiography *Miracles of Life* spoke with such nostalgic and detailed appreciation of the human cadavers he was required to dissect, cut and pasted medical anatomical images into his fiction, remediating the textbook in prose and appropriating the medical-scientific descriptive register. In an essay on *Crash* Baudrillard notes Ballard’s use of technical terms for the erotic: “No ass, no dick, no cunt but: the anus, the rectum, the penis, coitus. No slang, that is to say no intimacy of sexual violence, but a functional language”.¹⁰ Beyond this examination of the lifeless human body, the sexually active body offered itself to the scientific gaze through experiments conducted by sexologists, chief among them those conducted by William Masters and Virginia Johnson upon massed

⁷ Introduction by Andrea Juno and V. Vale to the 1990 edition of *The Atrocity Exhibition*.

⁸ The uncanny “evokes the cycle of life [...] especially through the fragmented, castrated or abject body” (Mahon, *Politics of Eros*, 17).

⁹ Slade, *Pornography in America*, 154; Christopher, *British Culture*, 77. Ballard also published fiction in *Playboy*, which though not appreciably sexual in nature (“The Dead Astronaut” in May 1968) was of course juxtaposed with sexual images. “The Rumour”, retitled “The Life and Death of God” (1966) is listed by Rick McGrath in *Terminal Collection* as “[s]old to, but spiked by *Playboy Magazine*”.

¹⁰ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 111. This essay, “*Crash*”, was originally published in French as an introduction to the French edition of the novel (Paris: Clamann-Lévy, 1974).

cohorts of 1960s volunteers. Meagan Tyler has argued that early sexological texts were frequently perceived as obscene both within and outside the medical profession, and that sexology and the sex therapies it offered became intertwined with pornography throughout the latter part of the 20th century.¹¹ She maintains that Masters and Johnson were among “key figures in sexology [...] who have gone on record as being in favour of pornography use”, and identifies various intended functions, most pertinently as the “treatment for paraphilias and sexual dysfunction”.¹² As such, for Ballard pornography and sexology are aligned on the same spectrum. For Baudrillard, though, “the functionalism of *Crash* devours its own rationality because it does not know dysfunction”.¹³ In the Ballardian universe devoid of affect, then, this analogy between sexology and pornography is metonymic and the one cannot cure dysfunction caused or identified by the other because that dysfunction cannot exist.

Crash (1973) became the culmination of a working method which evolved during the composition of the various discrete texts which he had assembled to form *The Atrocity Exhibition*, and evolved directly from the twelfth among them: “Crash”. The sexual subject matter Ballard appropriated in this earlier text had not at the time impinged upon the mainstream. It was taboo, originating from an underground subculture. Once these images came to permeate public consciousness, his fiction aspired for the first time to a greater understanding of their potential consequences, and in the 1980s came to document not just the revolutionary potential of mediated sexuality, but also its projected fallout. In addition to assessing synchronically the landscapes of sexual mediation he encountered, Ballard’s work of the 70s and early 80s engages diachronically with the rapid changes to which new technologies subjected them.

Edited Images

Twentieth-century photography and film technologies edited the human body, which frequently lent itself to representation for sexual stimulation not in its undivided wholeness, but rather as partial, cropped, torn, incomplete images of its covered or uncovered parts, potentially blown

¹¹ Tyler, “A Prescription for Porn”, 115.

¹² *Ibid.*, 118.

¹³ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 118.

up to scales enormously beyond the human.¹⁴ Both editor and photographer/cinematographer have the power to exclude facial features or interrogate them in such extreme close-up they elude recognition. This threatens the face's primacy: it may no longer be the first or only uncovered part of the body upon which the gaze falls. It must compete with primary and secondary human sexual characteristics as the camera fetishizes various parts of the body, partially or wholly covered or uncovered, just as the image in "iii) A Neural Interval" (Figure 1), in which all the woman's primary and secondary sexual characteristics, and indeed the majority of her face, are obscured. These partial images may be distorted or improved, repeated or sequenced. This is the primary status of the body in *The Atrocity Exhibition*: "Throughout, the body is repeatedly exhibited in various states of fragmentation, sometimes subject to careful mutilation, sometimes sectioned by the pornographic gaze or by the cropped frame of an extreme close-up into partial objects".¹⁵ This entails the disassembly and reassembly of the body, which is remediated to generate part-images at once human and non-human, at once derived and inscribed. This representation, as in much pornography, is *pars pro toto*, positing synecdochic relations of erotic stimulation between partial image and whole body, with the former denoting pleasure experienced by the latter. Ultimately, this is unavoidable since the body cannot be shown from every angle simultaneously and images therefore, for the purposes of the camera shooting two-dimensionally from a finite number of angles, cannot be holographic. Though sequences of mid-range shots of a whole sex manual of positions offer a narrative documentary account of the prolonged, varied and athletic encounters pornography demands, it is sequences of disparate close-ups which assay to narrate the succession of purported or real pleasures. It is these close-ups which Ballard exhibits.

¹⁴ Ballard repeatedly references huge billboards in *The Atrocity Exhibition*, with a particular fascination for Elizabeth Taylor: "[T]he huge figure of a dark-haired woman painted on the sloping walls of the blockhouse. The magnification was enormous. The wall on his right, the size of a tennis court, contained little more than the right eye and cheekbone. He recognized the woman from the billboards he had seen near the hospital - the screen actress, Elizabeth Taylor" (16).

¹⁵ Hui Bon Hoa, "Pornographic Geometries", 71. And yet, this sectioning or mutilation of partial images does not constitute disembodiment, since the images mediate the body rather than being enclosed/held by it and therefore take on an entirely new, unrecognizable form. Equally, the photographed/filmed body is not dismembered but remains intact.

The skeletal plot of Michelangelo Antonioni's abstract *Blow-Up* (1966) revolves around a fashion photographer in swinging London who is left cold by the models and other attractive women with whom he interacts and finds himself aroused only by the fragments of reality he can capture through the lens. He processes the film in his camera when he returns to his darkroom and inadvertently catches a murderer in the frame of the outdoor shot in a park, which leads to Antonioni's conclusion about the death of affect: "As he 'blows up' the tell-tale prints to greater and greater scale, objective reality becomes pure abstraction, and the film ends by suggesting that modern experience, even (or, perhaps, especially) when rendered visible on film, is not subject to interpretation, and is therefore meaningless".¹⁶ Throughout *The Atrocity Exhibition*, enlargement and the "indexical power of the photographic image" is associated with alienation (which Ballard trumpeted as something to be embraced) and "obsessive scopophilia".¹⁷ The reading of these images is a graphic process involving geometry and topology which supplants emotional engagement. However, the sexual charge experienced by narrator and characters alike does not diminish. It perhaps appears at first to mutate, and we are inclined to assign pathological sexual deviancy to the observer. But Ballard will have us contemplate another possibility: a pre-existing affectless sexual gaze levelled at the female body has been drawn into the visible spectrum by the act of massive enlargement. It was there all along. Recording technology transforms participation in sex into surveillance, into voyeurism.

In 1990, Ballard told Maura Devereux in a telephone interview that:

I think there is a sort of *close-focus* element in the *pornographic eye* that inevitably screens out human feeling, then that is part of the sexual imagination. It is powerfully obsessive; a lover may fix his or her gaze on the partner's ear and find all sorts of magic and mystery in the ear quite separately from any feelings of affection or what have you. I mean, that's part of

¹⁶ David A Cook, *History of Narrative Film*, 629. Antonioni's *Blow-Up* was a loose adaptation of a short story, "Las babas del diablo" (literally, "The Devil's Drool") by the Argentinian Julio Cortázar. See Hui Bon Hoa for an exploration of parallels with *The Atrocity Exhibition*: "In Antonioni's film, the equation of magnification and explosion evoked in the title is emblemized by the reduction of image to the grain of the photograph - to the asignifying mechanics of photographic technology" ("Pornographic Geometries", 74).

¹⁷ Hui Bon Hoa, "Pornographic Geometries", 74.

the way the human imagination works. So the apparent dehumanizing effects of the pornographic imagination don't worry me.¹⁸

Ballard here proposes a pornographic imagination brokered first through synecdoche, then through recapitulation. In its first phase, training the gaze on an anatomical detail fulfils a synecdochic function: the partial image first represents then replaces the whole, the two for an instant becoming, to all intents and purposes, interchangeable. Ballard's recourse to the ear rather than some primary or secondary sexual characteristics is intentionally absurd to the end of illustration but in recent decades online pornography, mutating and expanding in all directions, has perhaps made partial images of every conceivable human feature.¹⁹ On the internet no fetish is unthinkable. However, once isolated from context, the partial image requires new potentialities. Jean Baudrillard begins his essay about *Crash* by asserting that technology is an extension of the body but then concedes that in Ballard's vision it is "the mortal deconstruction of the body".²⁰ He goes on to "resist the moral temptation of reading *Crash* as perversion" and assert that "only the fetishistic metaphor is perverse, seduction via the model, via the interposed fetish, or via the medium of language".²¹ Ballard's method, then, is to affix the partial image to some nonhuman object to compose a fetish which operates by charging the union of the woman and the man-made. Moreover, an infinite array of other wholes can be cloned from the body and since these new beings have no existence outside the imagination they generate no feelings beyond sexual desire and can be held up as the killers of affect.

Ballard also offers recapitulation as a mode of pleasure, the echoing of past experience, past impressions. Once one has assembled a mental library or lexicon of partial images, they may be gathered together into one to return the object of desire to immanence. This example equates, for instant, two distinct young women and an inanimate landscape: "The young woman in the white dress sat beside him. Her breasts and shoulders recapitulated the forgotten contours of Karen Novotny's body, the motion-sculpture of the highways" (AE 21). In doing so, it of course

¹⁸ Ballard and Vale, *Conversations*, 207-208.

¹⁹ See for instance this self-explanatory article: *Celebuzz!*, "Kim Kardashian Opens Up About Make-Up, Tiny Ear Fetish".

²⁰ Baudrillard, "Crash" in *Simulacra and Simulation*, 111.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 113.

erodes the distinctiveness of the women, dehumanizing, objectifying them. Since Ballard sees this process as integral to the erotic impulse, whether mediated or ostensibly authentic, he refuses to identify it as damaging: “What *The Atrocity Exhibition* [and *Crash*] is in part devoted to, is the quest to go beyond apparent dehumanization into a new realm where a wholly new sort of grammar and syntax, a new vocabulary, a new way of perceiving the world, will emerge”.²²

The excision and discarding of sections of a narrative which fail to serve erotic purpose approximates to an inversion of censorship through expurgation: one strews the cutting room floor with narrative segues, the other with sexual interludes. To divide the adult feature after 1972 into these two potentially overlapping but nonetheless distinct components does not set it apart from other contemporaneous genres of mainstream cinema. Williams offers an extended analogy between hard-core and the musical stressing that that the sex-sounds and the singing respectively are added in post-production dubbing.²³ This invites the generation of a category of set-piece action (sex, singing, violence, extravagant special effects, or perhaps rock ‘n’ roll performances in music biopics, fight scenes in boxing movies, big games in sports films and so forth) proffered as the recurring highlight and driving force of a given entertainment, but which may not comprise its whole. To this day, both Hollywood and mainstreamed adult features aspire to incorporate these components within an overarching narrative which both segues between them and divides them from one another. Dirty movies were, however, not always so.

Stag and Loop

Before 1970s *porno chic*, the chief sources of the mediated sexual image had remained underground, unavailable to the mass of potential twentieth century consumers. Perusal for the perverted minority was both public and private but always covert: groups gathered in brothels, smokers and tents to watch stag reels but men also entered booths to watch peep-show loops and photographs and magazines often came by mail-order. There had been a shift from black and white to colour in the home movies market after the Second World War as Kodak introduced Ektachrome, initially developed in the early 1940s, which allowed

²² Ballard and Vale, *Conversations*, 208.

²³ Williams, *Hard Core*, 120-4.

professionals and amateurs alike to process their own films, but this had little effect on stag.²⁴ Ballard's montage takes images from movies, both Hollywood and blue.²⁵ The distinction between the latter two sources was more distinct before the birth of the full-length adult feature. The much shorter stag films and peep-show loops were largely shot in black and white, shown to covertly gathered audiences or individuals in booths and offered lower production values and acting which only intermittently pretended to professionalism. From the end of the Victorian era until the end of the 1960s, the stag reel had exhibited the breaking of myriad taboos one by one, and has been conceived by many commentators (Di Lauro and Rabkin, Williams, Thompson, Rosen) as providing a form of rudimentary sex education. The genre was highly diverse but, content and basic production values aside, distinct from the erotic or pornographic films which superseded it in two key aspects: audience and duration. "The most obvious primitive qualities of stag films are short length, usually filling a single reel (a thousand feet, up to fifteen minutes) or less; silence and lack of colour; and frequent lack of narrative coherence, thus resembling films of the actual primitive era (roughly 1896-1911)".²⁶ In this, as in much else, the illegal stag film clung to this nostalgic primitivism which, though it may have been born of the necessity of clandestine, illegal production, served to distinguish it from its porno successor. Stags were designed to be shown to "the largest possible number of people gathered together," usually to all-male groups, sometimes of a blue-collar and/or rowdy nature.²⁷ They were atavistic throwbacks to the age of the silent film invisible to anyone outside an underground subculture:

[...] by the mid-60s, despite the dramatic advances the motion-picture industry had made with sound and colour over the previous seventy-five years, stag films had barely changed at all. They looked like 19th-century throwbacks:

²⁴ Talbert, Michael. "Early Kodak Ektachrome Colour." See Rosen (*Beaver Street*, 132) and Slade ("Eroticism and Technological Regression", 12) for stag's resistance to colour.

²⁵ "American usage has preferred 'stag', the British 'blue.'" The latter refers to the colour of the smoky room. Di Lauro and Rabkin, *Dirty Movies*, 41. Thompson offers an alternative explanation: "that colour has been associated with the loudly ribald and obnoxiously obscene ever since it was first hijacked from the New England Puritan lexicon, where it contrarily denoted rigid moral and religious observance" (*Black and White and Blue*, 3).

²⁶ Williams, *Hard Core*, 60

²⁷ Thompson, *Black and White and Blue*, 55.

grainy, silent, black-and-white hard-core 'shorts' [...] that were still exhibited only in traditional private venues, such as basements, bordellos, fraternity houses and American Legion halls.²⁸

In the U.S. the travelling road-shows provided entertainment for convocations of society brothers, workmates or friends. Since the U.K. lacked this tradition stags were shown covertly in private members clubs, a device to circumvent obscenity legislation.

The physical length of the film reel -- first the dangerously inflammable nitrate-based 35 mm film stock and later its acetate-based successor -- limited them to around ten minutes, just enough time to establish a scene, go through multiple sexual variations, and end with a possibly humorous coda, a wink to the camera. However, editing in time - the fourth dimension film adds to photography - can conflate, stretch or freeze time and successive stag eras saw the drive toward more sex per reel: "Storyline, a sense of humour and the unspoken understanding that audiences were sophisticated enough to understand both [...] were eventually deleted from the majority of scenarios".²⁹ Thompson relates how the surviving remnants of seven decades of stags were physically cut up, which led to fragments from different sources being mixed up. Films were often stored in unmarked cans, had their opening scenes excised, contained spliced scenes from other movies, and are only very approximately dateable from the glimpses they contained of contemporary fashions, or furnishings or hairstyles.³⁰ As such, even before Ballard's appropriation, these images led orphaned existences, and much of the intelligence we have today about how they were made is pure surmise. Over time they became increasingly, to retrospectively impose an anachronistic term, hardcore. Crucially, they contained "The close-up that distinguishes the suggestion of sex from the full-bodied actuality of it".³¹

Transferring recorded sexual action onto film, whether moving or still, is an act of remediation. The editing of close ups or extreme close ups, hand-held images or tilted angles reduced sexuality to component parts, to hugely enlarged, enhanced details. The new raw material generated was subjected to dissection and, using the cut-up technique,

²⁸ Rosen, *Beaver Street*, 132.

²⁹ Thompson, *Black and White and Blue*, 14.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 93.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

reassembled and recombined into limitless poses and acts, aligned according to a “new grammar”, in Ballard’s terms, unlike any which might have governed the initial couplings.

“Sexual arousal results from the repetition and impact of image,” wrote William Burroughs in his preface to the 1990 edition of *The Atrocity Exhibition* (AE 7). If there was one format which would guarantee the stimulus of repetition to a customer with sufficient coins in his pocket, it was the peep-show loop, a form of viewing which dated back to the beginning of the century. It survived the porno chic revolution thanks to its ability to attract an audience of one, as distinct from the single-gender but communal stag experience which was diametrically opposed to the new public viewing ideal, whether or not the latter was grounded in reality. Loops evolved in the process as Di Lauro and Rabkin chart: “By the mid-1970s they were more perverse than the pornos in the attempt to provide the viewer with more potent, transgressing images than those available publicly”.³² The distinction resting on “publicly” here is somewhat moot given that neither a booth nor a cinema could afford any real privacy. The loop’s longevity, though, ensured that at least one format endured which would not be tamed by narrative or other constraints imposed by porno:

A ten-minute film is usually divided into five segments of two minutes each, each section triggered by a quarter. Since the film remains at the part of the film abandoned by the previous owner, a new quarter might begin a sequence from the middle or end of the film. Obviously in such circumstances plot and narrative become irrelevant.³³

This structural anarchy was echoed in the realm of experimental cinema when projectionists were issued a customized die to determine the order in which to show Barry Salt’s *Six Reels of Film to Be Shown in Any Order* (1971), a non-sexual film about permutations in the lives of four Londoners. This aleatory technique recalls Ballard’s instructions for reading *The Atrocity Exhibition*. In his “Author’s Note” to the 2001 edition he enjoins the reader to engage with its non-sequential format: “Rather than start at the beginning of each chapter, as in a conventional novel, simply turn the pages until a paragraph catches your eye. If the ideas or

³² Di Lauro and Rabkin, *Dirty Movies*, 117.

³³ *Ibid.*, 117.

images seem interesting scan the nearby paragraphs for anything that resonates in an intriguing way” (AE vi). Baxter, however, cautions that “Ballard constructs a text which is founded upon the very notion that his authorial notes are as unstable as the fictional body which they purport to stabilize”.³⁴ She refers to the marginalia in the 1990 RE/Search edition but the caution is applicable to any paratext Ballard has chosen to associate with the various editions of *The Atrocity Exhibition*. It may nonetheless be read as Ballard’s invitation to seek texture rather than structure in the text.

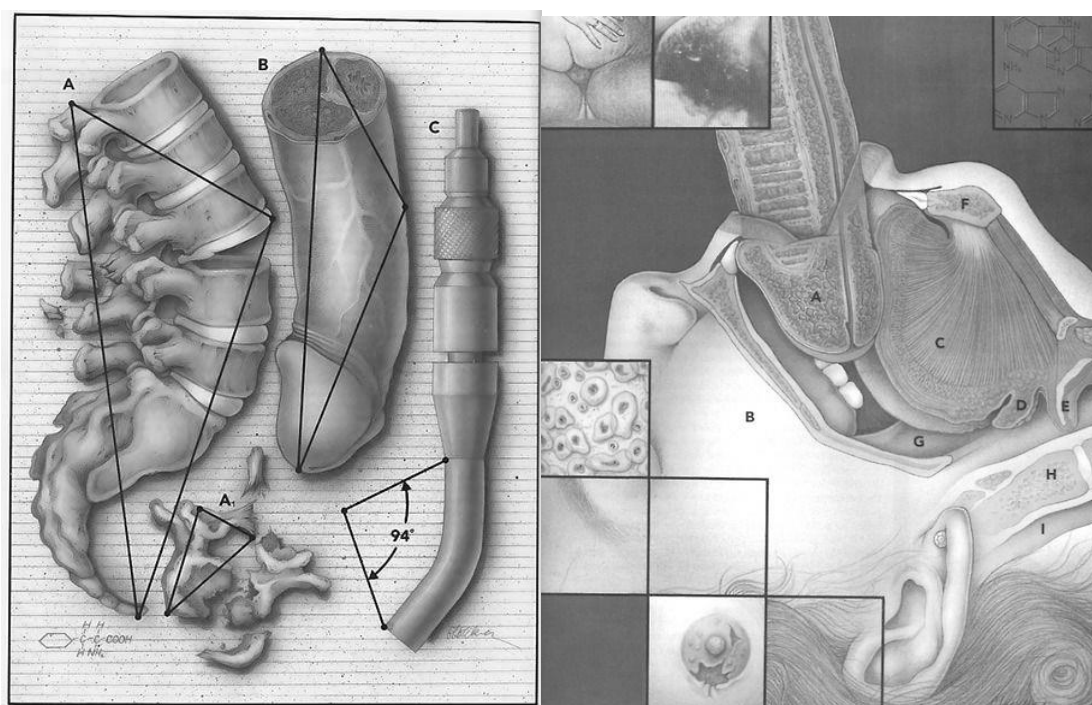


Figure 2. Phoebe Gloeckner's illustrations on pages 8 (left) and 55 (right) of *The Atrocity Exhibition*

Scientific-Pornographic Eye

Thoughts about sex could also be stimulated by non-photographic, non-film proxy sources, without any requirement for authorial intent. A new school of marriage manuals written by sexologists had grown up in a field inaugurated by German psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing’s *Psychopathia Sexualis* (in 12 editions, 1886-1903), which drew the first, modernizing cartographies of sexual practice and composed the first

³⁴ Baxter, *Surrealist Imagination*, 91-92.

typologies of possible acts.³⁵ Ballard appropriated his surname as a proper noun for such taxonomy: "A Krafft-Ebing of Geometry and Posture" (AE 61). Neither the Kinsey Reports, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948) and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (1953), nor the studies by William H. Masters and Virginia E. Johnson, *Human Sexual Response* (1966) and *Human Sexual Inadequacy* (1970), were intended to be salacious in tone or import, but they did describe a range of sexual acts hitherto regarded in many quarters as indescribable.³⁶ In a 1969 review of a contemporary sex manual, *How to Achieve Sexual Ecstasy* by Stephan Gregory, Ballard takes a position which mirrors the interests evinced in his fiction: "masturbation, illicit adventures, frigidity, perversions disenchantment, divorce, neuroses, psychoses, alcoholism and drug addiction [...] these activities are those which most people now seem to prefer [and] sexuality is expressed more and more in terms only of its perversions and disenchantments [...]"³⁷ The anonymity of subjects and the scientific register in which these works recounted sexual histories also constituted a form of excision from context and, inevitably, the abrogation of affect. This became Ballard's stock dry vernacular throughout the period: "The deadpan, quality scientific neutrality of *Crash's* pornographic passages, for instance, parody, the tone of 1960s sexological discourses"³⁸ Moreover, his subsequent marginalia frequently referenced the conflation of scientific and pornographic heuristics: "Bizarre experiments are now commonplace of scientific research, moving ever closer to that junction where science and pornography will eventually meet and fuse. Conceivably the day will come when science is itself the greatest producer of pornography" (AE 68). Feminist criticism after 1970 would hazard assessments of the damage to accruing both porno performers and consumers, dividing this damage into two distinct categories. Correspondingly, Ballard, in familiar offbeat fashion, would first implicitly equate Masters and

³⁵ Krafft-Ebing and Klaf, *Psychopathia Sexualis*. "Krafft-Ebing set a precedent for 20th century sexology when he collated a mass of personal sexual histories which he then catalogued and documented according to what he considered to be degenerative acts of sexual perversity (these perversities ranged from benign fetishistic attachments to cannibalism and necrophilia)" (Baxter, *Surrealist Imagination*, 77).

³⁶ Masters and Johnson, *Human Sexual Inadequacy*; Masters and Johnson, *Human Sexual Response*; Kinsey, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*; Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin and Sloan. *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*.

³⁷ "Use your Vagina" in Ballard, *Millennium*, 258.

³⁸ Baxter, *Surrealist Imagination*, 114.

Johnson's reports with the production of erotic texts, then ironically diffuse their impact upon the volunteers or the reader:

For me, the most interesting aspect of the work of Masters and Johnson, collected in *Human Sexual Response*, was its effect on themselves. How were *their* sex lives influenced, what changes occurred in their sexual freedoms and fantasies? In conversation they seemed almost neutered by the experiments. I suspect that the copulating volunteers were really training the good doctors to lose all interest in sex. (AE 19)

Prescient as ever, one suspects he would have revelled in the highly-regarded television series *Masters of Sex* (from 2013), which explored precisely these sexual dimensions. Nevertheless, it should also not escape notice that uniformly attractive women doctors or psychologists wearing, and opening, white lab coats constitute a recurring fetish in Ballard's fiction.

The medical profession, in a tradition dating back as long as 200 years, contributed first verbal descriptions and then drawn and later photographed images of genitalia and secondary sexual organs. Randolph Trunbach's inquiry into whether what we would recognize as 20th century pornography existed as early as the 18th century concludes: "if the standard used is the visual representation or verbal description of sexual organs [...] [M]any of the verbal descriptions of genitals are to be found in medical works..."³⁹ Although titillation of sorts might conceivably have been derived from works such as *Gray's Anatomy* (first published 1858) it was "not for the obvious sexual reasons" that Ballard had written of being drawn as a Cambridge undergraduate to a female cadaver and to the clues her bodily imperfections gave to her life history.⁴⁰ He acquired "a vast fund of anatomical metaphors that would thread through all my fiction" which created a simultaneous double view of the body which assigns it sexuality but never forgets its mechanical functioning, its status as an organism.⁴¹ The annotated 1990 edition of *The Atrocity Exhibition* strikingly underlines this duality with a series of whole-page photographs and illustrations:

³⁹ Trunbach, "Erotic Fantasy and Male Libertinism", 260.

⁴⁰ Ballard, *Miracles of Life*, 144.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 145.

Yet another level of reality is challenged by Phoebe Gloeckner's precisely-drawn illustrations to the revised edition of *The Atrocity Exhibition*. Their realism dismantles "pornography" like Ballard's text: as a series of fragmentary, alienated, passionless responses to certain stimuli. A penis inside a mouth takes on the detached distancing of a medical lecture, its eroticism excised -- just as an atrocity on the news is neutralized by the commercial that follows, resulting in a deadened emotional response. Implied here is a critique of science as ultimate pornography, capable of reducing the ineffable -- unique personal relationships, the source of our greatest delight -- to objectified, purely functional commodifications.⁴²

The edition's photographs by Ana Barrado dramatize abstract quasi-sexual aspects of buildings, aeroplanes, grounded NASA space vehicles and plant forms (*AE* 38, 50, 58, 80, 88, 96, 100, 124, back cover). Medical illustrator Phoebe Gloeckner was given no brief and her 11 full-page drawings, aside from retouching of the nose of the female figure with partially exposed skeleton, sinews and musculature on the front cover, were not edited in any way.⁴³ Her illustrations show the location of the vermiform appendix (*AE* 110), positioned to form a frontispiece for the edition's four-text appendix ("a visual pun"), and juxtapose and conflate the human organism with the arterial road junction (*AE* 30) and the machine part (*AE* 8 (Figure 2), 85, 104).⁴⁴ In this last case, lateral sections to different scales but the same dimensions draw a metonymic link between the shapes and respective spatial relations between upper torso and lungs and the penis and erectile tissue of the corpus cavernosum (*AE* 104). There are other drawings of particularly pornographic significance.

Positioned immediately before and with reference to two texts appended to the 1990 edition, "Mae West's Reduction Mammoplasty" and "Queen Elizabeth's Rhinoplasty", the diagram of torso and partially dissected breasts (*AE* 113) incorporates, aside from frontal and lateral nasal diagrams, inserts of the nipple and breast with "siloplastic implant". It was in the 1960s that cosmetic surgeons first developed the ability to facilitate breast enlargement with relative safety using silicone and saline implants, which later became a recurring staple in the

⁴² Introduction by Andrea Juno and V. Vale, 6.

⁴³ Groth, "The Phoebe Gloeckner Interview".

⁴⁴ Huntley, "Disquieting Features", 28.

pornography industry.⁴⁵ An early adolescent female face (AE 92) is partially obscured by drawings of intertwined ropes, heating pipes, stairs, a bathroom and the lips of an inconclusively identifiable but apparently vaginal orifice, whose labia are pierced with an open safety pin. This overwriting recurs in "Myths of the Near Future". An exterior representation of the female abdomen (AE 62) incorporates an interior section of an early-stage fetus growing in the womb above closed-legged genital display with pubic hair, a drawn reminder of the "beaver" shot.⁴⁶ An image of a crouching woman penetrating herself with a finger to insert a Dutch cap with the aid of lubricant from a pictured tube (Figure 3, AE 18), shows the use of the diaphragm contraceptive device which declined in popularity with the introduction of the contraceptive pill in the 1960s. This image is juxtaposed with a description on the facing page of Catherine Austin as "a rubber mannequin fitted with explicit vents, an obscene masturbatory appliance" (AE 19). She is composed of the same material as the diaphragm in her handbag. One side-section diagram in particular dramatizes an act endemic in stag films: a supine female head in the act of fellatio (Figure 2, AE 55). The section of a penis inside a woman's mouth is surrounded by inserts including a rear close-up of intercourse, one of what appears to be female pubic hair and a third of a nipple with damaged aureole which corresponds, according to Huntley with the "pair of breasts, left nipple marked with a small ulcer" (AE 54) listed as item (5) in the Karen Novotny "Sex Kit" on the facing page.⁴⁷ It is perhaps the amorphous nature of *The Atrocity Exhibition's* array of sexual sense-data which encouraged Ballard himself and others (among them Gloeckner, director Jonathan Weiss of the 2001 eponymous film adaptation and various popular musicians) to continue to remake, remediate and reapply them.

⁴⁵ Among the earliest instances was topless dancing pioneer Carol Doda's surgical enhancement of her breasts from size 34 to 44 through silicone injections (Slade, *Pornography in America*, 151). "Since the early sixties, breast implants have enhanced the dimensions of between one and two million women [in the United States] with an estimated 70 percent of them for purely cosmetic reasons", wrote Marilyn Yalom in 1997 (*A History of the Breast*, 237). See Yalom for further discussion of the breast enhancement boom of the late 1980s (181).

⁴⁶ "The female genitals or the pubic area in general; also *attrib.*, denoting films, literature, etc., in which nude females are portrayed; Chiefly U.S." (*Oxford English Dictionary*). The OED lists first usage in 1927 and adds a contemporary instance from 1969: "*Films & Filming* Aug. 25/2. The Supreme Court ruling that pubic hair wasn't obscene... led directly to a crop of self-styled 'beaver movies'". The next stage was the "split beaver": "The business has evolved its own jargon; full frontals are 'beavers', becoming 'split-beavers' if the legs are parted" (*n. slang*. 1972 *New Society* 7 Dec. 591/1, in OED).

⁴⁷ Huntley, "Disquieting Features", 28.

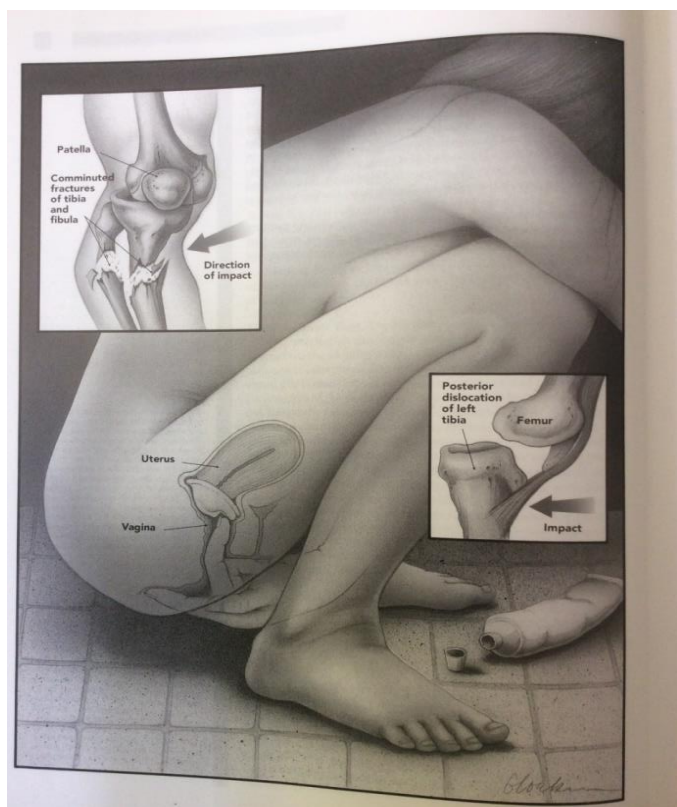


Figure 3. Phoebe Gloeckner's illustration on page 18 of *The Atrocity Exhibition*

Non-Stop Erotic Exhibition

Though the sexual re-seated from the foreground in his later fiction, Ballard's annotations to the 1990 illustrated edition of *The Atrocity Exhibition* evince his continued commitment to the subject matter. He uses these polemical marginalia to make a case:

Pornography is under attack at present, thanks in part to the criminal excesses of kiddie porn and snuff movies, and to our newly puritan climate -- the fin de siècle decadence that dominated the 1890s, and through which we can expect to live in the 1990s, may well take the form of an aggressive and over-the-top puritanism. A pity, I feel, since the sexual imagination is unlimited in scope and metaphoric power, and can never be successfully repressed. In many ways pornography is the most literary form of fiction -- a verbal text with the smallest attachment to external reality, and with only its own resources to create a complex and exhilarating

narrative. I commend Susan Sontag's brave 1969 essay ("The Pornographic Imagination") though I would go much further in my claims. Pornography is a powerful catalyst for social change, and its periods of greatest availability have frequently coincided with times of greatest economic and scientific advance. (AE 36)

Philip Tew treats the annotations to *The Atrocity Exhibition* as overwritings on a palimpsest, which allowed Ballard to continue campaigning on disparate issues including that of pornography. The moment of publication does not terminate the polemic: the text is never complete. Since the text allowed Ballard to "transcend the genre limitations of the science fiction field, within which he gained earlier recognition", appending marginalia to it also furnished him with one among many platforms (interviews with newspaper journalists, RE/Search publishers and academic researchers, published books of quotations and conversations) to address the mainstream.⁴⁸ Ballard is concerned with the conflation of sex and violence: "What happens at the level of our unconscious minds when, within minutes on the same TV screen, a prime minister is assassinated, an injured child is carried from a car crash?" (AE 89). He may exhibit pornography in juxtaposition with atrocities, but he does not count it among their number. He purveys it to us in the form of two different commodities at two different levels of remove: firstly the forensic description of sex acts among human characters and between them and fetishized objects and secondly detached, dispassionate accounts imitating/adopting the scientific vernacular of films and images viewed by these characters, often as part of an imaginary experiment.

Both of these, and particularly the tension between them, indeed create a complex and exhilarating narrative and we can also see Ballard's as a visionary pornography which looks forward to the juxtapositions of visual material created by the gonzo hard-core boom of the mid-90s onward. When parietic patients are shown "montaged sequences of commercial pornographic films", they may be viewing something yet to be invented at the date of publication but approaching later gonzo: "Fossilized into the screen, the terraced images of breasts and buttocks had ceased to carry any meaning" (AE 51). Lighter, handheld cameras privileged prolonged extreme close-ups over full body or wide-angle

⁴⁸ Tew, "Acts of Reconsideration", 404.

shots. Gonzo scenes are long and incorporate a very high density of sexual acts, which obviates the need for unschooled performers with limited straight acting talent to participate in contrived narrative segues. These ostensibly plotless narratives (we may need to seek the plot within the physical action, rather than outside it, just as in a dance performance) may be shot by a man holding a camera, and therefore from that male director/ performer's POV. They position the consumer within the sexual narrative and align the gaze of the performer most closely with that of the consumer. This gaze is almost exclusively male but rare women director/cinematographers have picked up the camera. They are, however, less likely to participate sexually in the action and this role may complicate viewer/performer identification for a predominantly male audience.

When characters have sex in *The Atrocity Exhibition*, they see and hear (but also smell, taste and touch) not each other's portraits but a succession or arrangement of fragmentary partial images, hard-core facets of sexuality. These are merchandized in the 16-piece "Sex Kit" called "Karen Novotny" (AE 54). Jeanette Baxter in this context associates this dismemberment with the "aggressively prostheticised bodies" of the dolls made and photographed by German Surrealist Hans Bellmer.⁴⁹ It is a critical commonplace to assign prescience to Ballard and an examination of much later technological progress in the adult industry yields untold evidence of the accuracy of this appellation. David Foster Wallace at the 1998 Adult Video News Awards notes a minutely explicit advertisement for "Anne Malle Facsimile Fullsize KNEELING DOLL" modelled after the eponymous veteran of over 360 adult features.⁵⁰ In the 21st century mail-order worn underwear became another marketing staple for career porn stars, but two examples pertaining to female partial anatomy should suffice here to illustrate that the Sex Kit exhibition is ongoing.⁵¹ Wallace reports the integration of artificial drainage/irrigation with the prosthetic female breast and listens to a starlet explaining that: "she has just gotten a pair of cutting edge breast implants that she can actually adjust the size of by adding or

⁴⁹ Baxter, *Surrealist Imagination*, 75.

⁵⁰ Wallace, "Big Red Son", 37.

⁵¹ Former adult star Aurora Snow writes, "Popular porn performers can rake in close to a thousand dollars a month selling their used drawers to fans – and the trend has even spread online to non-pros" ("The Dirty Panties Black Market").

draining via small valves under her armpits".⁵² However, perhaps the *tour de force* of the posthuman sex kit is the personally moulded artificial vagina, in one case an appliance made by a noted sex-aid manufacturer in 2013, one again remediating the genitalia of a real adult star: "Doc Johnson, Jessie Andrews Collaborate for Realistic Masturbator Release".⁵³

In clarifying the ostensibly unheralded arrival in the consciousness of the adult feature in 1972, Williams identifies three preceding stages which tested the robustness of retreating obscenity legislation: sexploitation features from the late 50s and early 60s features incorporating partial nudity, "Beaver" loops and girl/girl "action beavers" exhibiting strictly external clitoral masturbation and documentary features eluding censorship by claiming redeeming social importance based on the 1966 Supreme Court rulings.⁵⁴ It is possible to align Ballard's dissection of sexuality ironically with the disingenuous pretence inherent in the first and especially the third category - the subject matter is offered through a filter ostensibly unaligned with any prurient interest but subtextually evincing it. This is not to say of course that Ballard's sight through the scientific-pornographic viewfinder betrays intent to evade any kind of censorship or interference. His pronouncements above and other activities during this period, such as his 1970 exhibition *Jim Ballard: Crashed Cars* (real wrecks accompanied by a partially unclothed model conducting interviews) indicate the reverse. Publisher Doubleday also pulped an entire print run after a senior executive leafed through and found a piece which mentioned a personal friend of his, the then-governor of California: "Why I want to Fuck Ronald Reagan".⁵⁵

Williams credits the second category above with refining the definition of hard core to "display of the erect penis and penetration alone", and in this sense the transition to hardcore is made during the period preceding *Crash*.⁵⁶ *The Atrocity Exhibition* describes partial images both genital and non-genital of Catherine Austin: "Nathan glanced down

⁵² Ibid., 19. Here Wallace was stretching the license afforded a non-fiction writer. "[Evan] Wright had written in *The LA Weekly* about a woman at an industry charity bowling event, who had valves under her arms through which she was slowly augmenting her bust size with silicone. Wallace turned them into air valves that would allow her to grow or shrink her breasts at whim, a character out of Philip K. Dick" (Max, *Ghost Story*, 245).

⁵³ Rodriguez, "Realistic Masturbator".

⁵⁴ Williams, *Hard Core*, 96-97.

⁵⁵ Ballard, *Miracles of Life*, 237.

⁵⁶ Williams, *Hard Core*, 97.

at her broad thighs, calculating the jut and rake of her pubis" (AE 23). If Ballard is a writer whose work announces its style through the repetitive use of talismanic words and phrases, the obscure and self-consciously scientific "pudenda", denoting external genitalia, is one of the most striking. Usage predominantly applies it to the vulva, but for Ballard it is a distanced, unisex appellation also applied to Ralph Nader (AE 21, 24).⁵⁷ Phallocentrism becomes immensely more pronounced and the terminology changes: *Crash* features the word "penis" 93 times, the vast majority of them in the context of a sexual act, an insertion. Given their coincidence with 21 references to "anus", 18 to "vulva" and 22 to "vagina", this means the text retains a certain medical formality, avoiding colloquial sexual vernacular, but represents itself as concatenating frequent sexual acts with narrative segues. This is hard-core.⁵⁸

The sexual arousal Burroughs imputes to repetition also forms the central argument of Sarah Schaschek's *Pornography and Seriality*. She argues that repetition and variation are at the heart of pornography, which incorporates seriality in various forms, including recurring "sexual numbers" in each film, the remaking of classic porno plots in new films and sub genres and series that generate multiple volumes of titles.⁵⁹ She attempts to debunk various prejudices against repetition in pornography, including its showing of "mechanical sex", its portrayal of women as "sluts" and that it is somehow "endless".⁶⁰ This seriality, however, has also found expression through montage, one among many sophisticated techniques which distinguished the higher production values of porno from stag/loop. *Behind the Green Door* is an early heavy indulgence in the dream-fantasy sequences at the Green Door Cabaret, including the culminating seven-minute psychedelic orgy scene featuring star "Marilyn Chambers' face with coloured particles of

⁵⁷ Environmental and traffic campaigner Nader was the author of *Unsafe at any Speed. the Designed-in Dangers of the American Automobile* (1965). Among his most prominent campaigns was against the Ford Pinto, which had fuel-tank design accused of igniting on crash-impact: "On August 10, 1977, Ralph Nader and Mark Dowie held a press conference to notify the public that unnecessary deaths and injuries were being suffered as a result of the faulty design of the pre-1977 model year Pinto. They claimed that Ford knew the car was unsafe but decided it was more cost-effective to produce the design than to modify it even though in 1970 the company had the ability to make the car safer" (Dardis and Sent, "The Economics of the Pinto Recall"). Nader ran for the U.S. Presidency in 2000.

⁵⁸ Bonsall, "J.G. Ballard Concordance".

⁵⁹ Schaschek, *Pornography and Seriality*, 7. "Sexual number" is Williams' term (*Hard Core*, 126).

⁶⁰ Schaschek, *Pornography and Seriality*, 25.

ejaculate floating about it".⁶¹ The money shot, a matter of mere seconds of visible pleasure for any but a highly unusual male yet suddenly the essential highlight and structural punctuation of the porno, can be stretched most effectively by the montage of various shots from various angles repeated and overlaid. In *Crash*, Vaughan's interminable mental rehearsal of the conceivable variations on the traffic death of the retired prostitute (C 16), a disturbed and obsessive restaging on the page, is a montage of violence with some kinship to the pornographic sequence above, in line with Ballard's disturbed conflation of sex and violence. The insistence on assigning the sex-worker profession to this human crash test dummy invites parallels between the montaged ejaculation sequence and this recursive rehearsal of death: "Just as *The Atrocity Exhibition* invited the reader to participate in its imaginative collages, so *Crash* invites us to test our own transgressive imaginations by restaging the prostitute's body within alternative trajectories of pain".⁶² Formulated otherwise, hers becomes a recurring concept in the novel: a sex death.

The graphic access to the corporeal interior afforded by the anatomy diagram gives way in *Crash* to ingress achieved by violent puncture through the skin, which is no longer transparent. Simultaneously, pathology gives way to a stylized photographic glamour, later so richly rendered in David Cronenberg's 1996 film adaptation. Where Ballard had exhibited atrocious segments with the random sequential interchangeability of the coin-insert loop and encouraged non-linear readings, *Crash* engaged with a narrative which linked sexual scenes together. Shared injury fetishism is the binding agent of the subculture and romantic meetings occur as a result of traffic impact casualties. In terms of improbability or absurdity, these narrative segues fail to eclipse those of the contemporaneous porno chic adult feature. The money shot has made its appearance, semen is among the various visible bodily fluids flying through the air, and the numbers are punctuated by this male orgasm. Not only that, these sexual encounters are seen: "James' narrative is replete with verbs pertaining to multiple ways of seeing - to spectate, to witness, to see, to visualize, to watch, to look and to observe".⁶³ This scopophilia runs throughout the novel as the James Ballard character watches both others and himself having sex.

⁶¹ Williams, *Hard Core*, 242.

⁶² Baxter, *Surrealist Imagination*, 102.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 101.

Sam Francis asks with concern whether the sexual depiction in *Crash* causes it to amount to the pornographic novel its author claimed it be, but remains noncommittal on the subject: "questions of whether it is at all arousing and whether it was intended to arouse are more uncertain and can presumably only be determined by reference to the subjective experience of the writer himself and of individual readers".⁶⁴ He treats *Crash* as containing a parody of pornography which applies Sontag's concept of the total imagination, and the notion Angela Carter advances in *The Sadean Woman* of the "moral pornographer". Chapter 3 will engage with these reputed connections in detail but Ballard's pronouncements moot pornography neither as sexually stimulating nor the reverse, but rather as the subject of geometrical, topographical study, given his repeated identification of it with science. Nevertheless, it is not challenging to locate the sexual variations of the adult feature within the perverse frame of *The Atrocity Exhibition*, given that, "apart from the essential ingredient of the money shot [...] hard core consists of sexual action in, and as, narrative".⁶⁵ *Crash's* perverse accident and injury-driven grammar generates plentiful sexual narrative, both in the form of fantasy sequences, which in porno film are acted out, and sexual numbers between characters which depend for their impetus on complex imagined interactions with third and fourth parties. James' imagination generates an early automobile money shot as "semen jolts across a cracked speedometer dial" (C 18). Evincing a fascination endemic in porno, the dried ejaculate's presence immediately generates a second possible encounter in his mind which rapidly culminates in fellatio.

James and his wife Catherine jointly construct a narrative of "complex pleasures" (C 31) which entails her recounting stories of cuckoldry which culminate in her naming a new lover at the moment of her husband's orgasm, or detailed accounts of a lesbian affair with her secretary Karen conducted in the changing rooms of lingerie shops. Catherine's impeding inability to reach orgasm without recourse to this narrative is a staple of the adult feature, which frequently offers a plot conceit, some sexual quirk or peccadillo, to account for forms of nymphomania or erotomania and the necessitated multiplicity of couplings. This is a popular and convenient porno-within-a-porno construction which allows the presentation of sexual fantasy-within-fantasy. One might expect to encounter it between the pages of *Penthouse*

⁶⁴ Francis, "The Pornographic", 150.

⁶⁵ Williams, *Hard Core*, 121.

Variations, but Martin Amis, despite or perhaps because of his squeamishness in reviewing *Crash* as “a novel born of quite immeasurable perversity” would appropriate the cuckolding fetish in *Money* (1984), both to add pornographic glamour John Self’s girlfriend Selina Street and to drive the plot.⁶⁶ Self demands of Street, during both live and phone sex, that she recount tales of sex with other men to hasten his orgasm. It is his radical uncertainty about whether they constitute fiction or non-fiction which maintains his perverse interest in her.

It may be reductive to read *The Atrocity Exhibition* as a Ballardian stag and loop collection and *Crash* as his warped version of a chic porno. Nevertheless, multiple thematic and narratological elements in *Crash* are reminiscent of the adult feature: obsessions with the erect penis and the money shot, prolongation of climactic moments through repetition and montage and overall coherence achieved through extended, quirky sexual conceit. The logic with which diegetic segues bind sexual numbers together reflects a zeitgeist in which the fusing of sexual event and extended narrative had entered the mass consciousness for the first time. It would no longer require a visionary novelist to juxtapose mass culture images from press, television, Hollywood and newsreel with subpoenaed components from the sexually taboo underground. The underground would be visible to the mainstream.

“The Flesh of my own Species”

After technology and demand precipitated the unbanning of porn and imposed extended narrative structure on it through the feature, delimitation to curtail the total imagination became necessary. Documented proof that all performers were over the age of 18 became essential to a 1970s pornographer wishing to evade prosecution. Stories of compulsion emerged, most infamously that of Linda Susan Boreman (porn name Linda Lovelace) who maintained in two of her four autobiographies that she had been forced at gunpoint by abusive husband Chuck Traynor to perform in movies including the bestiality film *Dogarama* (1969) and *Deep Throat*.⁶⁷ Also, on the very edges of the

⁶⁶ Amis, *The War Against Cliché*, 100.

⁶⁷ *Ordeal* (1980) and *Out of Bondage* (1986), both co-written with Mike McGrady.

1970s consciousness the spectre of the snuff movie loomed large, albeit to all intents and purposes apocryphal.⁶⁸

Ballard demonstrated his sensitivity to these boundaries in the 1990 annotations *The Atrocity Exhibition*, quoted at length above. Moreover, somewhat perversely and ironically given its title, *The Unlimited Dream Company* (1979) does set extreme outer bounds to sexual behaviour: despite the anti-hero Blake's godlike powers, and constantly restated drive to engage sexually with each and every body he encounters in his dream-odyssey around Shepperton, he refrains from child abuse, rape and murder. Nevertheless, this focalizer exhibits multiple paraphilias for all manner of physical objects, particularly the doctor's white coat, and mimics the pornographic (once again *Behind the Green Door*) by scattering semen with visible ejaculation in all directions. He sexualizes every situation, no matter how mundane, how quotidian. He sexualizes every member of the inescapable micro-society of Shepperton: "If I was trapped here, I would at least assign myself the absolute freedom to do whatever I chose" (*UDC* 68). He is gripped by the total imagination, which affords him a moral holiday.

In an antecedent of Xan Meo in Amis' *Yellow Dog*, addressed in Chapter 3, all of this accrues from concussion (or possibly death – the dream narrative is ambiguous) after a plane crash which, "dislocated" his head (*UDC* 39). However, even before he took off, Blake was an, "unpublished writer of pornography" and hypersexual phone-pest who exploited a relatively new medium of the age: "(I spent many exciting weekends dialling deserted offices all over London and dictating extraordinary sexual fantasies into their answering machines to be typed out for amazed executives by their unsuspecting secretaries)" (*UDC* 12-13). In fact, oddly given Ballard's stated position, Blake is a worst-case projection of a man corrupted and rendered insane by porn. Like the porn damage assessed by Wallace (see Chapter 4), amoral Blake tells us his aim is "to undermine trust between wives and husbands" (*UDC* 166). The death of affect causes the libido to colonize everyday life, proliferate into the infinite and degenerate into quasi-cannibalism: "I was hungry only for the flesh of my own species. I would take the flesh, not with my

⁶⁸ "The repeated talk of coercion and violence and of so-called 'snuff' movies has fixed the notion in the mainstream culture of the worst imaginable things as being the essence of porn, and this like a modern urban myth, has proved difficult to shake. No police authority anywhere has actually found a snuff movie. It is possible to write to authorities like the FBI and have them confirm that they have never come across such materials" (O'Toole, *Pornocopia*, 46).

bruised mouth, but with my entire body, with my insatiate skin" (UDC 94). Ballard has offered a fantasy of no limits, excepting those dictated as fall-back legal positions in the new sexualized mainstream. Blake is a danger to almost all, and his incarnation of the sex impulse is a Ballardian portent of dystopia to come. To the surrealism of *The Unlimited Dream Company* Ballard would next add cameras and projectors as origins and vehicles of untrammelled libido.⁶⁹

Home Movies for Couples

"Everybody's going to be starring in their own porno films as extensions of the Polaroid camera," was Ballard's zealous conviction.⁷⁰ He showed how film and video recording technologies might both connect and interpose themselves as obstacles between the obsessional man and his desired object, who would become director, cameraman and star. In the stories collected in *Myths of the Near Future* (1982), sex projections familiar from *The Atrocity Exhibition* have been incorporated into games played to enhance or distort connubial relations. Danger ebbs away and these games seem less transcendent, less taboo-breaking, because they are bounded by the domestic environment, facilitate sexual experimentation and are predicated on the participation of the (long-term) female partner, albeit sometimes disturbingly passive/complicit. They became tame enough to inhabit the (abandoned) hotel room, the fantasy site of suburban sexuality, be it illicit or connubial. In the Ballardian near future this safe, private, *adult* fun, however, is predicated on dissonance and coercion. Shepphard, the title story's troubled protagonist, is first gripped by an obsession which imbues the recorded vestiges of his presumed-dead wife with pornographic appeal:

[...] he gazed all day at the video recordings of Elaine at her dressing table in the bathroom. Endlessly he played back the zooms and close-ups of her squatting on the bidet, drying

⁶⁹ Ballard, Angela Carter and later Nicholson Baker have all been driven by the expansion of desire propagated by the writing and painting of surrealism. Carter's *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* (1972) located the sexual image in the peep-show, merging surrealist technique with sordid industry practice to show female desire undiminished by new sexual proliferation, a theme which resurfaces in Baker's *House of Holes: a Book of Raunch* (2011). See Baxter, *Surrealist Imagination*, for a book-length study of the influence on Ballard.

⁷⁰ Interview in *Heavy Metal* April 1982, qtd. in Ballard, Vale and Ryan, *Quotes*, 279.

herself on the edge of the bath, examining with a hopeful frown the geometry of her right breast. The magnified images of this huge hemisphere, its curvature splayed between Sheppard's fingers, globe against walls and ceiling the bedroom.⁷¹

Schaschek's reading of seriality as an essential component of pornography is applicable here, as is the enlargement of the part-object beyond human scale seen in *The Atrocity Exhibition*. Technology disturbs the hierarchical size-distinction between component and whole; it disturbs chronological sequence and speed. There is, however, another agenda here. Sheppard co-opts his new lover Anne Godwin in a project to resuscitate his undead wife through the lens:

All day she submitted to the Polaroid camera, to the films of her body, which Sheppard projected on the wall above the bed, to the endless pornographic positions in which he arranged her thighs and pubis. Sheppard gazed for hours through his stop-frame focus, as if he would find among these images an anatomical door, one of the keys in a combination whose other tumblers were the Marey chronograms, the surrealist paintings and the drained swimming pool in the ever-brighter sunlight outside. In the evening Sheppard would take her out into the dusk, and pose her beside the empty swimming pool, naked from the waist, a dream woman in a Delvaux landscape.⁷²

Though Godwin is alive and extremely compliant here, her transport and rearrangement so rob her of agency and animation, so objectify her, that even this highly intelligent psychologist becomes reminiscent of Selena, the life-size doll in one of the collection's other stories "The Smile". Paul Delvaux (1897-1994) was a Belgian painter known for his depictions of female nudes, staring as if hypnotized, in haunting cityscapes. David Scot has argued that "Delvaux uses perspective to establish a tension between nude and background, in which these elements combine, becoming charged with erotic energy. In transmitting

⁷¹ Ballard, "Myths", 15.

⁷² Ibid., 34-55. Étienne-Jules Marey (1830-1904): "'Marey's Chronograms are multiple-exposure photographs in which the element of time is visible - the walking human figure, for example, is represented as a series of dune-like lumps'" (AE 12).

its electricity along the lines of perspective with which it is juxtaposed, the nude body *eroticizes* its environment".⁷³ In Ballard's remediation of a Delvaux scene, this erotic charge is generated by the female body's still submission to the camera. Conversely, in a Marey chronogram, it is generated by the female body's movement through space, expressed as a series of still images.

The route from underground loops and reels, through the high-profile main features of the 1970s, shown to mixed audiences in mainstream theatres, leads in the 1980s through the film camera and projector to the video camera and the VCR, with all its implications for the privacy of viewing by lone male or couple. This revolutionary new mass market technology which emerged in the late 1970s returns in the 1980s novels of Martin Amis (see Chapter 3), now feeding the predilections of working and underclass man (and utterly divested of Ballardian vestiges of surrealist painting and pre-cinematography). In the semi-lit home or hotel, it allows the superimposition of the sexualized woman upon the pre-recorded moving-image copy of herself, or vice versa. She becomes a home-porn star, directed and non-unique. Decades later in the Internet age, she might become an *amateur*.

Elsewhere in *Myths of the Near Future*, Ballard explores two consequences of pornographic proliferation which, as we shall see, would later occupy Wallace: isolation and, in the wake of affectlessness, anhedonia. The two are both aligned with one another and opposed. The collection's closer "The Intensive Care Unit" constructs a world in which all inter-human experience is televisually mediated, including marriage, sexual contact and insemination, which the narrator bombastically claims brings about "an immense increase in the richness of human experience" (*MNF* 197). Propriety, sustained by "an almost Victorian code of visual ethics" is highly pervasive in this society, aside from "a clandestine pornographic channel" (*MNF* 199). Ballard offers a preposterous cyber-sexual equation:

These admirable conventions eliminated all the dangers of personal involvement, and this liberating affectlessness allowed those who so wished to explore the fullest range of sexual possibility and paved the way for a day when a truly

⁷³ Scott, *Surrealizing the Nude*, 103.

guilt-free sexual perversity and, even, psychopathology might be enjoyed by all. (*MNF* 199)⁷⁴

The medium would be different, but this is a concept, readily applicable to online sex with its promise of limitless possibility: the enacting of unbridled fantasy at safe remove. Perhaps the image in “A Neural Interval” might be a candidate here. This amounts to no less than the contention that dreams can be made real. When the couple in the story break convention and arrange a first meeting, they abort it immediately after recoiling in huge disappointment at one another’s unmediated, unmade-up appearance. Up till that point they had enjoyed connubial bliss. In contrast, “Zodiac 2000”, his 1978 updating of the horoscope, is riddled with tedium and violence as we follow Renata across the celestial sphere of sexual technology. We start with film projection and progress through the smell of her vulva at the insertion of an IUD, “the gamut of every conceivable sexual variation” performed for a bored audience, a vibrator interlude producing unconvincing “shudders and gasps” (*MNF* 74), strangulation, and eventually her “bloodied body” (*MNF* 75) in another Ballard sex-death. This sexual prosthesis, more of which we will encounter in Pynchon, recalls Catherine Austin, the obscene mannequin from *The Atrocity Exhibition*.⁷⁵ Technology remakes and remodels women.

The two-dimensional printed image, whether photograph, diagram, drawing or painting was the initial cause of death of affect in Ballard, because it could be overwritten, zoomed in upon and blown up out of all proportion. However, moving images and recording technologies shared these properties and offered narrative. By the 80s it was the video or movie camera lens which would consume the attention of both self-appointed moral guardians and writers of fiction.

⁷⁴ *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901) is arguably the most famous work by Sigmund Freud, given that it dealt with the “Freudian slip”. In addition to denoting the study of mental disorders, psychopathology also came to mean: “Abnormal psychology; an abnormal psychological process or state” (*OED*, first usage 1947).

⁷⁵ Renata’s insertion of an intrauterine device (IUD or coil) is an updating of Catherine Austin’s Dutch cap or diaphragm.

Chapter 2 - "This set of holes, pleasantly framed": Thomas Pynchon, the Competent Pornographer and the Female Conduit

Gravity's Rainbow (1973), *Vineland* (1990), *Against the Day* (2006).

1973-1990-2006

A woman poses among masturbating tunnel drillers in the Austrian Alps. In this pre-gangbang warmup, gazing at "provocative and voracious" siren Ruperta Chirpingdon-Groin (*ATD* 367) has these men standing around "stroking themselves without shame" (*ATD* 656). This desultory facsimile of male sexual camaraderie is reminiscent of much 21st century gonzo porno: the school which turned away from feature-film narrative structures and diegetic segues. A spot-lit single female professional is positioned at the crux of desire for a shadowy convocation of invited amateur male fans: all that is missing is the fluffer tasked with maintaining their hard-ons. Gonzo has reached back a century and Ruperta has assumed the porn star position, with all the engaged hobbyism of touring English nobility, in a daytime rehearsal for her nocturnal pastime of "being penetrated by a small queue of tunnel hands, often two at a time, who cursed her in unknown tongues" (*ATD* 657). She recounts her submissive encounter to arouse Reef Traverse and he has rough sex with her without delay.¹

Perhaps surprisingly for a novelist resolutely aligned with the counterculture, sexual extremity in Pynchon can be mapped onto contemporary pornographies since they crossed over from underground stag and loop to mainstream features in the early 70s, up to *Against the Day* (2006) and beyond. I argue in Chapter 5 that Pynchon's seventh novel *Inherent Vice* (2009) uses a sixties nostalgia trip to normalize, render uncontroversial, the insidious influence of a sexualised mainstream colonised by hardcore. *Against the Day*, however, brazenly exhibits motifs like the double penetration and misogynist verbal humiliation above, which have become staples of a 21st-century Internet-

¹ A woman's erotic account of coupling with another man to stimulate her lover is a recurring cuckolding fetish in Pynchon. See, for example, the story told to Larry 'Doc' Sportello by Shasta Fay Hepworth (*IV* 304), one among legion microskirted women in *Inherent Vice* catalogued in Chapter 5.

streamed hardcore, whose on-screen transgressions exceed both the *porno-chic* era concurrent with *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973) and the subsequent anti-porn backlash dissipating around the publication of *Vineland* (1990). Brian McNair uses *porno-chic*, to denote two periods in which pornography was fashionable, first the early 1970s: "For a brief time between the flowering of the sexual revolution and the emergence of the anti-pornography lobbies later in the 1970s the consumption of pornography was not viewed as the shameful obsession of emotionally stunted perverts, nor the sadistic pastime of patriarchal predators, but the valid entertainment choice for mature, sexually liberated, 'swinging' society".² For McNair, the second began in the early 1990s, "in a radically altered political context informed by feminist and gay liberation ideas".³ It saw serious porn studies scholarship led by Linda Williams and became the subject of "pastiche, parody and aesthetic appropriation".⁴ These are Pynchon's techniques, as he anachronistically superimposes modern porno tropes on historical storyworlds, scripting power relations far beyond the narrowly sexual.

Pynchon described himself in a 1963 letter as a competent "surrealist, pornographer, word engineer, maybe".⁵ *Gravity's Rainbow's* sexual deviance polarized debate over the 1974 Pulitzer Prize for fiction: the committee's recommendation was unanimous but a squeamish Pulitzer board vetoed it as "obscene" and "unreadable", a combination familiar from the *Ulysses* prosecutions and burnings.⁶ However, where obscurity had once mitigated obscenity in the eyes of the judiciary, the two charges now apparently compounded one another in the eyes of the commentariat. In a new world of publishers who had helped graphic sexual description in Lawrence and Miller, Updike and Vidal to brave censorial interference, mainstream representations of "vanilla" sexualities had been disarmed, neutered, mainstreamed. As the stag and loop era ebbed away and *porno-chic* features appeared in mainstream theatres, *Gravity's Rainbow's* much-cited "polymorphous perversity" seemed infinite. Rekindling cherished period fetishes for complex underwear, cantilevering and nylon hosiery, the novel superimposes transgressive 1970s BDSM upon sepia-tinted stag interludes. Simulacra derived from interbellum film stimulate dark imaginings of

² Blumenthal, "Porno-chic"; McNair, *Striptease*, 62.

³ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁵ Qtd. in Herman and Weisenburger, *Domination, and Freedom*, 17.

⁶ Kihss, "Pulitzer Jurors".

domination/submission, long before mainstream cinema countenanced BDSM. Episodes express power through sex in sadomasochism, the adornment and fetishizing of bodies and myriad variation. Sexual prosthesis binds characters to rockets, plastics and sex toys as “technology supersedes humans” and troilism plugs Tyrone Slothrop, through his conquests, into other male players in *The Zone*.⁷ Bérubé’s reading of pornography in *Gravity’s Rainbow* as, “the enactment and exposure of strategies of power, domination and control ...” expresses the critical consensus.⁸

If *Gravity’s Rainbow* appeared during the golden age of porn, everything changed in the 17-year interval before *Vineland*, an era of what Brian McNair terms “a then still-hegemonic strand of radical feminism” which condemned pornography as inherently wrong.⁹ The time lapse between publication date and primary timeframe is relatively short and this pre-Internet 1990 take on still-analogue 1984 contains only passing references to the dominant sexual media of those years: print magazines and VHS. Frequent focalization by sardonic 14-year-old Prairie Gates, whose most sexual experience is watching friends “playing centrefold” in lingerie (*VL* 332), means there is much less action than usual in Pynchon. Occupied with family ties and domestic consumption in a television era, *Vineland* retreats from *Gravity’s Rainbow’s* deviations but nevertheless exhibits men making walkie-talkies of Frenesi Gates’ and DL Chastain’s bodies. The Mafioso, the Nark and the Hippie do not relish conversation in plain sight but through these mobile, malleable, corruptible women, criminal and federal elects breach walls which hide them from one another and the countercultural preterite. In her application of Sedgwick’s concept of “homosociality” to *Vineland*, Molly Hite recognizes that: “In the masculinist upper echelon where relations between men structure ideologies and institutions, sexuality and power are so interwoven that neither can be isolated as the ‘real’ ground of motivation”.¹⁰ *Vineland* is a crucial intermission between *porno-chic* eras. Though women are still conduits, sexual extremity is reined back dramatically because the dominant medium is prime-time television scrubbed clean of sexual content at a time when Reaganite neo-

⁷ Sears, “Black and White Rainbows”, 112.

⁸ Bérubé, *Marginal Forces-Cultural Centers*, 266. See Julie Christine Sears, and Herman and Weisenburger, who see *Gravity’s Rainbow’s* pornography as a “withering satire of control”.

⁹ McNair, *Porno? Chic!*, x.

¹⁰ Hite, “Feminist Theory”, 137.

conservatism united under a flag of convenience with anti-porn feminism.

Brian McHale calls *Against the Day* “a virtual library of early twentieth-century entertainment fiction”¹¹, arguing that throughout his oeuvre Pynchon remediates and appropriates popular genres from the timeframe in which his novels are set. These notably include 1940s cinema and stag in *Gravity’s Rainbow* and 1980s Tube in *Vineland*, which “imitates the form of a television programme”.¹² *Against the Day* was published in the digital porn era as streaming superseded the 60-90 minute DVD, bringing in unprefaced beginnings and accelerating the drive toward extremity. As Jonathan Meades has pointed out: “The principle of pornography is incremental -- there must always be more participants, more contortions ...”¹³ The novel leaps a century back in time, but once again incorporates multiple troilisms, the most graphic of which instantly morphs Frenesi’s great-aunt Lake Traverse from virgin bride into objectified package and “fuckmouth whore” (ATD 268) at the apex of “homosocial desire” (Sedgwick, Hite) between “pardners” Deuce Kindred and Sloat Fresno. *Against the Day* speaks of sex in a vernacular hardened by the new schizoid harshness of 21st century gonzo.

My concern here is to show that Pynchon has not been immune to the pornographic zeitgeist. In *Vineland*, narcotizing dysfunction spread by the Tube means sex is nostalgia-driven: the Brock-Frenesi-Weed triangle dates from the end of the 1960s and though the DL-Takeshi mistaken-identity-coitus is a few years later, DL’s seductive disguise is a “high-sixties outfit” (VL 152). Conversely, *Gravity’s Rainbow* and *Against the Day*, despite homages to sexual representations from their historical settings, are infused with the porno that was chic when they appeared. Male-to-male communication via the female conduit consistently drives sex in both clashing chronologies. Such networks of Control reduce to the agentic state both female vectors and the male vertices to which they lead. I will argue that these architectures within Pynchon’s fictions since *Gravity’s Rainbow* are blueprinted from patterns of mediated sex

¹¹ McHale, “Genre-Poaching”, 20.

¹² Madsen, *Postmodernist Allegories*, 130

¹³ Meades, *Museum Without Walls*, 281. For Meades, pornography and genealogy are the two chief generators of Internet traffic and Pynchon traces the Traverse family line, and genetic female submissiveness, back four generations from *Vineland* to *Against the Day*. David Cowart finds Pynchon’s first “feminist genealogy” in *Vineland*: “a generational unfolding that proceeds matriarchically from Eula to Sasha to Frenesi to Prairie” (Cowart, “Continuity and Growth,” 187). Eula Becker married Jess Traverse, son of Reef and Stray, so Lake is Frenesi’s great-aunt.

prevailing outside them. Hite foregrounded the conduit logic in incorporating feminist theory in *Vineland's* retrospective analysis of the 1960s writing before Internet access logarithmically multiplied and rescripted supply.¹⁴ Those alarmed at this explosion posit spiralling harm to both human medium and consumer, as both female consent and penis-ownership are rendered moot. Sometimes obscuring its historical setting, gonzo sex in *Against the Day* updates the female vector for the age of streaming.

Organizing Principles

The serpent holding its own tail: it is tempting to interpret the circular orgy aboard the decadent vessel *Anubis* (GR 467) as an heuristic for *Gravity's Rainbow's* sexual (dis)organizing principle, given critical accounts of its structure as topological rather than linear, cyclical rather than narrative, almanackic rather than novelistic.¹⁵ In addition to peripheral voyeurs, a round dozen enthusiasts (including two pairs of waiters and schoolgirls) engage in activities with those most adjacent to them in the ring, including but not limited to:

[...] vaginal and anal penetration, fellatio, cunnilingus, and anilingus linking various hetero- and homosexual pairs, while also including a wide array of paraphilias, such as voyeurism, frotteurism (rubbing), sadomasochism, pedophilia, and fetishism. This catalogue could have been lifted straight from Richard von Krafft-Ebing's 1886 classic *Psychopathia Sexualis*, mentioned earlier in the novel.¹⁶

Pynchon concisely narrates this paraphilic ring cycle in a single 250-word sentence sustained by punctuation no stronger than a comma. The infinite variety of this action is often adduced to "polymorphous perversity" (GR 440). Pynchon's single use of the term applies it to the music of Bach, but he derived it from Norman O. Brown's *Life against Death*, which foresaw, according to Weisenburger "the disappearance of

¹⁴ Hite, "Feminist Theory", 136-7.

¹⁵ The serpent dreamed by Kekulé as surrounding the world (GR 412).

¹⁶ Herman and Weisenburger, *Freedom and Domination*, 51. Ballard appropriated sexology pioneer Krafft-Ebing's surname as a metonym for sexual panoply in *The Atrocity Exhibition*.

history: this would mean simply, the disappearance of repression, the rebirth of a “polymorphous perverse” erotic being that stands beyond guilt and even consciousness and that would embody the childish, ‘mindless pleasures’ Pynchon represents in *GR*”, to echo the embryonic title used during the novel’s circulation to publishers.¹⁷ This may be construed as a return to innocence: “According to the term Brown takes from Freud, children are polymorphously perverse: nothing is unnatural to them”.¹⁸ Escapes from guilt and consciousness were pillars of 60s countercultural thinking, and hippie ideologies of permissiveness, often speaking in terms of rediscovered childhood, were “returning that much-abused word ‘pornography’ to its true antiestablishmentarian standing”.¹⁹ They posited boundless erotic utopias devoid of consequences. The Zone is a place of boundlessness: an unstable topography; lawlessness and a barter economy which invites the commodification of sex; sexual and social codes rescinded or at least suspended. If it were not for all the deprivation, danger and paranoia, it would be something of a hippie paradise.

It is not the orgy or Bacchanal, however, which writes the Zone’s topography. The tighter logic to these sexual chains is a smaller number: three. Men communicate through female proxies: a distanced troilism. Very frequently when man and woman conjoin there is another male consciousness intruding, albeit not in the room. From the Trystero to Lamont Replevin’s secret sect communicating through coal gas with “*secret interconnections*” (ATD 607), esoteric media extend tentacles throughout Pynchon’s story worlds. Women, until Yashmeen Halfcourt breaks the pattern, become such a medium as heteronormative patriarchy eschews intimate confrontation between men, routing interconnection through female bodies and consciousnesses. Analogously, most moving and still-image porno propagates a male-female-male dynamic as male photographers, filmmakers and distributors frame images of women for the male gaze.

Out in the Zone, Tyrone Slothrop is the primary vertex of *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s conduits through sex with the novel’s female leads Katje Borgesius, Geli Tripping, Margherita (Greta) Erdmann and Leni Pökler/Solange.²⁰ The only major exception is romantic heroine and girl-next-door Jessica Swanlake. These couplings with a Dutch triple agent,

¹⁷ Weisenburger, *A Gravity’s Rainbow Companion*, 249.

¹⁸ Wolfley, “Repression’s Rainbow”, 12.

¹⁹ Thompson, *Black and White and Blue*, 207.

²⁰ Clerc, *Approaches to Gravity’s Rainbow*, 14.

an apprentice witch, a horror film actress (and her young daughter Bianca) and a German Marxist, open channels through which Slothrop posts and receives messages to and from physically remote male powers, including Blicero/Weissmann, the White Visitation, Soviet officer Vaslav Tchitcherine, film director Gerhardt von Göll/Der Springer, imposter film producer Karel Miklos Thanatz, Peter Sascha (deceased) and rocket scientist Franz Pökler.²¹ They put him in indirect touch with German, British and Russian military and intelligence services, with capitalism, fascism, communism, the rocket and the beyond. The American lieutenant is the locus of a sexual conference further reaching than Yalta, seeing across the unseeable Zone through a third eye. These mediated conversations instil sex-panic in a number of ways: the conviction that a woman has sought him out to have sex at the behest of an invisible male pimp or director, which is after all the essence of much pornography and/or prostitution; the sense that every utterance requires decoding and that every sexual favour comes at a price; the consciousness of undetectable connections between people. However, this switchboard of glamorous women (dominatrix-submissive-switch, besotted girlfriend, submissive performer turned showbiz mother to a corrupted teenage daughter, wife compelled by harsh circumstance to turn whore) offers a panoply of excuses for rampant, unleashed female desire and sudden availability. Perversity and duplicity, submissiveness and pandering, supernaturally-induced trance and dire economic straits set them off.

The mental immanence at remove of an uninvolved other during the sexual act (masturbation, intercourse or other) is the essence of porn-fuelled fantasy, and therefore of remote-controlled sex. In Pynchon, this phenomenon is most explicitly articulated in *Vineland* when Brock Vond, the federal manipulator with the weakness for what his colleagues call "radical snatch" (VL 279), addresses co-opted observer-participant Frenesi Gates before she returns to countercultural rallying point Weed Atman: "You're the medium Weed and I use to communicate, that's all, this set of holes, pleasantly framed, this little femme scampering back and forth with scented messages tucked in her little secret places" (VL 214). The female body is reduced to a capsule of transmission in this fluid-exchange fantasy from the 1960s, when consciousness of AIDS and safe sex was yet to dawn. In complementary sexualized plotlines, controlling men engineer the downfall of male threats to their hegemony

²¹ Slothrop also eventually meets Von Göll, Pökler, Thanatz and Tchitcherine in person.

through female emissaries. Brock (socks on like a porn star (VL 215)) colonizes Frenesi's submissiveness and dispatches her to destroy Weed. The Mob first abduct DL Chastain, then buy her out of prostitution and white slavery (the latter erotic trope returns in *Against the Day* in the form of Dahlia Rideout's early performances) to force her into an abortive assassination of Vond. *Vineland's* triangles interpose women between forces federal, criminal and countercultural. DL Chastain's critique of Brock Vond's homosociality establishes Frenesi not only as a conduit between the prosecutor and the counterculture, but also between him and his superiors: "Maybe your mom's only in there to make it look normal and human so the boys can go on discreetly porkin' each other" (VL 265-266). The critique of dysfunctional homosociality is this: Brock and Weed and the forces they represent can only speak the same language through this woman.²² *Against the Day's* Traverse-Gates genealogy imputes it has long, if not always, been so.

Warring clans may broker peace by tendering marriageable princesses to one another, but the opposed Manichean families of anarchy and plutocracy in *Against the Day* do not make it official. Their submissive daughters neither need nor heed patriarchal instruction but rather covertly surrender to the other. While Web Traverse's youngest son Kit is a guest of Scarsdale Vibe, his niece Dittany gamely pursues him down to the stables, shows him a wide range of whips and crops and settles for a bare hand spanking as a prelude to sex (ATD 162). Conversely, Kit's sister Lake not only marries her father's plute-sponsored assassin Deuce Kindred but seeks self-erasure in a hardcore threesome with him and his equally thuggish "runinmate" Sloat Fresno (ATD 265). Conversations between the pardners are reminiscent of the smoker: "the place where men talk about sex without having to worry about what women think".²³ When Deuce focalizes for a moment, we hear an outlaw's arrogance: "Women could protest from now till piss flowed uphill, but the truth was, there wasn't one that didn't secretly love a killer" (ATD 262). This villainous voiceover is one of the crasser expressions of an endlessly recurring Pynchon dynamic.²⁴ Submissive

²² Counter-example of male-to-male miscommunication: Weed is clueless as to the why or wherefore of repeated summonses to Dr Larry Elasmó's dental clinic (VL 228). Ralph Wayvone pursues DL to send a lethal message to Brock (VL 130-2).

²³ Williams, *Hard Core*, 62.

²⁴ In Pynchon, not "every woman loves a fascist", as in Sylvia Plath's "Daddy", but those who do are legion, even unto *Bleeding Edge's* Jewish protagonist Maxine Tarnow and her "instant docility" (BE 258) at Nicholas Windust's obtuse sexual advance.

Traverse-Gates women lose agency to male dominance. Lake becomes a “badwoman” who relishes being chained to the bed, harnessed like an animal, derided and double-teamed. In their homosocial union the two “badmen” use her so they can have sex in the same room without being homosexual, a dynamic she is not expected to breach: “Only once had she been incautious enough to suggest, ‘Why don’t you boys just leave me out of it and do each other for a change?’ And the shock and outrage in the place, why you could feel it for days” (ATD 269). This willing chattel has designed a submissive fantasy with her father’s murderers, and finds further objectification as her body becomes a compass and melts into American topography and cartography: “They took her down to the Four Corners and put her so one of her knees was in Utah, one in Colorado, one elbow in Arizona and the other in New Mexico – with the point of insertion exactly above the mythical crosshairs itself. Then rotated her all four different ways” (ATD 269). Lake’s liminalities include being a geographical intersection point between states, a conduit for inexpressible love between men and a valve between forces of anarchy and oppression. Much like Humbert’s Lolita, she is transported across American boundaries so she loses her bearings. She can fulfil her desires if they have been recorded in the masculine playbook, if they register on the masculine map.

Sadomasochism, Fetishism, Prosthesis

“As for sado-masochism, it is extremely rare in the classic stag film,” Di Lauro and Rabkin confidently assert.²⁵ They concur with critics from porn studies and film studies (Williams, Thompson) that the stag era ended in the early 1970s. Men no longer needed to gather covertly in fraternal societies if they could simply run a finger down the newspaper listings and buy a ticket to see *Deep Throat* in a mainstream movie theatre. Despite their detailed accounts of recurring sexual “perversions” in stag, their viewing suggests the relative dearth of activities later categorised under the umbrella of BDSM, which conflates bondage, discipline, domination, submission sadism and masochism. Di Lauro and Rabkin attribute the 1970s paradigm change to porn’s compulsion to preserve its own shock impact from the threat of *porno-chic*: “Why then the mid-70s proliferation of S-M material on all levels – hetero and homo, porno and peep? Sado-masochism’s increasing command of the

²⁵ Di Lauro and Rabkin, *Dirty Movies*, 97.

mainstream pornography market undoubtedly represents an attempt (for commercial rather than aesthetic reasons) to restore a sense of transgression and guilt to a genre weakened by toleration. When pornography was infused with the frisson of illegality, sado-masochism had a more specialised appeal".²⁶

Against this Zeitgeist, Herman and Weisenburger, examining scenes of coprophagia and paedophilia, emphatically reassert *Gravity's Rainbow's* unrivalled transgressiveness: "In 1973, the text outdid anything then available in the twentieth-century literary canon".²⁷ Beyond their shock value, however, these scenes map power structures in wider military, political and social macrocosms onto expressions of, or rehearsals for, those relations conducted in private sexual microcosms. Julie Christine Sears makes a strong case that Pynchon equates deviant sexuality with death in *Gravity's Rainbow*, but the deviance with which she is concerned, alongside paedophilia, is primarily expressed in homosexuality/bisexuality. She sees difficulties in Pynchon's presentation of "the stereotypes of the Cold War period that equated Nazism with homosexuality," and problematizes "deviant sexuality [...] as regimented as lockstep marching in military uniforms".²⁸ Pynchon's roster of perversities is drawn from the source which also inspired contemporary Nazisploitation films including *Love Camp 7* (1969), *Ilsa: She-Wolf of the SS* (1974) and *The Night Porter* (1974).²⁹ Film in this shameless low-brow genre achieved notoriety in the 1970s by fetishistically associating "fascism with non-normative sexuality" and showing willingness "to consider Nazism's erotic dimensions".³⁰ If a sexual act threatens to be absorbed into the Pale, having it performed by a Nazi will send it back beyond.

Similarly, paedophilia is another measure of offensiveness in *Gravity's Rainbow's* theatres of sexual power. A sliding moral scale means five years of doubt about the age of Margherita's daughter Bianca. When he sees her on the *Anubis*, Slothrop forges a hebephiliac fantasy with her between the ages of 11 and 12 (GR 463), an assumption many commentators including Herman and Weisenburger adopt. Or is she 16-17, as Bernard Duyfhuizen suggests, having been conceived during the filming of *Alpdrücken* in 1928? However, though her youth may be

²⁶ Ibid., 97-8.

²⁷ Herman and Weisenburger, *Domination, and Freedom*, 77.

²⁸ Sears, "Black and White Rainbows", 111-112.

²⁹ See Sontag, "Fascinating Fascism", on the allure of Nazi chic.

³⁰ Magilow, Vander Lugt and Bridges, *Nazisploitation!*, 13.

designed to rekindle the extinguished guilt Di Lauro and Rabkin posit above, it is not salient here. During her punishment ritual performance with her mother, it is accoutrements and accessories which the fetishist Slothrop hears and sees. The engineering encasing her body speaks to him like working machinery: “suspender straps shift and stretch as Bianca kicks her legs, silk stockings squeak together, erotic and audible” (GR 466). Greta’s ruler inscribes the delineated geometries of her body mathematically: “white centimetre markings and numerals are being left in mirror image against the red stripes with each blow, criss-crossing, building up the skew matrix of pain on Bianca’s flesh” (GR 466-7). Slothrop had earlier patterned Greta’s flesh with a whip at her behest, but she recasts herself for this show, switching what we have previously known about her sexuality and rendering her unrecognisable: “where is the old masochist and monument Slothrop knew back in Berlin?” (GR 466). Slothrop is mentally assembling a database of stimuli for later use, just as Pirate Prentice had in another act of inscription, in an “interpretative gesture” noted by Jessica Lawson.³¹ Asked to mimic porn performer/consumer and ejaculate on demand, to rub seminal fluid into chemically-coated paper to unveil a hidden message, Pirate is supplied with the archaic stimulus of an erotic line drawing. As he retrieves a fantasy, not a memory, the eyes, face and body of the adulterous wife of a past affair are occluded on his mental screen by more dependable stimuli. All he can think is: what is she wearing?

“Scorpia sprawled among fat pillows wearing exactly the corselette of Belgian lace, the dark stockings and shoes he daydreamed about often enough but never – “No, of course he never told her. He never told anyone. Like every young man growing up in England, he was conditioned to get a hardon in the presence of certain fetishes, and then conditioned to feel shame about his new reflexes.” (GR 71-2)

Precisely this nostalgic fantasy of complex underwear and hosiery had entered the contemporary public consciousness in Bob Fosse’s *Cabaret* (1972) with its burlesque fetishism and “aura of carefree decadence for which post-Great War, pre-Hitler Germany is now renowned”.³² Posters featured star Liza Minelli in corset, stockings, suspenders and bowler

³¹ Jessica Lawson, “The Real and Only Fucking”, 234.

³² Thompson, *Black and White and Blue*, 60.

hat. Similar leg-show iconography, albeit in transvestite drag performance, adorned the advertising for Luchino Visconti's *The Damned* (1969), an example of pure Nazi porno-chic: "an intertext between sexual perversion and power in Nazi Germany", which creates "a seductive screen fascism that causes us to love the very thing that dominates us".³³ Legophilia in Pynchon, a partialist paraphilia, is historiographic: stockings and stays in *Against the Day* (upon the persons of an anthropologist, an actress and a mathematician) and *Gravity's Rainbow* yield chronologically to bare legs and miniskirts in the late 1960s California of *Vineland* and *Inherent Vice*. Here, real past erotic experience is accessed through a performance of femininity Scorpio never gave, adorned by period accoutrements she never wore, which precedes the woman herself.

The women of *Gravity's Rainbow* are subsumed in cyborg fantasy enactments: their bodies have no natural state in which to exist and are never unaccommodated. The part-objects adored in them are no longer components of their human body, but rather fetishes adorning it, or in the coprophagic encounter between Brigadier Earnest Pudding and Katje Borgesius (Domina Nocturna) which so appalled the Pulitzer board, expelled from it. The body is remade and re-gendered by prosthesis when Captain Blicero appears in high drag: "his penis squashed invisible under a flesh-coloured leather jockstrap over which he wears a false cunt and merkin of sable" (*GR* 95). Blicero procures his accoutrements on a covert and highly specialised illegal market, but Pynchon was writing in an era in which such objects emerged from backstreet darkness into public visibility. The over-the-counter sale and marketing of sex toys had emerged after former WW II pilot Beate Uhse opened the world's first sex shop in Germany in 1962 and subsequently expanded to become Germany's largest sex industry concern. The Ann Summers chain of sex shops appeared on U.K. high streets in 1970, initially designed "to create a sex supermarket based on the German Beate Uhse stores".³⁴ However, even after successive 1960s Supreme Court decisions effectively decriminalized the sex shop, strict zoning regulations limited the spread of this female-friendly, sex-positive model to the United States. The taboo objects still came from nefarious backstreet establishments.

In sex-toy free *Vineland*, Frenesi effectively repurposes hypodermics and suppositories as dildos. Masochism causes her to

³³ Magilow, Vander Lugt and Bridges, *Nazisploitation!*, 116.

³⁴ Kent and Brown, "Erotic Retailing in the UK", 201

frame her suffering as sexual during her stint as a political prisoner subdued with antipsychotics Stelazine and Thorazine at Brock Vond's PREP (Political Re-Education Program) gulag: "I got to like it - I wanted them to come and hold me down, stick needles in me, push things up my ass. Wanted that ritual" (VL 261). Sex and death are both matters of insertion in her 60s hippie chick riposte to Brock's semen-medium fantasy cited above (VL 213-4), a cliché of phallogocentrism in left-political and feminist vernacular. Equating homicide and sodomy, she tells the prosecutor that men "... prefer doing it by forcing things into each other's bodies" (VL 214). Accoutrements also expose a chink in Brock's emotional armour: "he loved Frenesi but did not possess her, and was driven to fetishism in faraway countries as his only outlet" (VL 141). Would-be -assassin DL must impersonate her and requires Aryan prosthesis to approach close enough to apply the Ninja Death Touch: lurid make-up, blonde wig and, crucially, tinted contact lenses to reproduce those "fluorescent blue eyes" (VL 141). This eye colour is an essential component of mythologised Californian womanhood, which recurs in *Inherent Vice*, and the key element of disguise. He may carry a torch for the novel's anti-heroine, but she is a clonable commodity.

Between 1973 and 2006, mediated sex had evolved, incrementally but almost beyond recognition. The Internet united dispersed schools of specialised fetishists in image-sharing communities, pandering to every niche micro-market. However, outside all these pockets of perversity, a mainstream, if such a constantly self-erasing concept can ever be applicable to pornography, emerged of harsh, male-dominant, misogynistic gonzo, often shot as ultralow-budget male POV by performers doubling as cameramen/directors. Gagging, choking, slapping, insults, facials and obsessions with large-scale gangbangs and heterosexual anal infested a mainstream more edgy, more transgressive than a BDSM environment predicated on informed consent and pre-negotiation.³⁵ This new normative paradigm is encoded in *Against the Day*, its viciousness most memorably rendered as Lake Traverse's body becomes a battleground between anarchism and corporatism.

³⁵ See Allen, *Consent and the Controlled Body*, for an extended discussion of "informed consent" and the changing representations of BDSM in mainstream cinema: "Whereas explicit BDSM prior to the 1990s was depicted almost universally as deviant and dangerous through being linked to oppressive regimes and the underbelly of society, alternative mainstream formulations became available, with these taking account of its normalcy and the role of willed consent."

Lake's three brothers each bind themselves to other worlds by gazing on three beautiful women in fetishistic encounters. The youngest, Kit, marries street actress and singer Dahlia, daughter of photographer Merle Rideout with Erlys, yet another traitorous Pynchon woman, who had abandoned her family to run away with, if not the circus, at least a magician. Dally is persuaded out of the "white-slave simulation industry" (ATD 339) into compromising positions as a sculptor's model mock-sodomizing a "Well Set-Up Young Man" (ATD 897) wearing only infantry boots, distributing her own freshly-worn "intimate apparel" to the aristocracy, suffering her toes to be adored by them (ATD 899), and masturbating while Clive Crouchmas "sat at his safe distance, watching" (ATD 900). Her 1910 career encompasses many tropes common to the sex industry a century later including prosthesis (uninstantiated - she is not provided with a dildo), diverse foot fetishisms, the (postal) tendering of pre-worn underthings and purely performative sexuality: girl solo. Severs sees Dally as a Working Girl heroine defending her virginity in a predatory world, and argues that Pynchon "while putting threats in her path, wants to keep the story relatively pornography-free as long as possible".³⁶ The activities above, which maintain her libidinal economic worth by sparing her penetration, are anachronistically aligned with Internet-age mediated sex-acts targeting niche fetish markets (prosthesis, feet and used lingerie) or solo performance as low-resistance gateway to later girl-on-girl, boy-girl, threesome, etc. He rescues the damsel from prostitution then, by a fine line, but not from self-pornography.

No sooner has middle son Frank become entwined with plucky girl anthropologist Wren Provenance than the pair visit a brothel forcing costume changes and subtle mockery of the damsel-in-distress plot. Once ensconced in Jennie Rogers's House of Mirrors she dons stays and stockings, adopts "... one of those looks of insincere dismay you saw in erotic illustrations from time to time" (ATD 276) and shifts into an anachronistic voice to lament eyelash-battingly "... you have simply ruined me for everyday bourgeois sexuality. Whatever am I to do?" (ATD 277). In this world women must confront the commodification of the body: "*Gravity's Rainbow* read sadomasochism as the model for all state policies. *Against the Day* reads the sex market as the model for markets in general".³⁷ Where Dally, defends her virginity and resists abduction into white slavery by lover boy Crouchmas and pimping by

³⁶ Severs, "The Abstractions", 223.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 230.

Ruperta or the Principessa Spongiatosta, Wren revels in the brothel as a Burlesque dress-up playground, not unakin to the *porno-chic* appropriations of Madonna or Gaga discussed by McNair.³⁸ She (or Ruperta or Yashmeen) would not be out-of-place among the “young women [who] choose, as sexual subjects with free will, to be sex objects, from time to time and in certain circumstances; to play the game of socio-sexual interaction using the language and symbols provided to them in the surrounding culture”.³⁹ In Pynchonoid fetish-nostalgia, Wren is a knowing 21st-century postfeminist time-traveller revelling in the trappings of a bygone era.

Firstborn Reef, entranced by the sleeping partially-clad form of his brother Kit’s bisexual mathematician ally Yashmeen Halfcourt, is masturbating as she awakes: “Are you committed to this disgusting activity,” she enquired [...] “or might the vagina hold interest for you beyond the merely notional?” (ATD 858). After upgrading him from voyeurism/onanism to coitus, she later resorts to display and feeds the prevailing fetish by revealing her “much commented-upon legs in black silk hosiery, which she now pretended to inspect and adjust” (ATD 882). Assertive adventuress Yashmeen creates a playful threesome between herself, ultra-masculine Reef and *fellatrice* Cyprian Lakewood. Her power arises from her verbal dexterity in guiding narrations which steer this troilism. These games are the only pre-negotiated sex in the novel and although, “[p]roceedings had been limited to the two heterosexual legs of the triangle” (ATD 881), one day when she is absent these two male polar opposites engage in surprisingly tender sex. Speaking sex opens channels between them unexplored by Sloat and Deuce, Brock and Weed or Tyrone and all those other men.

The stylised interactions involving pre-negotiated consensual whipping of Brigadier Pudding by Katje Borgesius and of Margherita Erdman by Tyrone Slothrop, may be conceived of as scenes, involving *play* covered by this useful definition: “Stressing its performative qualities, the term ‘scene’ is frequently used for the engagement in actual BDSM acts; others choose the term ‘play’, which as well as stressing its separation from the real has the advantage of indicating it is governed by predetermined rules”.⁴⁰ Both of the above cases dramatize explicit permission for the pain inflicted: Pudding’s ritual request is an added humiliation and Margherita adduces her predilection to her appearances

³⁸ McNair *Porno? Chic!*

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁴⁰ Allen, *Consent and the Controlled Body*, 199n.

in the films of Gerhardt von Göll. Her ultimate arousal is being encased in Imipolex and rubbing her face against the gigantic Imipolex penis Dröhne (a robotically named plastics connoisseur) wears over his own (GR 488): a fetish which helps her more closely aspire to becoming the "machine which no one will be able to tell from a human being," in the words of Rotwang, the Inventor in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927).

Conversely, *Against the Day*, excepting the Yashmeen-Reef-Cyprian triangle, posits domination as coercive and consent as at best implicit, with all the implied risk and potential abuse. At no point do we hear Lake Traverse importune her badmen to humiliate her or Ruperta enjoin her tunnel drillers to penetrate her. This sex occurs outside the boundaries of the game, acquiring an edge associated with the possibility of assault, which has not been diffused in speech or in thought.

Pornoscapes: Film, Tube, Internet

Horst Achtfaden is trapped in loops both personal and literal aboard the toilet ship in *Gravity's Rainbow*: "He has watched voluptuous Gerda and her Fur Boa go through the same number 178 times since they put him in here, and the thrill is gone" (GR 451). That this hand-cranked peep show stag loop retained its cachet approaching the 177th view is a joke about the efficacy of unvaried repetition in sexual stimulation (*Again! Again!*). Pirate's mental movie of Scorpia, cited above, shares stag narrative conventions: it commences *in medias res* without elaborately plotted foreplay; it is shot in a single setting; it lasts precisely long enough to transport the male beholder from arousal to orgasm, upon which it both culminates and immediately terminates. This microscopic episode in Pynchon's text can be mapped on to a single-reel blue movie like Gerda's. Wolfley is among many to have mapped the diegetic macrocosm onto the cinematic feature: "For the content of the novel *Gravity's Rainbow* is a hypothetical movie" (873).

In a truly stag scene, secretary Maud Chilkes is magnetized by Pavlovian physiologist Ned Pointsman, who cherishes delusions of control over others' actions. Maud provides an attractive visage and skilful fellatio, and confirms the sincerity of her sudden enthusiasm by swallowing his semen. The visible orgasm trope was certainly not unknown in stag, and "traditionally consists of the man ejaculating on

the female's belly (for the viewer's benefit)".⁴¹ Nevertheless, Linda Williams has shown that it increases in prominence immensely in features porno after 1970, which requires external penile ejaculation or the "money shot" as a demonstration of male pleasure: "to prove that not only penetration, but also satisfaction has taken place".⁴² This brisk, unprompted routine is consummate: "bold Maud, this is incredible, taking the pink Pavlovian cock in as far as it will go, chin to collarbone vertical as a sword-swallower, releasing him each time with some small ladylike choking sound" (GR 168) and its soundtrack holds itself back from the gagging and slurping noises endemic in later porno.⁴³ Her conscientious neatness, "swallowing, wastes not a drop" (GR 169), is stag, not the sloppy external money shot of later features. The written text, of course, need not suffer the accusation of fakery (essentially that hardcore has been replaced by a less valuable currency: softcore) with which the cinematic text contends. Her covert task accomplished, Maud abruptly disappears from view, and it is also this abrupt ending, an absence of narrative closure, which Williams associates with stag, a genre which if not entirely pre-narrative, dispenses with much dramatic content and was limited to primitive, linear single-scene plots conceived to fill a ten-minute film reel, minimizing shooting costs and maximizing use of limited available footage. Maud appears subsequently only as a view from behind and a brief smile and there is no attempt to ascribe rationale to her seduction of Pointsman.⁴⁴ This *utterand* with a single, sexual purpose in the narrative leads a life otherwise unilluminated by Pynchon.⁴⁵ However, we might imagine a defence of Maud proceeding along the same lines as Di Lauro and Rabkin's of the stag: "If women are 'degraded' as sex objects in these films, it is rarely because they are

⁴¹ Di Lauro and Rabkin, *Dirty Movies*, 89.

⁴² Williams, *Hard Core*, 73. Schaschek asserts that the money shot "symbolises the economic value of pornography; is criticized for foregrounding male pleasure; shows the compulsory repetition of the genre; highlights the importance of visibility in pornography; emphasizes the apparatus that 'shoots' scenes; is the prominent figure of satisfaction; represents the real sex act [...]" (*Pornography and Seriality*, 115).

⁴³ Williams, *Hard Core*, 123. "Other sounds of pleasure include the smack of a kiss or slap, the slurp of fellatio and cunnilingus, the whoosh of penetration-engulfment [...]" Williams also reminds us that stag and hardcore features were shot without sound, which was added in postproduction.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁴⁵ John Clute has coined this term for the archaic multitude from which Ruperta emerges in *ATD*: "They are utterands: people-shaped utterances who illuminate the stories of the old world that their Author has placed before us in funeral array; they are codes to spell his book with" ("Aubade, Poor Dad", 284). This is equally applicable to GR.

actively humiliated, but rather because they engage in sex without their larger reality as individuals being acknowledged".⁴⁶ Gerda and Scorpiia's stag interludes as burlesque stripper and adulteress are mediated through the loop and the line drawing but Maud the secretary steps suddenly into storyworld reality. These vignettes may evince nostalgia for a time before the explicit escaped the underground to encroach upon the mainstream, but we must look to Margherita Erdman to find a woman asserting sexual agency, if such can be said of her submission.

As film orchestrates sexual response in Pynchon, characters in search of sexual stimulus edit and extract unstimulating or distracting context. Film stimulates only two senses of the five, so this entails zooming in on partial, cropped sections of images or bites of sound, lopping, looping and repeating them for intensity and effect. Paranoid consciousness recognizes these stimuli as pre-programmed and non-unique and paranoid tumescence is triggered by repetition of previously studied images and narratives: it is a drilled, conditioned, Pavlovian response. In the daring days of the early sound era, pre-Production Code Hollywood made salacious but euphemistic horror and crime genre flicks, and Weimar cinema was of course never bound by the code.⁴⁷ The first feature Gerhardt von Göll (alias *Der Springer*) makes with the pseudonymous Max Schlepzig and Margherita Erdman (to conceal Jewishness, not porn names) is *Alpdrücken*, or nightmare dread. Men leave the film engorged by images of Erdman and father children, Franz Pökler among them (*GR* 397). Von Göll is the mendacious manipulator of this icon of passivity, in movies screened under cover of the horror genre to aspire to softcore: "I never seemed to move. Not even my face. Ach, those long, long gauze close-ups ... it could have been the same frame, over and over. Even running away—I always had to be chased, by monsters, madmen, criminals—still I was so [...] stolid, so ... monumental. When I wasn't running I was usually strapped or chained to something" (*GR* 394). This is not hardcore.⁴⁸ It derives eroticism from repetition, motionlessness, immobility, restraints and the moment of

⁴⁶ Di Lauro and Rabkin, *Dirty Movies*, 26.

⁴⁷ The Hays Code in popular parlance, enforced after 1934.

⁴⁸ I would quarrel with Bérubé's application of the term "hardcore" (245) to *Alpdrücken*, a horror film shown in theatres with no fictional sex, his casual assignment of the position of "snuff" film director to Pynchon (264) and his speculation regarding the author's sexual proclivities (264n). Hardcore entails visible erections and penetration, or in Williams' terms "genital display" and "genital action". Evidence of "snuff" as a commercial film genre, other than in urban myth, (O'Toole, *Pornocopia*, 46) is unforthcoming and Pynchon's tastes are neither apparent nor germane.

pause. The movie camera as still camera objectifies. However, the suggestive techniques are those of mainstream cinema: there is neither simulation of sex nor hardcore penetration or ejaculation. Objectification, a commonplace charge of anti-porn rhetoric, here paradoxically keeps the film on the right side of the law. The damsel-in-distress plot, familiar from many early 20th century detective magazines and designed to circumvent censorship but nevertheless appeal to perverse specialist taste, counts confinement and helplessness, escape and flight among its recurring tropes. An anti-porn reading of *Alpdrücken* would suggest exacerbation of prior damage during a traumatic experience: the galvanizing of submissive/masochistic proclivities upon which her later liaison with reluctant sadist Slothrop is predicated. However, how are we to discern that it is not the experience Margherita undergoes on “footage [...] cut out for the release prints” when: “jackal men come in to ravish and dismember the captive baroness” (GR 461) which has the effect?⁴⁹ Furthermore, is it not Stefania Procalowska’s disparaging assessment: “Margherita’s problem was she enjoyed it too much, chained up in those torture rooms. She couldn’t enjoy it any other way” (GR 461), which robs her of agency, denies her the right to assert submissiveness? *Alpdrücken*, both not-stag and director’s cut stag/slasher flic, gave Erdman both agency and no agency. For Maxwell, she is culpable for embracing the politics of her own oppression in “adopting strategies of survival in a culture that denies female empowerment”.⁵⁰ This is a convincing defence of Pynchon’s exhibition of rape against the charge of complicity: “While *Gravity’s Rainbow* is not an overtly feminist tract, it does in general, indict the masculinist culture for promoting the principles of phallic violence against all of its citizens, especially women and children”.⁵¹

There is neither stag nor porno in *Vineland* because other media are subsumed by the hegemonic Tube. Both Zoyd Wheeler and Frenesi separately masturbate to ostensibly nonsexual Tube programmes which they invest with a frisson. Frenesi has understandable trouble with the Tubal/real distinction since, just as she is settling down to *CHiPs*, cute real-life law enforcement officers arrive. Frenesi’s uniform fetishism accords with paranoid theory of the television as the political instrument

⁴⁹ Equally ambiguous: though the ravishing, or imputed gang rape, is apparently hardcore and understood as the moment of Bianca’s conception, the dismembering evidently cannot be.

⁵⁰ Maxwell, Marilyn. *Male Rage, Female Fury*, 187.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 187.

of the crypto-fascist right.⁵² She fantasizes about a US marshal because *they* have aired *CHiPs* and countless other cop-shows to induce her so to do. Near-universal disapproval kept 80s mediated sex predominantly obscene/invisible so Zoyd and Frenesi repurpose the Tubal blandness for their own DIY porno.

Ruperta and Lake live within the narrative confines of fin-de-siècle genres, but have sex in a 21st century vernacular. McHale treats *Against the Day* as revisionist reading of the Old West, approaching authenticity by including a gamut of tropes banned by Hollywood, including sexuality, and sees the flagrant homosexuality of Cyprian Latewood as the intentional *queering* of the British spy novel.⁵³ This overlay of a later sexual landscape, or set of sexual conventions, onto metafictional reinventing historiographic time periods has far-reaching consequences. Pynchon sexualizes or, more specifically, pornifies three of the four plot clusters John Clute distinguishes: “2) The Western Revenge [...] 3) The Geek Eccentric Scientist [...] 4) The Flaneur Spy Adventuress”, respecting the chastity only of the adolescent Chums of Chance, whose narrative is the first on Clute’s list.⁵⁴

A wave of 21st century anti-porn commentators (Dines, Paul, Walter, Jensen among them) have vilified the growth of the San Fernando porn industry powered successively by VHS, DVD and streaming technologies, accusing it of hijacking and corporatizing sexualities. Individual preferences are pre-programmed into a male-dominant mode which unquestioningly incorporates the industry-standard rough sex detailed above. David Foster Wallace in “Big Red Son” and Martin Amis in “A Rough Trade” were among investigative journalists and essayists to catalogue these tendencies around the turn of the millennium, and their voices are invariably appalled. Colonization of the female body by aggressive henchmen acting in a ruthlessly stylized manner both coded by machismo and fostered by mechanisms of corporate control is apparent in work by many directors among them Gregory Dark, Rob Black and John Stagliano.⁵⁵ Deuce and Sloat’s double-teaming of Lake is a scene from the dirtiest of their movies.

⁵² This series about the California Highway Patrol, which originally aired 1977-83, featured muscled

motorcycle cops in tight breeches and big boots.

⁵³ McHale, “Genre-Poaching”, 23.

⁵⁴ Clute, “Aubade, Poor Dad”, 287-288.

⁵⁵ Dark and Black appear in Wallace, “Big Red Son”, 27n; Stagliano in Amis, “A Rough Trade”.

A Competent Pornographer

Sedgwick, as applied by Hite to *Vineland*, sets out “to hypothesise the potential unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual – a continuum whose visibility, for men, in our society, is radically disrupted”.⁵⁶ Tyrone Slothrop exchanged messages with distant men through female conduits, a practice articulated by Brock Vond. But it is only in *Against the Day*’s passage from West to East that this continuum fully emerges into the light. Unreconstructed masculinity in Pynchon’s genre-poached dime novel *Wild West* follows gonzo hardcore rules, so Sloat and Deuce have to be content with Lake as a pipeline between them.⁵⁷ Back East, with assertive Yashmeen at its female apex, the homosocial liaison between another cowpoke, Reef (disinclined to consider the passive role) and Cyprian can find genital expression as “Pynchon takes the ‘shocker’ out of the closet in his version of the spy novel”.⁵⁸

Looking backward from the vantage point of 1973, Pynchon could exceed the bounds stag set itself, for which Di Lauro and Rabkin have an explanation: “Paedophilia and sado-masochism are far less common in the classic stag film than in literary pornography, in which it is possible for the imagination to savour the idea of transgression without having to assimilate actual images of its realization”.⁵⁹ However, McNair among others, recognizes that, “pornography has to be *outside* and *beyond* the mainstream [...] to perform its function and retain its value as a commodity”.⁶⁰ Excising informed consent from the diegesis is one way to stay outside and beyond. Katje and Greta enact BDSM rituals with semblances of pre-negotiation, though always mapping wider power relations, but Lake and Ruperta’s humiliations are no longer BDSM, just gonzo.

The three novels treated here, respectively, pushed limits of transgression in a new era of rolled-back literary censorship, retreated from it during the anti-porn backlash and then, gonzo having colonized the mainstream, threw around liberal doses of extreme sex. This

⁵⁶ Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 1-2.

⁵⁷ McHale, “Genre-Poaching”, 17.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁵⁹ Di Lauro and Rabkin, *Dirty Movies*, 96.

⁶⁰ McNair, *Striptease*, 62, emphasis original.

countercultural, historiographic novelist has written against a pornoscape first cleared by regulatory retreat then driven by successive format innovations. Control has always been his subject and he has used contemporaneous stag, chic and BDSM tropes to enact hierarchies extending down from Them through women to men. He has traced conditioning back to Them through science and technology, law-making and enforcement, cinema and the Tube, but the gonzo, fetish and *amateur* porn in *Against the Day* comes from the Internet, with its pretension of being not just Them but also Us. Either Pynchon reads Internet gonzo to distil in *Against the Day* a model of sexual relations between people, or he sources the model from a 21st century mainstream in turn sexualized by that porno. The disturbing point is that this distinction is at best fine. There is no normative dimension. It is also no coincidence that an overused metaphor for unbridled online license is the Wild West.

Chapter 3 - Damaging Others: Martin Amis in Pornoland

Money (1984), *London Fields*, (1989), *Yellow Dog* (2003).

An aura of misogyny has clung to Martin Amis' fiction. He has used "plastic tempresses" and male sexual voraciousness as tactics to excite media attention, the ire of feminist critics and his readers.¹ Amis the pundit has trodden the same ground. In 2009, his "two bags of silicone" epithet for glamour model and bestselling author Katie Price evinced his ongoing reluctance to retreat from the theatre of sexual debate.² However, pornography, intertwined as it is with tabloids and television, films and magazines, drugs and violence, remains essential to his assault on the hideous, debilitating tawdriness of the urban. *Yellow Dog* (2003) superimposes a moral critique onto the ostensible complicity of his 80s novels *Money* and *London Fields*. His style remains pornographically-infused, but for the first time he addresses the industry and its technologies of dissemination more than the product; the abuse of performers, consumers and relationships rather than the self. Where he once scattered sexually compelling but otherwise vacuous female characters to hold erring masculinity up to scrutiny, with all the risk of complicity that entails, *Yellow Dog* saw him catalogue the harm the pornography industry persuades men and women to inflict upon one another.

Performer, Director and Producer: Selina, Nicola and Cora

Amis described the satirical *Money* as "a feminist novel", but Kaye Mitchell claims that, "pornography also serves to infect and inflect the very style of the novel: it could be held to demonstrate a pornographic

¹ Kemp, "A Burnt-Out Case." Novelist Marina Warner levels this accusation: "I do read him with a mongoose fascination for his unrepentant misogyny. I know he says he isn't, but everyone says they aren't. It's his puritanical attitude towards sex that makes me feel that; sexual purity and misogyny go together" (Johnson, McIntosh and Arkinstall, "Now we are 60").

² "Amis, speaking in public, said [...]: "She has no waist, no arse ... an interesting face ... but all we are really worshipping is two bags of silicone" ... "So appalled is Amis at Jordan [Katie Price] she is to inspire a character in his upcoming novel, *State of England*. The character is to be called 'Threnody', Amis said. 'Threnody' isn't based on' Jordan, he told his audience, but readers should 'bear in mind' the model when they read the book"" (Adams, "Jordan is just 'two bags of silicone' says Martin Amis").

aesthetic of the garish, grotesque and excessive (an onanistic investment in repetition) in a way that undercuts the evident attempts at satire".³ This complicit aesthetic has persistently recurred in Amis's novels of London and America. It may have been rooted in the limitations of 1980s technology, which afforded curtailed access to a delineated population of consumers: principally men, furtive but ultimately unafraid to order by mail or step into public spaces. Carrying it into the literary arena entailed an inevitable taint, in which Amis appeared to revel. However, by the 21st century technology offered boundless access for anyone online. With the product so ubiquitous, it was difficult to achieve transgressive representations in fiction by style alone. Just as gonzo (as opposed to features) pornography dramatizes its own making, Amis came to problematise the ideology, manufacturing process and damage behind the images.

Physical media like the VHS tape in the VCR and the magazine on the newsagent's top shelf framed 1980s pornography, and their purchase and viewing could occasion public shame: a man could get caught. In *Money*, John Self, introduced to his Dad's new stripper girlfriend Vron, is coaxed into leafing through her multi-page spread in the hardcore *Debonair*, a magazine "targeted at the manual worker's hand-job" (M 148). She and Barry Self shed tears of pride in her achievement, but to do so in this England they need to be part of an underclass, or well ahead of their time. Later in the local newsagent, Self has *Debonair's* competitor *Lovedolls* dashed from his grip.

I looked up, in alarm, bewilderment, in terror. A plump, pretty girl, with a sensible scarf, two badges on the lapel of her corduroy overcoat, her face and stance vibrant, unflinching, exalted... Browsers paused in their shuffle. Someone near me stepped sideways, beyond the range of my sight.

"What are you doing?" she barked - she snapped. A middle-class mouth, the voice and teeth hard and clean. I backed off, or veered away. I even raised an arm protectively.

"Why aren't you ashamed of yourself?"

"But I am," I said.

"Look at that. Look."

³ Guinness, "Sex and Politics". Mitchell, "Self Abuse", 80.

We stared at the fallen magazine. It rested half-open on a low shelf where the normal, the legal stuff was trimly stacked. One of the centrepages was curled over, as if tactfully averting the gaze of the girl spread-eagled there. A trunkless, limp and warty male member dangled inches from her greedy smile.

"It's disgusting, *isn't* it."

"Yes."

"How can you *look* at these things?"

"I've no idea." [...]

"Why then? Why? Without you they wouldn't exist. Look at it." (M 159)

Porno remains sub-cultural: it has yet to migrate "on/scene" and Amis has to take it upon himself to uncover it. Williams uses the term "on/scenity" to signify "both the controversy and scandal of the increasingly public representation of diverse forms of sexuality *and* the fact that they have become increasingly available to the public at large".⁴ Before the Internet, Self had to go somewhere to access these representations, or at least order them through the mail under plain cover. But Self has a girlfriend called Selina Street: "like a girl in a men's magazine" (M 236). Selina pleases her man in contingent recompense for funded shopping and financial security. She offers an appearance which is "a fifty-fifty compromise between the primly juvenile and the grossly provocative, [...] frank promise of brothelty knowhow and top-dollar underwear" (M 14), plus stories of unfaithfulness (double-bluffs, oscillating between fiction and non-fiction) to feed Self's cuckolding fetish. She's synonymous with pornography, which he needs when she's not around. Selina, satirical caricature and wish-fulfilment construct, performs a version of herself for the delectation of Self and others.

Nicola Six is closer to female control and authorship of the medium. *London Fields* takes porn off *Money's* streets and into Keith Talent's flat. Nicola strings along Keith the cheat, another porn aficionado and addict, with sexual videotapes of herself: a tantalising, mediated sexuality.

⁴ Williams, *Porn Studies*, 3.

... The black elbow-length gloves, the look of young wonder, the jealous dress, the blown kiss, the wiggling black finger, beckoning.

"Slow it," moaned Keith, as the fade began. With a soft snarl he snatched at the remote. Then Nicola's quarter-clad brown body dashed backwards, and became a clockwork mannequin, then a living statue, as Keith froze the frame of choice. (*LF* 268)

The VCR allows Nicola to manipulate Keith sexually without the inconvenience and unpleasantness of having to be in the same space as him, and distance provides control: "'And meanwhile, masturbate about me, Keith. Beat off about me. As a form of training. A lot'" (*LF* 269). But for Nicola the sexual image is purely a tool, not an enthusiasm. "Surprisingly, Nicola disliked pornography, or she disliked its incursion into her own lovelife. Because it was so limited, because there was no emotion in it (it spoke straight to the mental quirk), and because it stank of money. But she could do pornography. It was easy" (*LF* 191). Nicola, in directing her own death as a *murderee*, directs herself in videotapes to spur her one-man audience into action.⁵

Anti-censorship libertarians and pro-sex feminists fought the religious right and anti-porn feminists in the fierce eighties porn wars.⁶ *Yellow Dog* returned to the subject, after the Internet boom of the mid-90s had generated unheralded volumes of porn, revolutionized its technologies of dissemination and remoulded social responses.⁷ Brian McNair contends that "pornography has to be outside and beyond the mainstream (if not actually outlawed) to perform its function and retain its value as a commodity. It must present a visible violation of moral values and sexual taboos, or it loses its transgressive erotic power".⁸ Always fascinated by the transgressive, Amis stepped up his response. However, literary fiction which embraces or condemns increasingly

⁵ Rupert Birkin, a character in D.H. Lawrence's novel *Women in Love* (1921), says, "[i]t takes two people to make a murder: a murderer and a *murderee*" (36).

⁶ O'Toole, *Pornocopia*, 26-60.

⁷ "The most recent of these technologies to find application by the pornographers - video, DVD and the internet - have been especially effective in allowing individuals to evade many of the negative psychological consequences hitherto associated with the acquisition and use of porn, bringing it further into the private domain of the home and away from the furtive, socially sanctioned world of peep shows and adult book stores" (McNair, *Striptease*, 38).

⁸ *Ibid.*, 62.

excessive pornography may be driven to parallel, corresponding excesses. Where *Money* and *London Fields* uncover the furtive consumption of tangible media, *Yellow Dog* exhibits unlimited volumes of virtual sexual content from California's San Fernando Valley, much of it for download, migrating from obscene to on/scene. Porn's association with ultimate sexual transgression has been exacerbated from an implied connection with rape, in the person of Keith Talent, to Karla White's explicit exhortation to Xan Meo to abuse his child. Moving from marginally complicit images of underwear and centrefolds to forensic accounts of sexual transgression, Amis' critique of pornography as male violence against women has adopted graphically confrontational tactics reminiscent of anti-pornography feminism. It has also turned the camera away from self-abuse, and towards damage to others.

The impending technological revolution of mediated sex appears in the variety of services on offer in *Money's* 1984 New York, with its overloaded culture of transactional sexuality. Strictly speaking, the live female sex-workers in a topless bar, a strip bar and a brothel called *The Happy Isles*, do not purvey pornography, which is etymologically the *depiction* of prostitutes. But, after a "porno emporium" -- "These 25-cent loop cubicles are toilets, really" (*M* 47) -- the alcohol-impeded Self odyssey takes in a hotel adult movie and he contemplates paying for more phone sex (with which Selina already copiously supplies him).⁹ "The small-ad columns of *Scum* magazine are full of remote-control hookers who just sit by a telephone all day for money [...] You ring them up, give your credit-card number, and they talk dirty to you for however long you can afford. They're probably cheaper than Selina..." (*M* 125). Hotel pay-per-view and phone sex (in an age before mobile phone billing) certainly leave credit-card trails but the distance and potential anonymity between performer and consumer closely anticipate the cyberporn revolution of the mid-90s.¹⁰

Nicola made and starred in amateur tapes, but *Yellow Dog's* retired porn star turned producer Cora Susan brings into being professional material ("both pimp and prostitute" (*YD* 335), in Russia Meo's merciless judgement). Nicola's complex underwear may be 80s period fetish but her predilection for sodomy ("It was the only time she ever lost control," (*LF* 68)), predicts *Yellow Dog's* critique of gonzo obsessions. The terminology mutates: the legalistic, biblical "sodomy" has been

⁹ The film is "a period piece, and more thoughtfully plotted than usual, about a black plenipotentiary" (*M* 216) which prefigures *Crown Sugar* in *Yellow Dog*.

¹⁰ Phone sex composed the entire content of a 1992 novel, *Vox* by Nicholson Baker.

supplanted by the visceral, anatomical, genre-defining “anal.” Or the “double anal” Amis describes in “A Rough Trade.” Grant, for a moment, the unproven link between porn consumption and rape alleged by 1970s and 80s anti-porn feminists, and Keith Talent, *Daily Lark* wanker, VCR owner and multiple rapist of his wife Kath among other women, becomes an atavistic ancestor of Xan Meo, who lives in a pornified world, narrowly avoids coitus with his niece, covets his infant daughter and nearly rapes his wife.¹¹ However, Xan has escaped the gangland milieu of his hideous family and would not normally contemplate any of those acts. His knock on the head reverses evolution and he reverts to a primordial Keith-like state. For Keith, porn remains scarce, finite and exhaustible. It’s worthwhile to fast-forward through six hours of recorded TV each night, freeze-framing images of violence or nudity (preferably partial, fetishized). His magazines and tapes each cost a small but in his terms appreciable sum.

By *Yellow Dog*, the Internet had opened infinite online stockpiles and invented numerous low-cost methods of generating content.¹² How Keith would have delighted in cultural striptease, in the amateur concept unrolling worldwide. How he would have leered at the 24-hour webcam in the *Big Brother* house, lurking in anticipation of shower nudity and undercover action. Amis, however, had ceased to invite us to leer with him.

On Set, On/Scene

Pornography, a discountable part of the nasty urban underbelly of Amis’ 1980s fiction, came to suffuse the alternative dystopian UK and USA of *Yellow Dog*. Amis had interviewed porn stars and producers and observed on-set proceedings for “A Rough Trade”. A sexualised society

¹¹ Perhaps the most famous rallying cry here is Robin Morgan’s “Pornography is the theory, and rape the practice” in her 1974 essay “Theory and Practice: Rape and Pornography.” Williams resists this argument thus: “Contemporary pornography’s speculation about sexual pleasure [...] does not generate rape, however, for the simple reason that feminists have done such a good job of showing that rape is not pleasurable for the person who is raped. [...] In short pornography by formulating sexual pleasure as a problem, with solutions involving the need for further sex and further speculation about that sex, begets pornography” (*Hard Core* 276). See also Kutchinsky, “Evidence from Crime Data”, for a detailed statistics-based refutation.

¹² Pornographic magazine editor Robert Rosen pinpoints 1995 as the year when “the instant availability of free internet porn had begun to slowly suck the life out of the men’s magazine business” (*Beaver Street*, 3).

had achieved wider acceptance among feminists and the general public. Pornography's incursion upon the mainstream had even been feted in some ways, through what McNair refers to as a second era of porno-chic, which entailed "the representation of porn in non-pornographic art and culture".¹³ This phenomenon emerged alongside a confessional and exhibitionist "striptease culture [which] frequently involves ordinary people talking about sex and their own sexualities, revealing intimate details of their feelings and bodies in the public sphere".¹⁴ These tendencies have gradually removed the automatic shame tag from public displays of sexuality. Pro-pornography or sex-positive feminists saw the "democratisation of desire" and confessional blogs illuminated previously out-of-sight sexual concerns.¹⁵

In marked contrast, Amis' term for all this in *Yellow Dog* is the "obscenification of everyday life" (YD 335), wording which betrays his refusal or inability to see a positive progression. Hawkins and Zimring argue that "the furore over pornography and the appointment of commissions are part of a 'ceremony of adjustment' to widespread availability of sexually explicit material" and they predict less social concern about pornography.¹⁶ *Yellow Dog*, however, sees no reason to abate its nausea or horror at obscenification, and no gain for women from porno-chic or cultural striptease. Karla White may assume agency as a producer and purveyor but she still works for Joseph Andrews and can never evade damaged Cora Susan's past. In the novel's near-future dystopia, all characters confront corruption by transactional sex. Amis mocks the narrative banality of features porn from the San Fernando Valley but earnestly voices shock at the palpable excess of gonzo hardcore. Features attract less of Amis' fire, often being more tempered than gonzo and ostensibly aimed at the couple's market, but he lampoons the narrative segues which bind sex scenes together. Karla defines Xan's envisaged cameo: "'You are Ramses the Great,' she said. 'But you're on a time travel vacation from BC to LA. With some of your entourage'" (YD 291). Amis lists punning adult film titles and porn-star names, echoing the harmless-fun-for-all-the-lads John Self approach. However, he also lambasts the genre for its humourlessness, ironically casting the pun as an antidote to humour. Karla gives us an account of further damage to already pre-damaged female performers.

¹³ McNair, *Striptease*, 61.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 88.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, ix.

¹⁶ Hawkins and Zimring, *Pornography in a Free Society*, back cover blurb.

Amis had been accused of complicity in the 1980s for imaging Selina Street and Nicola Six as objects of male sexual gratification but their glamorous, fetishist appeal is almost wholesome in comparison with Karla's 21st century hardcore.¹⁷ *Yellow Dog* depicts no sexual encounter positively and attacks the manufacture of porno images. Amis' methods once again resemble those of his unlikely allies: anti-porn feminists. Since the 1980s, liberal masculine responses to porn have included the plea of boredom -- citing mechanical and uninspiring couplings -- a stance which could be shared with women. Public enthusiasm has remained the province of a shameless minority, but legal and consensual acts among adults can evade the moral outrage of the majority. The rarefied peaks of moral ground, where all representation of sexual acts was taboo, were occupied by a marginalized coterie of radical feminist thinkers and religious fundamentalists. More recently, Paul (2005) and Dines (2010) are among those to have reclaimed some of the anti-porno province for more tempered feminisms, extending victimhood to men.¹⁸ Paul recounts, for instance, adverse effects on interviewed male consumers including erectile dysfunction, difficulty achieving orgasm, intimacy issues, feeling of self-loathing and anhedonia.¹⁹ Amis, and another novelist and porn-curious journalist David Foster Wallace, recorded the beginnings of this change of emphasis.²⁰

Amis' journalism and fiction have risked contamination. Viral pornography affronts the civilised man of letters, the father of daughters and even the brother of a sister whose life, in the near-autobiographical *The Pregnant Widow*, is ruined and foreshortened by the permissive

¹⁷ "[...] it is easy to see how the depiction of Nicola Six invites accusations of misogyny, even though Amis's apparent intention is for his female character to be read as a symbol of her age rather than a sign of her gender" (Smith, "Hell Innit", 101). In describing *Yellow Dog*'s Cora Suzan as "Another synthetic vamp [who] swells the line-up of Amis's plastic temptresses", Kemp ("A Burnt-Out Case") echoes a review of *London Fields*: "Nicola is a problem, though; she makes us yield to a sneaking suspicion that a misogynist lingers here somewhere. She is not truly satisfying as character or caricature. She seems to be another of Mr. Amis's plastic women" (Bette Pesetsky, "Lust among the Ruins").

¹⁸ "If we refuse to accept the easy answer that men have a natural predisposition to get off on hurting women, then we have to look to the culture for answers as to why some men seek out and enjoy gonzo. We have to ask, what is it about male socialisation and masculinity that helps prepare them -- or, I would say, groom them, -- into seeking out, and masturbating to such images? The answers do not lie within individual men; rather, they are found in the culture that we all live in" (Dines, *Pornland*, xxiv).

¹⁹ Paul, *Pornified*, 72-106.

²⁰ Wallace, "Big Red Son".

society.²¹ In *Yellow Dog*, the ubiquitous digital image and the scandal-sheet tabloid conspiracy generate a postmodern simulacrum which precedes and excludes romantically meaningful physical interaction. *Yellow Dog* shows journalism gone wrong, gone yellow, and conspiring with pornography to corrupt the right-thinking man and transport his fantasies beyond the bourn of violence and the last taboos of paedophilia and incest.²²

Amis and Wallace both took participatory journalism excursions into the bright and surreal “psychically walled” world of Adult entertainment, before transposing their responses into fiction.²³ Wallace’s collection *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men* is the subject of the next chapter. Amis has talked about how, though responses to the traumatic may begin with reporting and deepen into investigative journalism, it is only after the dust has settled that they can be interpreted to the degree which literary fiction requires.²⁴ Amis re-published “A Rough Trade” in 2004 in Stefano de Luigi’s *Pornoland*, a book of on-set photographs of porn stars between takes. Since the photographs deny the porn stars the stylised and codified facial expressions, poses and movements with which they conceal themselves professionally, they bypass the sexual transaction to illuminate the act of consumption. They depict the unglamorous periphery of glamour and are not intended to be sexually arousing. Nevertheless they risk a different kind of complicity: literary prurience or fascinated loathing. Amis’ prose seeks to circumvent this by gradually upping the intensity of disapproval. McNair notes in relation to the original publication in *The Guardian*: “the piece was heavy with the smell of porno fear, focusing on

²¹ Amis, *The Pregnant Widow*. Subsequent references in the text abbreviated as *PW*. Protagonist Keith Nearing's younger sister Violet is based on Sally Amis (1954 -2000), Amis’s younger sister by five years. “Amis said she had been crushed by the pressures he felt women had been subjected to ever since the idea of sex before marriage became the norm” (Adams, “The Sexual Revolution”).

²² “Originating in the US during the late 1890s as part of a battle for readers between Joseph Pulitzer’s *New York World* and William Randolph Hearst’s *New York Journal*, yellow journalism was developed as a way to draw more readers with sensational content, garish pictures and bold headlines” (Zelizer and Allan, *News and Journalism Studies*, 173).

²³ Wallace, “Big Red Son”, 1.

²⁴ Although he was explaining why he has written extensive journalism but published no extended fiction on the 9/11 attacks, this sequencing also reflects his response to pornography. “As often happens, you look into something as a journalist, and then a couple of years later you write your immediate response, which is your rational response. Then it trickles down into some other part of you where your novels come from, usually known as the unconscious, the subliminal” (Finnerty, “Famous Amis”).

violent, sadomasochistic sectors of industry, and describing their activities in detail. Ironically, the very details -- intended by the author to shock and horrify rather than arouse -- led to him being accused of peddling 'gratuitous filth' by several readers".²⁵ Amis' approach shares a fascination with forensic, graphic textual description of violence against women in the making of porn with "the fire and brimstone of anti-pornography feminism."²⁶ This thinking insists that "Pornography should not be seen merely as a form of representation --- sexist and offensive images or words - but should be seen as *literally* harming women and creating gender inequality".²⁷ Hence, it may be possible to align Amis' nausea with that of Andrea Dworkin, who sees pornography as literally equivalent to violence against women: "The word *pornography* does not mean 'writing about sex' or 'depictions of the erotic' or 'depictions of sexual acts' or 'depictions of nude bodies' or 'sexual representations' or any other such euphemism. It means the graphic depiction of women as vile whores".²⁸ However, Amis consistently exhibits his sensibilities, voicing concern about film and video porn's creation of sexual simulacra for the young and its physical and psychological impact on performers. Amis, at the scene, imbeds himself in the "anecdotal narratives of harm".²⁹ Wallace's "Big Red Son" is a foray into "mookland" (the world of pornography's fans attending its ritual celebration of itself) or table #189 at the Annual *Adult Video News Awards*, which parallel, parody and worship the Academy Awards. But while Wallace observes starlets and "woodsmen" (male performers) at the porn Oscars®, and watches hardcore in his hotel room, Amis drinks in the porno experience on set. Amis and Wallace both abandon the distanced, documentary tone to become appalled, concerned citizens. "I shouldn't be here. None of us should. But we have work to do," says Amis.³⁰ Wallace elects "to submit an opinion," insinuating that he is nudged off the moral fence, as Amis would be, by gonzo's excesses. "The truth is that in-your-face vileness is part of the schizoid direction porn's been moving in all decade. For just as Adult entertainment has become

²⁵ McNair, *Striptease*, 215n. Notably, Amis addresses extreme acts in violent mainstream hardcore, especially anal sex and choking or gagging, rather than to sub-genres self-defining as fetish or sadomasochistic, which incorporate notions of prior informed consent.

²⁶ Segal, "Contradictions of Anti-Pornography Feminism", 62.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 61.

²⁸ Dworkin, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women*, 200.

²⁹ Segal, "Contradictions of Anti-Pornography Feminism", 65.

³⁰ Amis, "A Rough Trade".

more “mainstream” – meaning more widely available, more acceptable, more lucrative, more chic: *Boogie Nights* – it has become also more extreme, and not just on the Bizarro margins”.³¹

Both writers take guides: Amis is chaperoned by porn legend John Stagliano and two porn starlets, Temptress and Chloe, while Wallace is sired by men’s magazine reporters, to whom he assigns the pseudonyms Harold Hecuba and Dick Filth. These porn people generate an incessant stream of background, anecdotes and introductions while Amis and Wallace supply corporate financial analysis, look-at-the-wacky-porn-people humour and ultimately, moral and cultural judgement. At the end of “A Rough Trade” Amis, switching to the second person, protectively announces: “No Chloe, you are not a prostitute, not quite. Prostitution is the oldest profession. Porno is the newest.” The family man Amis loads up ammunition for the assault on 21st century pornography’s pernicious influence upon the young. Amis said in a phone interview: “It’s not some woman in sensible shoes teaching biology who tells the young how to behave in bed. It’s pornography”.³²

“A Rough Trade” addresses porno as an expression of Californian late capitalist decadence through technology, a monster created in the studios of LA’s San Fernando Valley, just over the mountains from Hollywood. Each new medium since the printing press has quickly become a vehicle for pornography. Television channels, VHS tapes, DVDs and Internet sites have often won the battle against competitors through purveying porn. In his gang-bang novel *Snuff*, Chuck Palahniuk invents a highly analytical fluffer (starlet who pre-stimulates male performers to maintain their on-camera erections) and queue-orchestrator:

This crew of pud-pullers, these ham-whammers, it’s they who killed Sony Betamax. Decided VHS over Beta technology. Bought the expensive first generation of the Internet into their homes. Made the whole web possible. It’s their lonesome money, paid for the servers. Their online porn purchases generated the buying technology, all the firewall security that makes eBay and Amazon possible.

³¹ Wallace, “Big Red Son”, 27n. Paul Thomas Anderson’s *Boogie Nights* (1997), about the Californian porn industry of the 1970s and 1980s, is an oft-cited example of porno-chic. The preposterous, back- to-front Bizarro world originated in the DC Comics of the 1960s.

³² Frizzelle, “Cockfights in Fucktown”.

These lonely jerk-jockeys, voting with their dicks they decided HD versus Blu-ray for the world's dominant high-definition technology.

'Early adopters,' the consumer electronics industry calls them.³³

Internet may have obviated the furtive purchase of magazine or VHS, eradicated the need for on/scenity of consumption, but some male consumers still retain a primal need to be on/scene, and attend conventions like that of *Adult Video News*. Given pornography's intrusion into the media landscape, Amis and Wallace are not mavericks boldly using their credentials as working journalists to cover ground upon which the literary establishment is rarely disposed to walk. They are just two among a crowd of industry hacks covering a part of public and corporate life which has become inescapable because of its sheer volume and financial heft.³⁴

Karla, He and k8: Tape, Camera, Cell Phone

Paasonen, Nikunen and Saarenmaa distinguish between two commonly equated terms: "the sexualisation of culture refers to a fairly wide range of culture phenomena while pornification is a more specific term pointing to the increased visibility of hardcore and soft-core pornographies, and the blurring of boundaries between the pornographic and the mainstream".³⁵ Amis would address wider sexualisation in *The Pregnant Widow*, but *Yellow Dog's* subject is pornification, mostly emanating from one man. Hoodlum and

³³ Palahniuk, *Snuff*, 23.

³⁴ Wallace weighs the industry up against Hollywood. "It is universally acknowledged that the US Adult-film industry, \$3.5-4 billion in annual sales, rentals, cable charges, and video-masturbation-booth revenues, is an even larger and more efficient moneymaking machine than legitimate mainstream American cinema (the latter's annual gross commonly estimated at \$2-2.5 billion)." ("Big Red Son" 5) Amis wants us to believe that the industry is *beyond belief*. "Porno is far bigger than rock music and far bigger than Hollywood... Last year Americans spent \$8 billion on mediated sex" ("A Rough Trade"). Even given that Amis is writing three years later this seems an extraordinary burgeoning. In 2004, Linda Williams put pornography revenues at "between 10 and 14 billion dollars annually" (*Porn Studies*). This figure, Frank Rich has noted, is not only bigger than movie revenues; it is bigger than professional football, basketball and baseball put together." Rich goes on to argue that pornography is no longer "a sideshow" but the main event" (Rich, "Naked Capitalists", 51).

³⁵ Paasonen, Nikonen & Saaremaa. *Pornification*, 8.

pornographer Joseph Andrews unleashes three sexualised furies: Cora Susan/Karla White, He Zizhen and (at least in the incandescent, sexually impugned judgement of Clint Smoker) the transsexual/transgendered k8. The trio appropriate pornographic communications technologies to wreak sexual revenge upon Xan Meo, King Henry IX and Clint Smoker, destroying Xan's marriage and family (ultimately unsuccessfully), the British monarchy (with apparent ease) and the worthless hack's career.

In *The Pregnant Widow* Amis writes, "Pornographic sex is sex that can be described" (PW 461) and almost all *Yellow Dog's* sex is porno sex, yet Amis fights complicity by holding back from visceral and fetishist excess, just as Renaissance man and sensitive New Age guy Xan Meo does in *Lucozade*.³⁶ Amis appears unwilling to hail porno-chic or democratise desire, so *Yellow Dog* contains no romantically satisfying connubial congress, no enhanced sexualities. Cora is not titillating the way Selina and Nicola could be. Nevertheless, it is moot whether the dysfunctional sexualities of the novel's hideous men can be directly attributed to pornography: they are flung into the world of the industry by uncontrollable external forces.

These three women (a simplification of gender in k8's case) who lead the pornographic assault all have compromised identities. Cora Susan, a woman wronged and vengeful in almost Greek tragic mode, has become porn apologist and erudite literary critic Karla White. He Zizhen shoots paparazzi film and stills in the yellow house of Princess Victoria, who is played in the porno *Princess Lolita* by 17-year-old starlet Tori Fate, giving her onanist admirers two porno simulacra: unsuspecting amateur and calculating professional. Transgendered k8, the apocryphal chick with a dick, achieves Smoker's comeuppance through a calculated, dissembling revolt against porn's hegemonic ideology.

Pamela Paul berates pornography for damaging the women who appear in it, the men who consume it and the relationships between these men and the women and children in their lives: "[f]or most people, pornography wreaks a subtle but real emotional, and in some cases, physical, devastation".³⁷ *Yellow Dog* shows a porno actress turned

³⁶ The exception is head trauma Neanderthal Xan's sex with his wife Russia, which approaches rape in its "post-traumatic Satyriasis" (YD 138) and ultimately crosses that line to become one of her reasons for ejecting him from the house. Otherwise sex is limited to the Californian industry, through Karla White's participation or description, He Zizhen's filmed seduction of Princess Victoria or Clint Smoker's ill-fated tryst with Rehab, during which he does his best to mimic porn.

³⁷ Paul, *Pornified*, 260.

producer aspiring to do all of the above in ruining Xan Meo's family life. However, Cora Susan had to be abused to become Karla White, and it is this pre-damage and the instigation of Joseph Andrews (rather than *ennui* or desensitization or man-hatred or any other career-induced dysfunction) which cause her to target Uncle Xan. In fact, the industry has given her a means of expressing compassion: as a producer she looks after the girls' health and interests. Only because Xan is so desensitized and disoriented in his post-head trauma Neanderthal state, can she tempt him to abuse his own daughter. It is not pornography that does this to Xan, but his attitude to it has changed: "Previously he quite liked it when he saw it but also disapproved of it; now he liked it a lot and approved of it, assented to it, blessed it. And yet it was no help to him, in his altered state" (YD 237). Head trauma has done to Xan what porno does to other men: "It is Amis' point that with digital proliferation (and the widening cultural acceptance) of pornography, sexual equilibrium has become even more elusive, for the average male".³⁸ The pornified mainstream gives Xan the wherewithal to think the unthinkable: "And why did they so often remind him of pornography: the lewd contortions, the self-fingerings, the slurping ingestions with chin and cheek dripping with milk or vanilla icecream?" (YD 214) Karla may be a missile, but she lacks a guidance system: "she had more in mind for Xan Meo than mere seduction -- and the graphic disabusing of his wife. She did not yet know what." Although Karla is a self-appointed apologist and ambassador for the industry, she is disarmingly frank about its workings to Xan: "I told you the reason. It was once a cliché, and is now a fallacy - but why do girls make blue movies? Because they were raped by their fathers. Between the ages six and nine, inclusive, my father raped me once a day..." (YD 235). This reductive analysis is very close to the anti-porn feminist position: all porn performers must be pre-victimized.

Karla speaks in the voice of a language aficionada, "Pornography ... *Porn* is a disgusting little word, is it not? It's the most disgusting single thing in the whole phenomenon. *Porno's* nothing like so bad." One syllable is worse than two (YD 235). She's also a mistress of the Amis paradox: "I 'starred' in over 100 movies. Blue movies. Karla White. For three years, the only sex I had was the sex I had on camera. Porno-people aren't like non-porno-people. When we *watch* porno we fast-forward through the sex to get to the acting. Now that's true perversity" (YD 235). And she's a critic, allowing her to address the link between porno

³⁸ Caldwell, "Pornography is ruining your life."

sex and literary sex. She lambastes Xan's fiction for failing to follow through and represent sex. Her accusation that, since good sex has to have somewhere to go, he has driven readers to pornography is ironic, given the flak Amis has taken for writing about sex. She's like the industry's all-American starlet spokeswomen, who replace orthodox beauty queen wholesomeness with in-your-face frankness, an on/scenity, or as Amis has put it, an absence of *pudeur*.

Both sides in the porn wars send women to the front lines. Amis' male porn performers are vain, insecure, worried, fearful of replacement and envious of others' higher tariffs, but they elicit no sympathy and Amis can make his usual claim to be harder on men. Karla is also a precocious analyst of pornification: "You mean you *say* you don't watch pornography. [...] You're just a generation out - you're still obliged to disapprove of it. It'll take a while, but pornography is heading for the mainstream. [...] Every time Dimity Quest or Tori Fate opens a supermarket, the industry says how respectable it is" (YD 237). Amis balks at fetishizing Karla White's clothing, except to colour-coordinate it with her porn surname. The retired performer does dress like starlet apologists for the industry. "She looked like the Platonic ideal of a young mother... as usual, she wore a dress of white cotton and a broad straw hat" (YD 183). This contrasts with the forensic inventory of Selina Street and Nicola Six's porno lingerie. Karla's straightforwardness and lack of dissembling obviates the sexual hinting of the 1980s - everything is on/scene, uncovered.

Notably, she has neither silicone breast implants nor dyed hair. "Cora Susan's hair was long and straight and fine, and lucent grey, reminding you that grey was a colour" (YD 183). Cora's contends she has been constructed as a porn star not by surgeons and stylists but by genetic disposition and incest. No man need recoil at the sexuality of such a post-human living doll, or suffer post-coital guilt. She itemizes her porno attributes for Xan, in a double-edged feminist critique of porno's reshaping of the female body:

'Well yes, but I meant physically made.' She took her hand from his and started counting off the fingers. 'One. Okay: father. Two. I can be candid with you, can't I? Two. My uh, netherhair is naturally minimalist, as they all are now. As *everyone* is now. Is that evolution too? Like men stopping having beards? Three. I wasn't born with a kiss-tattoo on my coccyx, but I do have a birthmark on my hip that's shaped like

a valentine greeting. All I needed, for the complete look, was some great *rock* bolted into my navel. Or my tongue. Four. The bust. They seem fake. They seem fake because there is no asymmetry. They don't move fake but they *feel* fake. Feel. [...]

Five. [...] I measure five foot and a credit card. I weigh eight stone sopping wet. I magnify the man. I'm a cock-puppet...' (YD 240)

This physical and psychological predestination to please does not afford her a satisfying sex life. Incest has robbed her of her own sexuality, as bodyguard lover Burl Rhody testifies: "You know what she does when she gets aroused? She weeps [...] Hot tears. Then everything stops. She stops. Then you stop" (YD 295). Amis locates successful sex outside the porno simulacrum, and outside the novel.

King Hal Nine suffered erectile dysfunction, and intense associated embarrassment, when called to service his mannish wife Pamela, who now lies frigid in a coma. He has turned to his Chinese mistress, whose sensual embraces offer an antidote to the mechanical couplings of ungentle western sexuality. Henry's curtailed and unsatisfactory sexual prehistory owes much to a shyness and unassertiveness we ascribe to the upper-class Englishman, and undercuts the privileged rakishness expected of the heir to the throne. DVDs arrive periodically at the Royal household, showing footage of the partly unclothed fifteen-year-old Princess Victoria, upsetting her and opening a rift with her father. He Zizhen turns out to be the camerawoman, and later the princess' seducer. There are oblique references here to the fatal paparazzi harassment of Princess Diana, tabloid obsessions with the Royal family and gonzo's "amateur" genre. Moreover, both the British popular press and American hard-core has assigned girl-on-girl sex a somehow milder, less threatening gateway status, just a step beyond glamour modelling. Palace minion Bugger watches the videos of Princess Victoria and the *Princess Lolita* feature about her, all in the line of duty, a roll Amis took during the porn shoots upon whose fringes he loitered for "A Rough Trade". Alongside Cora Susan and Xan and Russia Meo, Bugger offers a fourth analytical decoding of porno's messages. He memorably articulates the danger of complicity: "Brendan attended to the ordeal of his own arousal. You'd better hope that this doesn't happen, he thought, when you're watching the one about the oversexed undertaker, the coprophagic pigfarmer, the ladykilling ladykiller..." (YD 257).

Amis writes in *The Pregnant Widow* that sexual intercourse is “indescribable” (PW 7), but he must have in mind rather a ban on intimacy on the page since his novels have frequently described transactional sex. This is often directly financial, like Clint Smoker's hiring of an escort girl called Rehab, to have rigidly stylized pornographic sex and then to pretend to be his girlfriend in front of his colleagues and cronies. Rehab breaks the contract and announces herself as a girlfriend impersonator. Ironically, in a perverse porno-chic simulacrum, if Smoker had simply introduced her as his sex-worker consort he might have acquired greater kudos.³⁹ In *Money* Selina Street dresses in porno underwear and engages in consciously porno sex in the quest for joint access to John Self's bank account, but retreats to fiercely unattractive practical wear whenever financial security recedes. The regression is from the transactional Self-Street relationship of mutual pretence, to the Smoker-Rehab transactional encounter and simulated relationship: from faux-intimate horse-trading to public performance.

Clint Smoker's desires directly clash with his public personas as the author of bullish think-pieces for the “Yellow Top” *Morning Lark* (Amis' re-colouring of Red Top). His hermaphrodite text-message seducer k8 constructs a discourse, which advertises an atavistic regression to pre-revolution sexuality and obviates the need for male performance or imposing phallic dimensions. S/he comfortably relegates intercourse to an inconvenience, the embarrassment of which is best tempered by alcohol, abandoning the female orgasm and substituting fellatio for intercourse. Since k8 projects a vocally assertive but sexually submissive parody of an old-fashioned girl, s/he is the perfect foil for the k9 object of her/his desire: Clint, who she finds it easy to dog-train using her mobile phone as a remote control. This is reminiscent of “feminist philosopher Kathleen McKinnon's frequent deployment of the dog in her canine-conditioning model of pornography's effects in a way in which imbricates masculinity with bestiality via the discourse of behavioural psychology”.⁴⁰ Technology has advanced, but k8's mobile phone text messaging asserts a control reminiscent of techniques pioneered by Nicola Six in the 80s. Texting posits mobility (not tied to the office computer), speed, informality and, to Amis' evident delight a new language, but it also delivers messages

³⁹ In the porno-chic sense described in *Preposterous Worlds* below.

⁴⁰ See Segal, “Contradictions of Anti-Pornography Feminism”, 65.

which cannot be interrupted or queried before completion.⁴¹ Nicola's way of telephonically training the clueless Guy Clinch was to pick up but impersonate an answering machine ("This is a tape...") thereby precluding his stutterings and achieving resonance not normally associated with the phone. Before her, Selina Street just did phone sex.

Among *Yellow Dog's* hideous men, it is Clint's sexual dysfunction which it is most possible to ascribe directly to the industry. Clint's "compact intromission" means he no longer has girlfriends and holds out little hope of having any in the future. This is a crack at male fear that women porno watchers will be disappointed by the lack of prodigious phallic dimensions in their real-life lovers. Clint's comic sexuality reminds us of the sheer density of sexualized spam on the net: it is his fault that we are bombarded with adverts for Viagra and penis enlargement. We supposed someone actually read and answered them, and it turns out to be him. Clint is full of brash priapic boasting in his columns, and in what passes for his private life, but he suffers deep psychological and physical insecurity about sex. There is a web of links between newspaper publishers and porn magnates in the United Kingdom and Clint and his employers surrender the UK of *Yellow Dog* to the porn-monster which inculcates itself into every corner of life.⁴² Tabloids fetishize the age of sexual consent (*YD* 16), which equates to consent to publishable topless photography. Clint Smoker talks of

⁴¹ The BBC devoted a whole evening of programming to texting, punningly titled: *The Joy of Text* and hosted by Ulrika Jonsson on Saturday 9 June 2001.

⁴² Richard Desmond, owner of Express Newspapers (*The Daily Express*, *The Sunday Express*, *The Daily Star* and *The Star on Sunday*) who built an empire on adult magazines like *Spunk Loving Sluts* and *Asian Babes*, also (via Northern & Shell, Channel 5 and Portland TV) owns the adult TV channels including Television X and Red Hot TV. The rival newspapers of Rupert Murdoch's News International (*The Times*, *The Sunday Times*, *The Sun*, *The News of the World*, the last of which closed in 2011 to make way for *The Sun on Sunday*) have often derided Desmond as a pornographer, but Murdoch holds shares in BSkyB television, which transmits pornographic content. The spectrum of porn extended from the page three girls, now with covered nipples, through top-shelf mags to cable and satellite TV. *The Morning Lark* is more closely based on *The Daily Sport* or *The Sunday Sport*, celebrity-gossip-and-softcore-porn tabloid titles published by hardcore porn magnate David Sullivan. Countless examples of its rancid practices are on record, including the story of Linsey Dawn McKensie as she approached her 16th birthday in 1994: "Her career started as a glamour model, quickly moving to topless modelling when she turned 16. This subsequently turned into a 'media frenzy' with *The Daily Sport* counting down the days until they could legally show Linsey topless". McKensie later graduated to both hardcore porn films and celebrity appearances on mainstream terrestrial UK television programmes, including a quiz for glamour model girlfriends of footballers, but to this day, speaking nostalgically on a video on her website, she asks fans to recall "the days of the countdown - you know what I mean." ("Linsey Dawn McKensie").

“Amfea”, a pregnant ex-stunna (tabloid newspaper glamour model) previously linked with footballer Ainsly Carr: “a cheesy little blond who was, nonetheless, sixteen. Very popular: posing with her mum in matching thongs” (YD 113). The second reference to age limit is more disturbing. Porn sites and films use universal disclaimers which say everyone was eighteen at the time of filming. Regretting the insidious, decadent shortening of youth, Amis shaves a year off the Californian age of sexual majority to seventeen, and when Tori Fate plays the fifteen-year-old Princess Victoria her youth is a chief selling point: “*Princess Lolita* began with a still of Tori Fate's birth certificate followed by dateline clapperboard introducing footage from the first day of principal photography. Brendan made the calculation; the actress had been barely a week past her 17th birthday when filming began” (YD 256).

Preposterous Worlds

Showbiz agent Rory McShane brings celebrity porno-chic into Xan Meo's life via a poisoned chalice from Karla White: “What they like to do now is hire mainstream British actors to play so-called character parts [...] It has a kind of grunge cachet. Like with minor rock stars. It's considered a blinding coup for a rock star to have a porno girlfriend” (YD 250). Amis had already published several exercises in artful reversal. *Time's Arrow* turned chronology around and two stories collected in 1998's *Heavy Water* are extended single-jokes riffs.⁴³ “Straight Fiction” posits a world where the hegemonic sexual majority is homosexual and “Career Move” relocates celebrity and boundless wealth from Hollywood to poetry. *Yellow Dog* reverses the porno-chic flow: since the early 2000s the trend has rather been for adult stars to debut in mainstream cinema, sometimes as porn star cameos. Sasha Grey's lead role in Steven Soderbergh's *The Girlfriend Experience* (2009), as a call girl who offers clients a simulacrum of an evening with a significant other, echoes what Clint induces Rehab to do. This tendency undermines the dictum that a starlet disqualifies herself for the main event by doing porno. Xan's job op, to do “a bit of watching” as an extra on set as Ramses the Great in *Crown Sugar*, is much more in line with the contemporaneous flood of British actors into roles in Hollywood and mainstream US TV, initially often retaining their British accents but increasingly to play Americans.

⁴³ Amis, *Heavy Water and Other Stories*.

McShane says Fucktown is heavily populated with English girls and men with English stage-names.

Natasha Walter documents another aspect of porno-chic: accounts of clubbing women dressed only in their underwear and competing for male attention by stripping and other sexual display, the object frequently being opportunities in so-called glamour modelling (i.e. porn without genital display).⁴⁴ However, in *Yellow Dog* women dress to impress one another (Russia visiting Xan in hospital, in case first wife Pearl turns up) rather than pornographically (off-set at least) or ironically. However, in *The Pregnant Widow* (2010) Amis takes hold of porno chic through protagonist Keith's post-feminist step-daughter:

Silvia said she'd be dropping in to show them her new uniform. Her new uniform – as a feminist.

‘It's a joke isn't it.’ She was wearing a white miniskirt with the red cross of St. George, a halter top with HOOKER stamped across the chest – plus several items of (detachable) jewellery in her navel, in her lower lip, and in both nostrils. (PW310)

Women, feminist or otherwise, dressing in obscenified mainstream fashion are every bit as much inhabitants of an Amis back-to-front world as vilified and marginalized heterosexuals or super-A-list celebrity poets.

⁴⁴ Walter, *Living Dolls*, 19. The apparent carelessness and hedonism of this phenomenon has been expressed as postmodern irony by clothing brands like the UK's Porn Star, with this mission statement on commercial clothing sites:

Porn Star Clothing is market-driven by its shock appeal, non-conformist attitude and controversial moniker, Porn Star is "alternative" clothing that is in demand among today's risk-taking Gen X and Y crowd.

Porn Star is for the rebel in all of us, someone who has a sense of humour but wants to let loose on the weekends and make a statement. It's all about your attitude and not about taking life too seriously; have some fun!

http://www.klader.nu/t-shirts/Porn_Star_Clothing.html

Gonzo Extremes

"Today's market is split into three distinct categories: the feature, the gonzo film, and the fetish film," according to Joseph W. Slade. "The gonzo type outnumbers the feature film at least five to one, and the fetish type outnumbers both features and gonzo three to one".⁴⁵ Amis ignores three-quarters of world porn output. A few scattered jokes aside, he's not interested in anything other than the pornographic mainstream. He documents the extremity of the hardest gonzo through Chloe in "A Rough Trade" and he writes graphically in *Yellow Dog* about its conventions and the ways in which it co-opts performers. However, he neglects to consider fetish or non-mainstream sub-genres, including gay porn and material made for and/or by women. Instead, he subdivides films by performers' collective emotional responses, in an ostensibly emotionless business. Chapter 9.2 of *Yellow Dog* advances a humorous taxonomy of sub-genres generated by episodic skirmishes between starlets and woodsmen in the Californian industry. The seriousness of Amis' concern about what porno people do to each other recedes as he considers what they, and therefore he, might do to the English language. Celebrity extra Xan receives "the script of *Crown Sugar*, the audiotape ('Background')." The voice of Karla White starts by defining *Hatefuck* (YD 287) in an interview with Clint Smoker, which Xan listens to in his Fucktown hotel room.⁴⁶ Hard-core occupies a mezzanine between fiction and non-fiction in that the copulation physically occurs and is recorded in documentary style (fly-on-the-wall except that in much gonzo the director and even the crew participate) but the motivation for copulating (and the narratives segues of features) originate in fiction. In Amis' "*Hatefuck*" the porno female drags this axis toward non-fiction (and much sought-after authenticity) by evincing contempt for the woodsman, the reading being that porn starlets do something they detest for money.

Karla then dissects "*Cockout*". The coinage is Amis' but Wallace addresses the same dubious phenomenon in a footnote to "Big Red Son", quoting one of his minders at the convention, the pseudonymous Harold Hecuba, telling a story about an enamoured police porn fan.

⁴⁵ Slade, "Eroticism and Technological Regression", 12.

⁴⁶ "*Hatefuck*" and "*Cockout*" are among many terms Amis repeatedly italicizes for emphasis.

[...] when H.H. finally cleared his throat and asked the cop why such an obviously decent fellow squarely on the side of law and civic virtue was a porn fan, the detective confessed that what drew him to the films was “the faces,” i.e. the actresses’ faces, i.e. those rare moments in orgasm or accidental tenderness when the starlets dropped their stylized “fuck-me-I’m-a-nasty-girl” sneer and became, suddenly, real people.⁴⁷

Legitimate mainstream cinema and the media which cover are satirized in a *Journal* (presumably modelled on *Adult Video News*) article “Reports of Major Cockout on Dolorossa Drive.” Hollywood has ceased to proffer moments which touch the viewer with their resemblance to reality, which strike a chord. The cop has recourse to pornography which, through courting extremity, constructs a reality by exposing its own machinations and dramatizing itself as a perpetrator of unpleasantness.

No literary approach to hardcore would be complete without its most defining feature (after visible penetration): the culminating external male orgasm which punctuates each scene: “the image of the erect penis and of male ejaculation onto the face or body of the woman is of defining importance as proof of the truth and reality of the sex that is shown.”⁴⁸ Clint Smoker’s porn has led him to see his ejaculate as aspirational, an accomplishment, and he takes doses of *His Voluminousness*, obtained from shady online sources, to increase its volume. However, Karla White, speaking on tape, defines it as confined to the porno simulacrum: “And it’s the one sexual act that barely exists outside of porno. A prostitute might do it, but a free woman, on her knees? That is another good reason for calling the Facial what we call it: the Money Shot” (YD 289). She also casts it as a key factor in female powerlessness, during her analysis of gender conflict in the industry: “*The Facial. Even the most rigorous Hatefuck demands the Facial. Market force number one demands the facial. And Boxback never even tried to do without it. So, what kind of victory is that? Sending the*

⁴⁷ Wallace, “Big Red Son”, 16. Hustler reporter Evan Wright (the real name of Harold Hecuba) offers a substantially similar account: “The detective brought up porn videos and confessed that he liked them. His tastes, he said, were specific. He liked the director who focused on the women’s faces. “It is all bullshit,” he said. “But sometimes you are looking at the girl in the video and she reveals herself. Then it is just a moment in her eyes, but it’s human, it’s genuine.” (Wright, *Hella Nation*, 66). “Wallace mined [Wright’s] research as avidly as his own” recounts Max, and he returned chastened: “‘I don’t think I’ll have an erection for a year,’ was his comment to [Jonathan] Franzen” (Max, *Ghost Story*, 245).

⁴⁸ Hardy, “The New Pornographies”, 7.

grunt on his way with a sneer and a taunt when you've got his come all over your chin (YD 289)?"⁴⁹ *Yellow Dog* locates the money shot in the domain of abusive masculinity and sees no potential for it to enhance real-life sexuality. This bucks a trend identified by Paasonen, Nikunen and Saarenmaa:

If amateur stories and online discussion forums are anything to go by, cum shots have become part of private fantasies and desires -- and hence part of everyday sexual practices. This kind of iterative imagery suggests, defines and shapes understandings of sexual acts: what they are and how they can be done [...] This implies a certain schooling of desire, as well as the inseparability of public and social fantasies.⁵⁰

Also, Amis' instructional description of Karla's on-screen oral skills is of such vividness that it acquires a hardcore edge:

For the forward thrust the arms were clasped about Burl Rhody's waist; his phallus, ideally black, seemed to constitute an obstacle: she couldn't go past it, she couldn't go round it. No, she had to go through it, as if her real goal lay somewhere within his loins. On the reverse thrust, her hands were placed flatpalmed on his hipbones, to achieve greater traction, and each withdrawal ended with a tremendous smack of the lips before Rhody was as vociferously reengulfed. (YD 297)

This porno scene is arguably the most graphic Amis has written. Worldwide (web) market demand precisely scripts the visuals and the soundtrack. The producer and ex-performer is giving a master class, but our reading of Karla's every professional movement and professional

⁴⁹ Emphasis original. Karla White defines this school of porn: "*Classic Boxback is simply premature ejaculation – inflicted by the woman. The more premature the better. Now it's certainly very humiliating for the man, because he has to go again, much diminished. So: the shower, the pill the wait, the headache, the hatefuck. But this new footage will precede the earlier ejaculation. Unlike Cockout, Boxback leaves no filmed evidence of its own achievement*" (YD, 289). Amis would later concede the increased popularity of the cum shot in *The Pregnant Widow*, during which he has Gloria Beautyman revel repeatedly in what she and (another, different, more squeamish) Keith call the "sinister refinement" (422): "*Ejaculate.. contains many of the same ingredients as face cream. And I mean expensive face cream. Lipids, amino acids, and proteins that tighten the skin. [...] Ejaculate is the secret of eternal youth.*" (355).

⁵⁰ Paasonen, Nikunen and Saarenmaa, *Pornification*, 13

sound is informed by our pre-knowledge of Cora's pre-damage. We cannot, at any point, evade the immanence of the industry. Cora/Karla, leaving aside the other caricatures on set, is Amis' first porn star character part.

Pornography may have been, as Mitchell persuasively argues, a matter of style for 1980s Amis, but *Yellow Dog's* critique is articulated through analytical characters both female (chiefly Cora but also Russia and k8) and male (Xan, Bugger, Hal 9, Burl Rhody), and addresses itself to the abuse of others. This is child abuse, which erodes youth and pre-damages women. This is abuse of the private person, through media intrusion and manipulation by corporately generated images. This is physical abuse, most flagrantly the violent oral and anal extremes of gonzo.⁵¹ Amis has come to treat pornography as a substance which occasions harm.

⁵¹ "In 2007, Paul Little (a.k.a. Max Hardcore) was indicted on ten counts of federal obscenity charges in the USA relating to five movies [...] showing fisting, urination and vomiting. He was found guilty on all charges and sentenced to 46 months in prison. Little began serving his sentence, following an unsuccessful appeal, in January 2009 and was released in July 2011. [...] The understanding of Max hard-core's extremity enabled the Bush administration to appease anti-porn constituencies by tackling the apparent worst excesses of pornography, while notably leaving the rest of the industry untroubled" (Maddison, "The Limits of Pleasure", 114-115).

Chapter 4 - Onanism = Solipsism: David Foster Wallace's Damage Assessment of Pornography

Brief Interviews with Hideous Men (1999)

In *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men*, David Foster Wallace diagnoses pornography as an addiction corresponding in many senses to other addictions, with anhedonia as a primary symptom. Although his approach ostensibly appears allied with that of anti-porn campaigners like Paul and Dines, he exhibits the failings of adductive reasoning which assigns dysfunctional sexual expectations or behaviour to the consumer. He does not address, as elsewhere in "Big Red Son", the sexual or ideological content of pornography, but is rather concerned with its imposition, in Jean Baudrillard's terms, of a hyperreal sexual simulation with no grounding in reality. This simulacrum no longer functions as even a rehearsal for sexual intimacy and solipsism and loneliness are the penalties.

Women, Men & Relationships

David Foster Wallace saw his own generation afflicted by: "an immense, gnawing, craving hunger for pleasure, and a real feeling of deprivation when we are not experiencing it".⁵² Throughout Wallace's fiction, characters' frenzied and destructive pursuit of pleasure aims itself at sex, drugs and entertainment (film and TV rather than rock 'n' roll). *Infinite Jest*, which centres on a "cartridge" (video) so addictive it kills its mesmerized viewers by imposing inertia and ultimately fatal self-neglect upon them, relates a panoply of addictions in excruciating detail, dissecting myriad recreational and prescription drugs, and addictions to television in broadcast and pre-recorded form.⁵³ Obsessions with tennis, other sports and the self also figure. Stefan Hirt concludes about Wallace: "In both his expository and literary texts he presents his society as addicted to entertainment and diagnoses it with apathy, narcissism and

⁵² Wiley, "David Foster Wallace Interview".

⁵³ Wallace, *Infinite Jest: A Novel*. In some senses this Entertainment's effects were anticipated by Ballard with the chronologically-instigated fugues suffered by space age personnel in his story "News from the Sun" in *Myths of the Near Future*.

solipsism."⁵⁴ These are all ways for characters to evade what Jean Baudrillard terms "*The desert of the real itself*".⁵⁵

Sex, however, is one addiction *Infinite Jest* largely fights shy of addressing, at least in Wallace's trademark forensic detail. Though football punter Orin Incandenza "spends most of his personal life imitating his mother's promiscuity"⁵⁶, neither her infidelities nor his sexual interludes with women he thinks of as "subjects" are described in detail: they remain in the realm of the obscene.⁵⁷ Wallace explained how sex addiction arrived on the agenda in his next fiction, *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men*. This 1999 collection addresses disturbed male psyches and behaviour patterns, predominantly sexual in origin or expression, as he elucidated in an interview:

In retrospect, Wallace says, he was unsatisfied with the character of Orin Incandenza, the novel's closest thing to a sex addict. Incandenza, a football hero goes through *Infinite Jest* seducing women who remind him of his mother. "Much was made of Orin's sexual behaviour but in the novel it never coalesced. I remember making this connection and beginning to write more of "the interviews" with that in mind. But it wasn't until I saw the galleys [for the new book] that I realised how horrific this stuff was."⁵⁸

Inevitably, male sexual behaviour in *Brief Interviews* is dysfunctional, and presented in modes ranging from the deadly serious (rape in "B.I. 46" and "B.I. 20") to various degrees of disturbing black humour including use of a withered "flipper arm" as a seduction tool ("B.I. 40"), boasting about accurately divining whether a date would consent to bondage ("B.I. 48") and the screaming of a slogan at the moment of climax ("B.I. 14"). The stoned and supercilious interviewee in "B.I. #31" discourses in numbing detail on how a sexually skilled man must avoid the Great Lover syndrome (embodied by the "sensitive male smoothy type" (*BIWHM* 24)). This obsessive individual can only please a woman by allowing her to please him, but does not allow her to do so, thus generating a pair of uncoordinated erotic paradigms. The causes of these

⁵⁴ Hirt, *The Iron Bars of Freedom*, 11.

⁵⁵ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 1.

⁵⁶ Hirt, *Iron Bars*, 12.

⁵⁷ In the sense of being unseen.

⁵⁸ Stein, "In the Company of Creeps", 91.

aberrations are diffuse and unapparent, but three stories in the collection do specifically adduce media input as dangerous, offering not release but scripted behaviour:

[H]is characters are no better equipped to find release and solace in sex than in popular entertainment or drugs. Rather, sex becomes for Wallace's "hideous" men (and women) another means by which they can descend deeper and deeper into their self-made cages of self-consciousness and solipsistic dread [...] sexuality [has] become hopelessly enmeshed in falsifying codes and conventions.⁵⁹

Alongside television ("B.I.#59") and Hollywood ("Think"), which write these codes for his characters, pornography is the third major entertainment industry to impose sexual simulation on America. Biographer D.T. Max records Wallace conducting research into the machinations of this "nonconformist" industry as early as 1988, with a view to writing a novel.⁶⁰ When he flew to Los Angeles in July that year to interview porn stars and stand around observing the mundane details of shooting on set, though, he had decided definitively to treat the subject through: "a reported piece on how the industry had changed as the so-called golden age of porn gave way to the era of inexpensive and inartistic video".⁶¹ It was a full decade before he enthusiastically accepted *Premiere's* offer to cover the Audio Video News Awards and published "Big Red Son", which contains various embellishments and appropriated experiences of others.⁶² Shrinking away from the appalling, plastic non-fictional world of the industry itself, Wallace turned to the potential emotional and relational impacts of its hegemony, its ubiquitousness.

The two-part story divided into "Adult World (I)" and "Adult World (II)" addresses addictions to sex and sexual entertainment, envisaging the *pornification* of martial sexuality and metonymically ascribing agency to the eponymous sex shop.⁶³ Adult World

⁵⁹ Boswell, *Understanding David Foster Wallace*, 183.

⁶⁰ Max, *Ghost Story*, 123.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 124-5, 127.

⁶² This essay is, as discussed extensively in the preceding chapter, a broadside against the content, working practices and shamelessness of pornography.

⁶³ The two parts are hereinafter referred to collectively as "Adult World". They were originally published in *Esquire* but ironically, Little, Brown also gave permission for the first three pages of part one (up until "her tires might have squealed"...) to be collected under the

disseminates products which create an inescapable pattern of expected behaviour, and render inaccessible any notion of an unscripted sexual relationship based on untutored instinct. The store is a tentacle of the porn industry, which has reached into this unnamed American town to deprave and corrupt the three-year-old marriage of a young couple. The films it shows appear guilty of transforming an unnamed currency analyst into a "Secret Compulsive Masturbator" (*BIWHM* 156), which alienates and confuses his young wife Jeni and "leads the protagonists' marriage into alien territory, where commercial sex ... impinge[s] ... upon their domestic arrangements".⁶⁴ There is no speaking of sex between the two. He conceals his habits and whereabouts like an adulterer, absconding nocturnally on the pretext of work but locking himself into his study with his computer. He cloaks visits to Adult World, and specifically to a booth at the back of the store, by insisting on grocery shopping in the middle of the night. Since this is 1999 he still physically attends the Adult World franchise rather than resorting entirely to surfing the Internet. He lies about his whereabouts, drowns expression of his feelings for his wife in banal, insincere superlatives and constrains his physical interest in her within narrow parameters which, we are invited to presume, is owing to his earlier exertions. He, having expended a proportion of his presumably finite daily orgasm capability on masturbation and suffering from the associated depletion of drive, selects sexual positions which most easily facilitate ejaculation. He is distracted, absent, unknowable and in the thrall of an addiction malignant, in a sense Wallace defines elsewhere in the midst of an analogy between liquor and television, both of which he says are fun in small amounts but "*really* bad for us if consumed in the massive regular amounts reserved for nutritive staples".⁶⁵ His definition corresponds closely with the claims of anti-porn commentators:⁶⁶

But something is *malignantly* addictive if (1) it causes real problems for the addict, and (2) it offers itself as a relief from the very problems it causes. A malignant addiction is also distinguished for spreading the problems of the addiction out

banner of literary erotica in *The Hot Spots: The Best Erotic Writing in Modern Fiction*. This arguably admitted Wallace to a club of which he would not have cared to be a member, that of published self-professed pornographers like Ballard and Pynchon.

⁶⁴ Giles, "Sentimental Posthumanism", 17.

⁶⁵ Wallace, "E Unibus Pluram", 37.

⁶⁶ Paul, *Pornified*. Dines, *Pornland*.

and in in interference patterns, creating difficulties for relationships, communities, and the addict's very sense of self and spirit.⁶⁷

It is easy to conceive of this sex addict husband as prototypical of the race of men Naomi Wolf warned in 2003 would suffer debilitating sexual dysfunction as a symptom of widespread pornographication:

But the effect is not making men into raving beasts. On the contrary: the onslaught of porn is responsible for deadening male libido in relation to real women, and leading men to see fewer and fewer women as "porn-worthy." Far from having to fend off porn-crazed young men, young women worry that, as mere flesh and blood, they can scarcely get, let alone hold, their attention.⁶⁸

The threat is anhedonia. However, Jeni still commands his physical attention, in that they have sex regularly, and still he protests too much, with many a flustered and inarticulate verbalization of ineffable conjugal joy. No, the evidence that something is amiss is physical, empirical, if never concrete, undisputable. She obtains her data from his penis and his face. She is concerned about, "the rawness and tenderness and spanked pink of the head of his thingie" (*BIWHM* 137) and by the intense suspicion that it is all too much like hard work for him: "During their lovemaking together, the husband's face sometimes wore what sometimes seemed to her less an expression of pleasure than of intense concentration, as if he were about to sneeze and trying not to" (*BIWHM* 146). She initially attributes these symptoms to her amateurish technique, finds no way to broach the subject once she does catch on and, ostensibly bizarrely, until one considers the hegemony of the pornographic simulation, conceives the solution in acquiring the oral expertise of a hardcore actress. In search of instructional hardcore videos and later sex aids, she summons up the pluck to visit Adult World and discovers that "The X-rated videotape had explicit color photos of women giving their partners oral sex right there on the box" (*BIWHM* 142). That wife and husband are, unbeknownst to one another, clients of

⁶⁷ Wallace, "E Unibus Pluram", 38.

⁶⁸ Wolf, "The Porn Myth".

the same emporium is a metonymy of the bifurcated solipsism which is the schism in their marriage.

Wallace's critique of pornified America could at least thus far be said to anticipate that of 21st century feminist critics, including Paul in 2005:

Pornography not only damages relationships and interactions between men and women personally, professionally, and socially, it also makes women feel inferior and cheated, incapable of living up to airbrushed and surgically enhanced perfection. Women are baffled that their husbands and boyfriends feel drawn to submissive or unrealistic images of female behaviour. They fear they cannot compete with the barrage of easy orgasms that their mates can attain anytime, anywhere to the images of other women -- and without their knowledge. And they lie in bed at night wondering why their sex lives have gone sour, their husbands seem distracted...⁶⁹

Wallace's case exhibits correspondences with Paul's, and positions Jeni in the same way, a perplexed damsel in distress with her husband AWOL at a sensitive moment: "This immature, inexperienced, emotionally labile young wife lay alone in their bed very late on the night of their third wedding anniversary" (*BIWHM* 140). However, Wallace ultimately refuses to assign victimhood to Jeni and, at the end of "Adult World II" posits solutions, which though they make no attempt to engage or involve her husband, succeed in securing her a measure of autonomy. From her first viewing, she suffers no desire to emulate porn stars other than in terms of technique, and when she watches a tape she evaluates the competition much as she might a more tangible rival:

She was relieved that she had no worries about being less attractive or sexual than the actresses in the X-rated videotape: these women had gross measurements and obvious implants (as well as their own share of slight asymmetries, she noted), as well as dyed, bleached, and badly damaged hair that didn't look touchable or strokable at all. Most notably, the women's eyes were empty and hard -- you could just tell they weren't experiencing any intimacy or

⁶⁹ Paul, *Pornified*, 260.

pleasure and didn't care if their partners were pleased.
(*BIWHM* 143)

Jeni is not baffled, in fact she takes as read that her husband will be aroused by porno, and though she subjects herself to direct physical comparison with its starlets, she comes out on top, applying a set of aesthetic categories which we may readily equate with the female rather than male gaze: naturalness, symmetrical features (and breasts) and healthy hair. Ideological objections do not concern her. It is not hard to imagine her hideous husband applying an unrecognizably different set of criteria. The matter-of-fact acceptance of porno as an inevitable player in her sex life is striking: the couple both live in a pornified world. There is no reluctance, no can't-beat-them-join-them, and Jeni decides she must learn porno's lessons. It is clear that the performers are not aesthetic role-models for Jeni, and at no stage does she evince resentment at the 24/7 availability with which she cannot compete. Her attitude to in-marriage sex remains unabashedly positive and her only aspiration is the expertise, the techniques which they display. None of this is to say that she shares her husband's fascination for it.

Paul goes on to address the damage she sees accruing to men:

Pornography has a corrosive effect on men's relationships with women and a negative impact on male sexual performance and satisfaction. It plays a rising role in intimacy disorders. More than ever, it aids and abets sexually compulsive behavior in ways that can become seriously disruptive and psychologically damaging. [...] For married or otherwise monogamous men, pornography often signals discomfort or uneasiness in a relationship. They hide their porn from their girlfriends and wives...⁷⁰

This seems a compelling account of the husband's malaise, or it would be if the limited omniscient narrator stepped into his consciousness at any stage. But Wallace has isolated this man, making his feelings as inaccessible to the reader as they are to his wife, and any conclusions about psychological damage remain conjecture. Nonetheless, Wallace shows a man who is secretive and struggles to climax, at least according to his wife's standards. Whether he is satisfied, remains absolutely moot,

⁷⁰ Paul, *Pornified*, 267.

after all: “He had never complained about being sore or raw, or of slightly wincing when he first entered her, or said anything other than that he loved her and totally loved her down there more than he could even say” (*BIWHM* 138). The husband’s avowals and reassurances are rendered exclusively in reported speech and doubly filtered by the consciousnesses of his wife and the limited third person narrator. We must read his fervent lover’s vernacular, crammed with superlatives and expressions of the inability of language to describe his feelings, as insincere.

Jeni has only physical evidence on which to base her conclusions, using faulty abductive reasoning. She has had only a single previous lover, and her attempts to learn from pornography, prevent her from being, in the sexual arena “a citizen of reality” (*BIWHM* 150). Her dysfunctional sexuality is based on second-guessing her husband’s desires and preferences and disregarding the reassurances he offers about them. The schism between them recalls the mutual alienation which Wolf sees in audiences she has talked to about the effect of pornography upon relationships: “young men and young women alike [...] know they are lonely together, even when conjoined, and that this imagery is a big part of that loneliness. What they don’t know is how to get out, how to find each other again erotically, face-to-face.”⁷¹

A Radically Condensed Sexual History

If conservative prefeminist marriage entailed sex primarily for reproductive purposes and precluded negotiation between the partners, dismissed the idea of female desire and diverted non-normative sexuality toward the extramarital, then widely available, reliable contraception and women’s emancipation legitimated the promulgation of female desire. The sexualities of both genders, schooled by pornography and the abundant sexual image subsequently and consequently, found it possible to proliferate publically. “Adult World” is an allegory which suggests that sexualization of the mainstream first strained or almost severed relations between men and women only to restore them in a different form, once the realisation came that aversion of the gaze need not signal the end of marriage. If, in a pornified world, desire is irrevocably diverted outside, then that institution must evolve and redefine itself to comprise “that deep & unspoken complicity that in

⁷¹ Wolf, “The Porn Myth”.

adult marriage is covenant/love" (*BIWHM* 161) and allow "Adult World II" a happy ending of sorts. So, although engaging with the sexualized image appears adolescent, a stage which the couple must pass through, sexual maturity concedes the plurality of desire in oneself and in one's partner, though not the acceptability of adultery.

Jeni's committed marriage is plagued by paradoxes. Her husband is faithful, in the sense that he shares no physical intimacy with another woman, and yet unfaithful, in that he denies his wife connubial intimacy, spills his seed and adverts his gaze from his wife to depictions of prostitutes. The only suggestion of his unmediated infidelity comes at the end of "Adult World II" and is oblique: "By marriage's 6th yr, hsbnd frqntly away on "emergency trips to the Pacific Rim"; J.O.R. masturbing almost daily" (*BIWHM* 160). There is heightened sexual awareness since Jeni sees fellatio, cunnilingus and what porno terms the cowgirl position as inextricable components of the joy of married sex and, by extension, spousal duty. However, although reasonably adventurous in sexual practice, the couple erects a wall between them, which prevents them from communicating about it other than through a stream of placating reassurances which become platitudes. The superlatives they offer one another, uncritical as they are, cease to function as communicative utterances and are reduced to the status of phatic communion, social white noise. Their 1990s sexual sophistication coexists with communicative inhibition. We can read this as an ironic reification of an arcane system of marriage from the mid-1950s Baby Boom years (or perhaps even the years before the relatively sexually sophisticated 1920s). The distinction between sex for reproduction and for pleasure had yet to be inaugurated. D'Emilio and Freedman's analysis of the changes the 1960s brought locates the S.C.M/J.O.R marriage both before and after this watershed:

By the 1960s the nation had travelled a long way from the sexual values and practices of its nineteenth-century ancestors. Efforts to subsume the erotic into a gentle spiritualized passion and to keep it contained within the private sphere had given way as sex became an integral part of the public domain. Sexual imagery abounded in the culture. The erotic loomed large in the expectations of married couples.⁷²

⁷² D'Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters*, 300.

They appear to have, if not the best, then something of both these worlds. Their erotic private sphere ultimately becomes a “gentle spiritualized passion” but it just doesn’t gel with the surrounding sexualized culture. Their erotic expectations loom large but they have lost their fix on one another as objects. The store’s name metonymically substitutes the euphemism “adult” (literally meaning sexually mature) for pornographic and the hyperbolic metaphor “world” for emporium. It is only through their visits to the store, unbeknownst to one another, that the couple may outgrow the insincerity, blandishments and inability to engage, which have dogged their superficially satisfactory marriage. They do this by separately freeing themselves from the delusion that sex between them can double as reproductive act and comfortable marital cement on the one hand and exciting leisure activity on the other. They decide, not collectively but separately, to privilege the former over the latter.

At the end of part II we arrive at a definition of adulthood as the readiness to consider reproduction, understood here as the termination of a phase of hedonism upon the assumption of responsibility. This drives an ironic wedge between the two senses of Adult in that (perhaps with the exclusion of pregnancy fetishism) porno wrests the sex act away from its reproductive purpose and locates it solely in relation to the pleasure principle. The juxtaposition of roles in the two parts of “Adult World” may be seen in the light of a reversal of the roles of gatekeeper and positioned victim. The husband sneaks out at night to satisfy his own cravings in a porn store booth and locks the door to his computer, both of which, though perhaps inadvertently, resemble tactics conceived to protect his wife from the impact of his sex addiction. A Victorian gentleman might have locked away the erotica collection in his library in much the same way. However, this husband’s gatekeepership is ineffectual, ultimately rescinded and tacitly passed to his wife. Once Jeni has entered Adult World she conceals the fact, ostensibly to save her own embarrassment, but into the bargain, protecting him from having to confess his misdeeds.

The stories are a radically condensed history of how in the wake of sexual emancipation, to borrow a phrase from the subtitle of Dines’ book, pornography has hijacked our sexualities. However, though it may be difficult to read Wallace as affirming the value of the variations Adult World opens up for the couple, he presents them without judgement. There is no dialectical progression here: thesis and antithesis are unreconciled and produce bifurcated solipsisms. Jeni exists in a sexual

information vacuum, a bounded ontology dependent upon two sources: sense data (visual -- aural -- tactile) derived from her experiences with her husband and comparative study she makes between him and her Former Lover. In the absence of any other sexual interlocutor, this eventually leads to her seeking a meeting with the latter, which is also unsatisfactory in every way except as an epiphany trigger. She deduces from a sighting of her husband's car that he is an Adult World customer, and by extension, living in a pornographic simulacrum created by the material it disseminates. The simulation literally precedes the real: the reason she feels unable to please him is because porn has made him (or fuelled him in becoming) a "Secret Compulsive Masturbator" and the masturbation has taken place before the two of them sexually interact. She is unable to participate because the simulation, for which the male gaze is the only hermeneutic, has excluded her. But when she discovers this in the throes of epiphany, she does not challenge the existence of her husband's secret world or attempt to make its borders porous. She pays her own visit to Adult World and buys sex toys from the displays on the fourth wall, the one devoted to "marital aids" which offer a different kind of simulation, and allow her to construct her own separate, and ultimately separatist, simulacrum.⁷³ The couple are now divided by their onanisms rather than united in intercourse. Wallace ironically suggests that occluding pores on the borders between the couple constitutes a reification of the pre-communicative, pre-sexual revolution marriage. This quashing of the possibilities offered by postmodern sexuality returns them to a pre-revolutionary state, which, again ironically, Wallace moots as ordained for the propagation of children. Boswell notes here that, "the sex act, for all its physical intimacy, cannot puncture the wall that separates one's own inviolate interiority from that of one's lover".⁷⁴ Wallace is prepared to posit a woman as a willing and eager porn consumer. The young wife is suborned by the industry but twists its values ostensibly to her own advantage. Ironically the associated deadening of the connubial relationship opens the window for the couple to consider children, feeling free to enter a less sex-governed

⁷³ We may wonder whether it is significant that she breaks into the porno simulacrum via the "one side of marital aids" (*BIWHM* 142) which constitutes the fourth wall of the emporium. At the very least, this suggests a minimally three-quarters majority of the industry being devoted to satisfying the male gaze. But the import of tangible sex objects into the home, rather than just images and media, might also be a metaphorical breaking of the fourth wall in the theatrical or metafictional sense.

⁷⁴ Boswell, *Understanding David Foster Wallace*, 203.

stage of marriage. So it is only through the engaging with Adult World the emporium, that they become citizens of the adult world.

Baudrillard's three orders of simulation constitute a useful hermeneutic for this connubial tug-of-war. It seems possible to deduce that, perversely, the porn-addict husband likes his simulation strictly first-order: "where the representation of the real (say, a novel, painting or map) is obviously just that: an artificial representation".⁷⁵ Wallace does not show us any of the images, texts or techniques the Secret Compulsive Masturbator encounters at Adult World: all we have to go on is his sexual behaviour at home. He frequently retreats from a pornographic paradigm toward more traditional sex, in two stages, first by shortening the duration of fellatio in favour of the cowgirl (or female superior position) and then turning her over for "the Missionary Position of male dominance" (*BIWHM* 148). He may be attempting to reduce the simulation to first order, by reinstating the distinction between representation (porno) and reality (marital bed). Jeni, oppositely, seeks to co-opt the simulation by gleaning techniques from porno. Her strategies suggest she expects that sex cannot be other than pornographic and that hers is a second-order simulation "*which blurs the boundaries between reality and representation*".⁷⁶ But their failure to pool their knowledge or negotiate, with all the entailed mutual detachment, means neither are likely to have a clear concept of what sexual intimacy entails and that we may see the simulation as rising to Baudrillard's third order:

This doesn't mean there is a blurring between reality and representation; rather there is a detachment from both of these, whereby the *reversal becomes irrelevant*. [...] The important and disturbing point to all this is that the hyperreal doesn't exist in the world of good and evil, because it is measured as such in terms of its performativity - how well does it work or operate?⁷⁷

And it is the resolution of "Adult World (II)" which evaluates their "now merely nice" (*BIWHM* 161) bi-weekly sex in terms of performativity, i.e. how well will it enable them to stay together and reproduce. They are having hyperreal sex with no origin in the real: there is nothing to compare it to because the template has been erased.

⁷⁵ Lane, *Jean Baudrillard*, 84.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 84, emphasis original.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 84, emphasis original.

Jeni's sexual dreams dramatize the third-order simulation in both the blurring of distinction between reality and simulation, but also the detachment which makes the distinction irrelevant:

In another [dream], she herself was the husband and was entering the wife sexually, ranging above the wife in the Missionary Position, thrusting, and he (that is, the wife, dreaming) felt the wife grind her pubis uncontrollably against him and start to have her sexual climax, and so then he began thrusting faster in a calculated way and making pleased male sounds in a calculating way and then feigned having his own sexual climax, calculatingly making the sounds and facial expressions of having his climax but withholding it, the climax, then afterwards going into the master bathroom and making horrid faces at himself while he climaxed into the toilet. (*BIWHM* 145)

Many commentators have condemned as woman-unfriendly pornography which consistently (the whole film and/or each scene) terminates with external male sexual climax, or money-shot. This dream vignette shows her fears about a husband who fakes orgasms as a means of terminating a sexual encounter with her but then retreats from unsuccessful intimacy into onanism, so he can climax externally, pornographically.

Post hoc ergo propter hoc / Jeni Rewrites Porno

Wallace suggests no long-term physical problem for the couple, and they've come to an accommodation: "7th, 8th yr: Hsbnd masturbates secretly, J.O.R. openly. Their now-bimonthly sex is ". . . both a submission to and celebration of certain freely embraced realities." Neither appears to mind" (*BIWHM* 161). This sex, albeit reduced to the merely "nice", is adequate to satisfy whatever sex drive remains unquelled after the partners' separate masturbation. However, abductive reasoning exacerbates the communication-inhibiting embarrassment and concomitant secrecy to create an enduring intimacy problem.

There are multiple possible explanations for the rawness of the husband's penis and his wincing upon entry. Jeni's initial faulty

abductive reasoning, which blames her clumsy oral technique and tendency to grind during intercourse, is based on physical evidence but she's still working retroductively, her quest for truth starts with effect and attempts to arrive at supposed cause. She tries to stop herself grinding during sex (most of the time) and abandons the diaphragm as her method of contraception because it might be hurting him. But she then runs out of self-generated strategies and resorts to Adult World as a sex education classroom. She consults XXX-rated material before she knows that her husband is a regular customer there so, paradoxically, she is endeavouring to provide a sexual paradigm, drawn from a source which he is using to substitute for or supplement sex with her. She unquestioningly assumes that in order to be satisfied, she must become satisfying and behave in such a way that the route to male orgasm becomes an easy one. She positions herself as either a facilitator or an impediment, depending upon her performance.

Little does she know her battle is with forces unseen. After she practices oral sex on a dildo, then watches an X-rated tape, her inspirations are expressed in the vernacular of porno and informed by its tropes: "She flattened her tongue to suppress the well-known Gag Reflex and moved her head up and down as far as her ability allowed" and, "She tried making pleased, excited sounds with her mouth full of his thingie; then, lying awake later, she sometimes worried that the sounds she had made had perhaps sounded strangled or distressing and had only added to his tension" (*BIWHM* 140). She even considers cutting her hair short because on the tape: "the men often seemed to like to look down at the women when the women had them in their mouth and see their thingie going in and out of the woman's mouth" (*BIWHM* 143). She tailors her behaviour to the male gaze to the power of two: first the downward glance of the porn actor (or "woodsman" to use the industry jargon Wallace plays with in "Big Red Son") and then that of the male consumer of same (which includes her husband, but not at this stage to her knowledge). Earnestness, naiveté and shamelessness all combined to lend her the ephemeral aura of a beginning starlet learning the ropes. The sexual hyperbole Jeni attempts to make her own is directly transcribed from porno, the necessary audio-visual excesses of which are described by British director Anna Span:

Real sex utilises all five senses together, and on film you only have two senses with which you must portray that excitement. So, you must exaggerate the sight and sound in

your film to compensate three other senses not being present. This is why most adult movies make such prevalent use of exaggerated sex noises and movements -- in order to evoke the three missing senses.⁷⁸

Mainstream pornography operates through policing the male gaze, and there is only one other sense at its disposal, accessed through the soundtrack. Besides music, this consists largely of the stylised sounds of female arousal, usually dubbed onto the footage in postproduction along with whatever ambient music is deemed necessary.

Quitting Virginia Slims is another option Jeni ponders, since "She worried that her tongue was rough and pulpy from smoking and might abrade his thingie" (*BIWHM* 144). All along, Wallace feeds us with dramatically ironic clues to the husband's proclivities: she has never checked his Discover credit card statement; he goes late-night grocery shopping alone, checks a bewildering array of currency fluctuations nocturnally and padlocks the workshop off the garage. Unfortunately, all her detective efforts and processes of elimination are founded on known unknowns, and she requires an epiphany to discover the cause, an unknown unknown.⁷⁹ Much anti-pornography argument, of both the militant 1980s brand and more nuanced recent variations like Paul ("The Censure-Not-Censor Solution" is the final chapter of her book) and Dines (who advocates fighting back through educational tools) has been tempted by this form of reasoning and has adduced all manner of sexual dysfunction subsequent to the sexualization of the mainstream as symptoms of its corruption.

He is a Stochastic Currency Analyst - "*Stochastic* meant random or conjectural or containing numerous variables" (*BIWHM* 142). His professional mystique facilitates his secretiveness. Her attempts to build the perfect sexual relationship with him are ironically stochastic, since no matter how expert she becomes, the outcomes remain unpredictably based on his unknown feelings, on incomplete data. Stochastic means

⁷⁸ Span, *Adult Home Movies*, 61. The absence of data from the other three senses supplies a workable distinction between sexual acts and pornography, given the *OED* definition of the latter: "The explicit description or exhibition of sexual subjects or activity in literature, painting, films, etc., in a manner intended to stimulate erotic rather than aesthetic feelings; printed or visual material containing this."

⁷⁹ "There are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns - there are things we do not know we don't know." United States Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, February 12, 2002 at a press briefing.

non-deterministic in mathematical terms, which means that the outcome is unfathomable even if everything is calculated correctly. She wants to please her husband and to have a good sex life, which includes oral sex, moderate experimentation but also intimacy. But she lacks experience (apart from one Former Lover) and sources of information – specifically (female) friends. She is isolated and alone, forced to draw logical conclusions from the data available, and surmise root causes, taking stochastic guesses. So the pornographic text disseminates unreliable information and, in the absence of any hope of dialogue, fails miserably as sex education. Jeni's post-feminist situation, and lack of shared female experience, precludes recourse to any ideology with which to approach Adult World's products. This means her responses occur within the simulation imposed by pornography and obey its rules. The pornographic model precedes reality, and has become a rehearsal for connubial interaction. Real acts, like haircuts and giving up smoking, mean nothing in the simulation.

Nonetheless, the young wife finds her own simulation: "Realizes that true wellsprings of love, security, gratification must originate within self*; and w/ this realization, J.O.R. joins rest of adult hmn race, no longer "full of herself"/"immature"/"irrational"/"young"" (*BIWHM* 159). All the independence and self-actualisation she achieves is predicated upon her construction of narrative sexuality for herself. She "begins exploring masturbation as a wellspring of personal pleasure & revisits Adult Wld svrl times; becomes almost a rglr. Purchases 2nd dildo w/ vibrator" (*BIWHM* 160). Her collection of increasingly complex sex aids fulfil a woman-centred purpose as distinct from the first dildo she bought to practice oral sex on then shamefully discarded, carefully wrapped, in the garbage. Nevertheless, she still hides her toys and doesn't see them as replacing marital sex, in line with a tendency traced by Jane Juffer: "Fear of the vibrator as technology has dissipated over the course of the 80s and 90s -- perhaps because, as it turns out, few women have chosen vibrators over partners".⁸⁰ Having selected her toys, though she is too early to profit from the blush-saving online ordering of sex aids Juffer discusses, Jeni conceives a stock fantasy with which to use them: "J.O.R.'s most frequent/pleasurable masturbtion fantasy in 6th yr of marriage = a faceless, hypertrophic male figure who loves but cannot have J.O.R. spurns all other living women & chooses instead to masturbte

* [N.B.: narr tone here mxmly flat/affectless/distant/dry → no discernible endorsement of cliché.]

⁸⁰ Juffer, "There is no place like home", 52.

daily to fantasies of lvmking w/J.O.R." (*BIWHM* 160). The origin of this figure is unclear: he could be a version of her husband or her Former Lover, who had declared himself unable to focus upon his current fiancée during sex, and troubled by unshakeable fantasies of Jeni. She has rendered both men unthreatening by weeping for their loneliness. Or he could be a genuinely hypertrophic representation of men in general or a mass male audience. However, in all of these eventualities, she has written herself as an object (the way in which the majority of pornography conceives women) rather than subject. This is because the theatre of operations in their sexual relationship is her husband's veiled consciousness, or her imagining of how it works. And her husband had already become a pornographic figure to her, appearing in her dream driving an ambulance with an "obscene" facial expression (*BIWHM* 153). She becomes addicted to the fantasy of being the object of addiction, a third-order simulation devoid of original referent. The fantasy is to be the object of the fantasy.

She pointedly stops short of adopting the jargon or vernacular of porno, or even profanity in a more general sense. Elsewhere in the collection the eponymous female protagonist of "The Depressed Person" laboriously and "unbearably narrates her pathologies in the neo-vocabulary of healing and therapy".⁸¹ This complex lexicon has become so enmeshed in the disfunctionalities it describes that it has become an integral part of them. "The Depressed Person" dramatizes "the impact on our collective consciousness of the therapeutic discourse writ large" but elsewhere, despite abundance instances of "self-consciousness [...] inextricable from sexual consciousness", Wallace fights shy of exhibiting pornographic discourse in the same way.⁸² Jeni still thinks either in childish, consistent euphemisms like "his thingie" or a forensic and dispassionate physiological register, or synthesizes the two: "she was aware that she liked to press her pubic bone in the face of her button against him and grind when they made love together, sometimes" (*BIWHM* 137). Furthermore, the reported exchanges with her husband proceed in a cloying but nebulous romantic vernacular unscripted by porno.

In "Adult World II" Wallace adopts a highly self-conscious note-style, as if offering a draft version: "the structured notes that approach but do not achieve the level of a story".⁸³ This is one of many alienation

⁸¹ Passaro, "A Baffling Man".

⁸² Boswell, *Understanding David Foster Wallace*, 182, 202.

⁸³ Passaro, "A Baffling Man".

strategies in the collection – other pieces offer plotless narratives through dialogue-only interviews with hideous men, assigned random numbers, dates and locations to give the impression they have been plucked from an extensive corpus of field recordings. The preliminary note form gives Wallace a metafictional out from writing an epiphany story (since he can dramatize the method of avoiding focus on the epiphany, rather than a sudden blinding realisation itself) but there is another consideration besides any desire to forestall hypothetical accusations of lameness or predictability. Although the terminology of AA, therapy and addiction counselling impinges upon the note-form narrative (she “accepts her “unalterable powerlessness” over hsbnd”s secret compulsions” (*BIWHM* 159)), the language of pornography is excluded. She rewrites the script to suit herself and make her sexuality intelligible and satisfying. The fantasy narrative she constructs is therefore subsumed by neither the word nor the image of Adult World.

Hideous Male Gazing

“Adult World” is only one side of this investigation into sexual solipsism. Jeni is a rare female focalizer in *Brief Interviews* but in the 18 eponymous “B.I. #n” pieces hideous men relate events to a silent woman Wallace represented only by a “Q.” described as “an interlocutor, and in fact a hostile one”.⁸⁴ She listens without comment (on the page) to these and many more accounts from gazing males as they condemn themselves. This absent focalizer subjects them all to the female POV, which is the vantage point we are invited to read them from. As they talk, we see shards of porno embedded in their sexualities, which are frequently the codified and second-guessed (in both the predictive and reflective senses). Wallace includes pieces which identify media images of sexualized women as tools or agents in the exchange of power. The presumed low-security institutional inmate in “B.I. #59” has initially subconscious but frequently recurring fantasies in adulthood about the episodes of *Bewitched* he fixated on as a child in Siberia, where he could pick up American programming. In the series, the good witch protagonist played by Elizabeth Montgomery can freeze time while she fixes things. Wallace’s character has appropriated a children’s programme and invested it with pornographic allure, corrupting not a

⁸⁴ Schechner, “Behind the Watchful Eyes”, 107.

minor but rather material intended for minors. He mediates extensively on the logical conundrums associated with stopping time to jack off.

This same superpower and its sexual potentialities had been the essence of Nicholson Baker's *The Fermata* (1994), which is impossible not to class as an erotic novel. Baker shares Wallace's microscopic gaze, which he turns to the obsessional examination of women. Protagonist Arno Strine both suffers from and indulges in temporary, self-willed episodes of total isolation from sentient company when he enters what he terms "the Fold", the playground in which he alone is animate while the rest of the universe and all the people in it are paused.⁸⁵ In terms of solipsism, these amount neither to an epistemological position undermining the certainty of external knowledge, nor to a metaphysical position that nothing external to his mind exists, since he can switch back out of them at will. He could be suffering from the dissociative disorder called solipsism syndrome, but then again only intermittently. What remains is to take the novel's premise literally, which means that the solipsism he experiences is psychological but not, if such a state were to exist, corporeal. His prime directive in periodically suspending forward momentum is the protracted pleasure of examining at close range, undressing and re-dressing (often deliberately imperfectly) oblivious women he is attracted to, each undiscovered episode amounting to sexual assault and a moral challenge to the reader. Like "B.I. #59" after it, this is a product of enhanced mediated vision in the post-VCR age – both focalizers use the freeze-frame function on their surroundings as Keith Talent used on the video tapes Nicola Six gave him in Amis' *London Fields*. Much like the husband in "Adult World" it has him leading a double life: "To be sure, the fermata amputates Strine from the social world and relegates him to a malleable wet dream, in whose sweaty confines Strine admires women in pieces and as pieces".⁸⁶ Strine literally objectifies the women in his path – depriving them of agency and mobility, sentience and memory – and further divides them to form the part-objects discussed in chapter one, through this kind of admiration: "her ass can therefore be completely itself" (158). While the responsibilities entailed in this projected double life drove the interviewee in "B.I. #59" crazy because he logically extrapolated that he would have to freeze the entire cosmos to avoid irregularities and detection, they eventually drive Strine to reveal himself to the woman he

⁸⁵ Baker, *The Fermata*.

⁸⁶ Saltzman, *Understanding Nicholson Baker*, 96.

desires, and with whom he finds happiness. Nevertheless, the correspondences between the two fantasies are manifold: limitless and megalomaniac choice of subject, voyeurism and frotteurism amounting to sexual assault devoid of perceived consequence – even the “attractive, bewitched overpowered woman of my choice in” (184) with whom our disturbed interviewee copulates in “B.I. #59” post-coitally recalls no more than “a vague but powerful attraction to the pale boy reading across the room” (*BIWHM* 186). These Folds afford moral vacations and immunity from prosecution, (female) censure, discovery, embarrassment, and ultimately any comeback at all. In this, for the porno user, they anticipate the benefits of online technology, but also the addictive pitfalls.

In stark contrast to *The Fermata*, Wallace’s endings in both “B.I. #59” and “Adult World II” construct hopeless visions of the final implications of solipsism. Arno Strine wearies of inhabiting his lonely universe, shares his secret with former boss Joyce Collier and then transfers his special skill to her through intercourse, cheerfully losing his own knack in the process. This consummation lifts his burden and a peeping tom evolves into a potential memoirist in a satisfying stable relationship, as love triumphs over scopophilia. Bleakness descends, though, in Wallace as the obsessional inmate in “B.I. #59” apparently requires psychiatric incarceration and, as we have seen, Jeni’s only recourse is to inflate her own bubble, entirely separate from her husband’s. Addiction drives permanent wedges between the congenital masturbator and those around him.⁸⁷

It is, however, the illicit encounter in the vignette “Think”, entirely comprising exchanges of gaze between a man and a woman in the moment preceding adulterous sex, which most cogently problematizes the scopophilic male gaze. It is self-consciously related in a high-motion, frame-by-frame style, a Wallace trademark, but the technique is redolent of the porno film or video camera. The situation and sexual motivation have the unapologetic uncomplicatedness of porno narrative: a man and “the younger sister of his wife’s college roommate” (*BIWHM* 61) are home alone as everyone else in the extended family group goes to the mall. There are salacious details of clothing, “Her brassiere’s straps are in front”, and body, “her breast is half globe at the bottom, a ski-jump curve above” (*BIWHM* 61). However, this third-order simulacrum is at

⁸⁷ The desperation here recalls the shocking tales of American auto-castration as escape from porn addiction which began “Big Red Son”.

its most hyperreal when we gaze through the male consciousness simultaneously at a woman and a magazine overlaid upon one another: “Her expression is from Page 18 of the Victoria’s Secret catalogue. She is, he thinks, the kind of woman who would keep her heels on if he asked her to. Even if she’d never kept her heels on before she’d give him a knowing, smoky smile, Page 18” (*BIWHM* 61). He anticipates both this ungiven smile and the “slight smile, slight and smoky, media-taught” (*BIWHM* 61) which she already wears, as a simulation of a simulation. The photographic image in freeze frame employs a visual vernacular, heels, lingerie, make-up, lighting, body position and facial expression, to invite the beholder to construct a pornographic narrative and since this man considers this woman *porn-worthy* (in the words of Naomi Wolf above) he constructs the same for him and her. As Wallace said of the piece in an interview:

The guy watching her and interpreting, more or less guessing, that she is putting on a performance. So there is an extra element of creepiness. The whole watching/being watched, display/reception of display stuff gets complicated and probably creepier when you are in a sexual situation. *Brief Interviews* is the only book in which I have explored that kind of sexuality.⁸⁸

This “media-taught” woman is “replaying a scene from some movie she loves” (*BIWHM* 61) presumably mainstream and romantic, and she appears to be calculating: “Her expression is a combination of seductive and aroused, with an overlay of slight amusement meant to convey sophistication, the loss of all illusions long ago. It’s the sort of expression that looks devastating in a photograph but becomes awkward when it’s maintained over real time” (*BIWHM* 62). The sexual tension between the two actors has been written in alternative pornographies, hers from glamorous Hollywood and his from an iconic lingerie catalogue, but they are insufficiently eloquent for them to grasp each other’s meaning. Once again Wallace has sexual simulacra defeating sexual interaction. As his gaze alights upon her, the fetishistic magnets are the removal of the brassiere and the retention of the synecdochic high heels, with all of the “media-taught” sexual savvy, dexterity and availability they convey. They cannot hold his attention, intermittently punctured by thoughts of

⁸⁸ Schechner, “Behind the Watchful Eyes”, 106.

wife and child as this momentary reverie is, but they render her, the wife's roommate's sister, *porn-worthy*. It is only when he can deflect his attention from them that he can resist the spur to adultery, or at least postpone it with a moment of shared, kneeling prayer. For what he is about to receive.

Hideous men throughout the collection turn their gaze on women and judge them, and their relationships with them, in manners constrained by Boswell's "falsifying codes and conventions" which, in the words of the therapist in "The Depressed Person", function as "psychic armour designed to keep others at a distance" (BIWHM 41).⁸⁹ Pornographic fantasies are extremely useful to them in this respect as third-order simulations, in which "we no longer have the real as part of the equation".⁹⁰ Jeni's only response is to generate an alternative simulation, equally hyperreal, founded only upon assumptions about assumptions. She can consider children with her husband *because* rather than in spite of the fact that no real, intimate sexual relationship exists between them. In *Brief Interviews* pornography supplies sexual narratives which have encroached and impinged upon the intimacy vacuum cleared by those who will not or cannot engage with one another. Hideous men, however, are eminently capable of generating their own supplanting stories, as are women. The content and nature of pornography, with all its training of the male gaze, constitute something of an irrelevance in this respect. Damage limitation, aimed at curtailing its effects, would have to address itself to filling the void between us.

⁸⁹ Boswell, *Understanding David Foster Wallace*, 183.

⁹⁰ Lane, *Jean Baudrillard*, 84.

Chapter 5 - Manson Chicks and Microskirted Cuties: Pornification in Thomas Pynchon's *Inherent Vice*

Many sexual encounters in Thomas Pynchon's fiction have occurred beyond the mainstream, generating theatres of perversity which dramatize the death wish and enact power relations from wider arenas. However, in *Inherent Vice* they change in nature. With the exception of scenes which use Charles Manson to fuel fantasies of domination and submission, these encounters have lost their transgressive bite. Instead, the sheer profusion of variations, and the insouciance with which they are greeted, betrays the effect of a sexualized mainstream colonized by hardcore pornography. Paradoxically, much hardcore catering to the mass market is appreciably less transgressive than Pynchon's fiction has been. The narrative of his seventh novel, with its noir conventions and accompanying sexual motivation, is driven by the commissions his detective protagonist receives from *femmes fatales* and damsels in distress. The transference of these women from man to man becomes the novel's sexual currency.

Mansonoid and Pynchonoid

Charlie Manson's trial began on 15 June 1970. In *Inherent Vice*, Pynchon appropriates the sexual submission of his female acolytes of as the stuff of pornographic fantasy. This is the sexual trope which most recalls the transgressive taboo sexuality of his earlier fiction. However, throughout the novel women dressed like porn stars, and with their sex-positive approach and versatility, drive the narrative through sexual agency.⁹¹ They relate or hint at submissive narratives of themselves with other men or other women, aspiring as the most taboo fetish to the submissive status of a female Manson acolyte. They initiate good sex as an end in itself, and not as a sign or a signifier of anything else. They do not seek commitment and their sexual stories come with enthusiasm, but also insouciance about power relations. The variety of this sex adheres to the taxonomy of ubiquitous acts consumers have come to tolerate or anticipate in a hardcore adult feature.

⁹¹ The exceptions are bit parts for older and wiser women with unspecified hemlines: realtor and land-use guru Aunt Reet, cannabis-curious mom Elmina Breeze-Sportello and acid-trip guide and Ouija-board diviner Sortilege.

Hippie private investigator protagonist Larry “Doc” Sportello has a stoned tryst with Penny Kimball, the assistant DA he is seeing, soon after she’s “shopped him to *los federales*” (IV 274). Before either of them even mentions Manson, she spins him a punishment fantasy yarn with extra perversion added by her profession and his drug consumption. In mock indignation, she suborns Doc to be the threatening Other in her sexual narrative:

“You know, if somebody I cared about, even in a casual-sex sort of way, had shopped *me* to the FBI? [...] if it was *my* dick? and some self-satisfied lady prosecutor thought she was getting away with something?” [...]

“Just try it,” she cried, “you drug-crazed hippie freak, get your hand out of there, who said you could do that, let go of my, what do you think you’re --” By which time they were fucking, you could say, energetically. It was quick, not too quick, it was mean and nasty enough, it was great stoned fun. (IV 279)

Sex in this novel is mostly stoned and fun, but the monster on the Tube is recruited to add a little edge. In their post-coital calm, Doc and Penny watch Manson trial TV reports and Penny, disgruntled at hitting a glass ceiling and being excluded from the legal action by male colleagues, shifts her analysis from the professional to the prurient: “The only part I enjoy anymore is hearing how all these hippie chicks did everything Manson told them to do. The master-slave thing, it’s kinda cute?” (IV 280) She teases Doc with the prospect of Mansonoid role-playing: “You’re almost short enough. I guess. But, see, it isn’t only the hypnotic stare, Charlie’s big appeal is that he’s down there eyeball to eyeball with the ladies he’s ordering around. It might be about fucking Daddy but the really perverse thrill is that Daddy’s only five foot two.” (IV 280) The thought sticks in Doc’s dope-addled memory long enough to resurface during their next phone call: “If I could find you a Manson-chick type wig to wear? Would it be, like, a problem?” (IV 283) Later, Doc briefly discusses with Tariq Khalil the merits of Leslie van Houten and Lynette ‘Squeaky’ Fromme (“Yeah, ain’t *she* some righteous -ass bitch” (IV 293)). This idle chatter touches a nerve even with the woman present: unshockable, two-men-at-a-time Clancy Charlock.

Meeting Penny at the hairdresser prompts Shasta Fay Hepworth, the *femme fatale* who instigated this dopehead noir plot by coming back

into Doc's life, to collude with her in embellishing the fantasy both women apparently want Doc to have: "Submissive, brainwashed, horny little teeners," Shasta continued, "who do exactly what you want before you even know what that is. You don't even have to say a word out loud, they get it all by ESP. Your kind of chick, Doc, that's the lowdown on you" (IV 304). However, it is moot whether Penny and Shasta are supposed to do anything beyond appropriate the dominant Californian media figure of 1969-1970 to add spice and zeitgeist to their sexual fictions. This is less of a sexual simulacrum (details of Mansonoid murders or sexual peccadilloes remain unseen) than a tokenistic piece of horrorshow: paranoid writing on the wall about the end of the hippie era and implosion into violence. Pynchon has Manson leave a pervasive atmospheric mark whenever he's mentioned in the novel:

[...] it was during that very freaky time right after Sharon Tate. It had occurred to very few in the hopeful-starlet community that regular features and low body weight might not after all be counted on to buy you a thing that mattered. The shock of the Cielo Drive murders was bad enough out in civilian life but the impact on Shasta and her friends was paralyzing. You could be the sweetest girl in the business [...] and still be horribly murdered for your trouble. (IV 308-9)

Manson becomes an index of safety/danger: Shasta's appraisal of undead saxophonist Coy Harlingen as a good friend hinges on the fact that he "even strung out most of the time on smack had never looked at her in that creepy Mansonoid way" (IV 311). Also, when Doc, Denis, Dr Blatnoyd and Japonica get pulled over by traffic police on a new "Cultwatch" citizen-monitoring programme: "Doc noticed for the first time that both cops were ... well, not trembling, the police wouldn't tremble, but *vibrating* for sure, with the post-Mansonical nerves that currently ruled the area" (IV 179). Manson may be the prime contemporary source of paranoia, but his presence in the novel is no less peripheral than that of Governor Reagan. Charlie is not the libidinal energy behind the novel's sexual narratives, just a totem of extremity and control, and the source of thematic material which grounds them in this 1970. Pynchon goes further than porno which, though promiscuous about where it appropriates thematic material and frequently inclined to

satirize politicians, performers and public figures, appears to have largely stayed away from Manson to date.⁹²

Bogey-man Manson references aside, almost two decades after *Vineland*, Pynchon's return to California, the state with the largest and most formulaic pornographic film industry in the world, has reduced the previously transgressive and emblematic sexuality of his characters to patterns apparently codified by that industry. Where sexual encounters previously tended to be either countercultural, revolutionary acts or the instrument of the elect, in *Inherent Vice* they become an almost chapter-regular device for furthering the plot, much like the recurring consumption of soft drugs and rock 'n' roll. This sexually liberated characters' interest in multiple partners takes the narrative from episode to episode, and many people are conjoined by mutual conquests. So Doc has sex with Shasta Fay, who has sex with Mickey Wolfmann, who has sex with Luz, who has sex with Doc. Wolfmann's wife Sloane has sex with Riggs Warbling, and so forth. However, it is not all this physical conjoining which ties the novel together. It is the participants' accounts of it to others, chiefly Doc.

The 1970 sexscape of *Inherent Vice* is in the words of British novelist Martin Amis, "a pregnant widow".⁹³ Patriarchal control over female sexuality has been rescinded but no new post-revolutionary system has been constructed to manage male-female interaction. Pynchon imagines sexually liberated women anxious to couple with all manner of men, but they've hardly shaken off the chains of sexism: they are groupies or girlfriends ("old ladies"), receptionists or stewardess, maids, waitresses or singers. Dynamic white-collar careers seem available only at the prosecutor's office and in the novel's only moment of quasi-feminist political correctness or anti-sexism, Doc's waggish lechery arouses the ire of Penny's assistant DA colleague: "'And Miss Frothingham, may I add, that skirt length on you today is especially attractive.' Rhus screamed

⁹² See for example *Who's Nailin' Paylin?* (2008), the first in a series of pornos satirizing former U.S. vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin. The *Internet Movie Database* listed a forthcoming feature called *Manson Girls* (2014), directed by Susanna Lo, promising "Sex, drugs, and an infamous Rock & Roll deal gone murderous in the Summer of '69" and featuring porn legend Ron Jeremy as a porn director.

⁹³ Explaining the title of his 2010 novel *The Pregnant Widow*, set in 1970 like *Inherent Vice*, Amis wrote: "The Russian thinker Alexander Herzen said that after a revolution we should, on the whole, be braced by the fact that one order has given way to another; but what we are left with, he added, is not a birth, not a new born child but a pregnant widow – and there will be much grief and tribulation before we hear the baby's cries. In other words, consciousness is not revolutionised by the snap of a finger. And feminism, I reckon, is about halfway through its second trimester." ("Martin Amis, You ask the questions.")

and picking up a galvanized trash can prepared to throw it at Doc's head" (IV 282). This augury of raised consciousnesses and longer skirts to come is an ironic exception as Pynchon populates *Inherent Vice* with an ensemble cast of more than twenty individually or dually introduced "presentable" young female characters in abbreviated and lasciviously-described apparel.⁹⁴

"Oh, Doc..." (IV 13). Downstairs from private eye Larry "Doc" Sportello's office there's a doctor who prescribes amphetamines. Dr. Buddy Tubeside's receptionist is Petunia Leeway: "a stunner in a starched cap and micro-length medical outfit, not so much an actual nurse uniform as a lascivious commentary on one" (IV 13). Later, at the Golden Fang dental collective, Doc visits "lecherous toothyanker" Dr Rudi Blatnoyd. Xandra is his "Asian receptionist wearing a black vinyl jumpsuit and a distant expression" (IV 168). She returns unprompted a couple of pages later, jumpsuit unzipped: "'Oh, Doctor,' she breathed, half singing it" before whisking her boss away for cocaine-fuelled sex (IV 170). These breathless Moneypennys and Bond girls ("Oh, James...") fill this pre-feminist male-fantasy 1970 with flirtatious availability and gently fetishist glamour.⁹⁵ Pynchon's touch is ever comic and whimsical and his characters, male and female, are "unabashedly cartoonish".⁹⁶ Moreover, our view of these women is filtered by the libidinous male gaze of our single-POV protagonist. Pynchon may be ribbing us about our expectations of the backend of the sixties but there is more to this than hippie nostalgia and casual Bond girl sexism. The sexual code which runs through *Inherent Vice* has been adulterated with 21st century data.

⁹⁴ Aside from the cornucopia of microskirted cuties name-checked elsewhere in this chapter, the following also join the procession down the *Inherent Vice* catwalk: a night club singer wearing a "Little Black Dress from the 1950s and interestingly high stiletto heels" (IV 160); "a pair of cupcakes in red vinyl minidresses, black fishnet hose and lacquered hair [who] sang backup while doing white-chick time steps" (IV 229); Zirconia "a young woman in a wine-coloured minidress" (IV 230); Chlorinda: "a waitress in a combination Nehru jacket and Hawaiian print shirt, just long enough to qualify as a minidress" (IV 91); two house groupies named Bohdi and Zinnia" (IV 125); Japonica Fenway in a "striped minidress of many psychedelic colours" (IV 170); "a presentable young lady in a paisley Qiana minidress [who] came up and introduced herself as a Lark" (IV 237) and Adrian Prussia's nameless receptionist in "a minidress she had no more idea of how to carry than a starlet did a Victorian gown" (IV 316).

⁹⁵ Satirised in the Mike Myers vehicle *Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery* (1997) and its two sequels.

⁹⁶ Millard, "Pynchon's Coast".

Ongoing sexualization of the mainstream, it has been argued, “implies a certain schooling of desire”, raising consciousness of myriad sexual eventualities and breaking taboos against them.⁹⁷ Pynchon is a long-time exhibitor of sexual excess and non-normative sexualities taken to bizarre extremes, to all manner of ends, but in his seventh novel the intimate interactions of his characters are constrained within a kind of flatness and conventionality, a shadow of the experimentation of his earlier fictions. *Inherent Vice* is “a gumshoe pastiche set in surfside L.A. in 1970”: a hippie-dopehead homage to the American, or Californian, hard-boiled detective novel, an oft-filmed form.⁹⁸ Tim Martin’s review was prescient: “*Inherent Vice* is eminently filmable. Filmable, meaning that the plot goes in straight lines, the characters are distinct and rounded, and the book features large amounts of dialogue that is not only speakable but also very funny.”⁹⁹

A second film genre also contributes narrative structure to this most novelish of Pynchon’s works: the adult feature. This plot is driven by detective assignments issued by noir *femmes fatales*, but their liaisons also link its episodes. A post-feminist sexualized mainstream populates and infects a nostalgic pre-feminist world of new sexual liberation as the sexually charged Pynchonoid women Doc encounters tell him stories about their experiences and their lovers which bring these men (Mickey Wolfmann, Puck and Einar, Tariq Khalil, Riggs Warbling) into focus. Doc is sexually stimulated by these accounts and learns about the men, and their crimes and misdemeanours, through the women.

In 1970, the hardcore porno feature film was just starting to assert its dominance over the 8mm stag film and the 16mm loop. These formats, intended respectively for the private showing or the sex shop booth, were filled almost entirely with sex: “The 16mm loop is outlined in the same manner as the stag movie. All you need to do is to establish the setting and the reason for the sex. The reason need not be any more than two people in the woods looking for some fun. Sexual action is the most important element.”¹⁰⁰ Features have flourished for four decades despite fierce competition from plotless gonzo hardcore, which has dispensed with conventional narrative and instead dramatizes its own

⁹⁷ Paasonen, Nikunen and Saarenmaa, “Pornification and the Education of Desire”, 13.

⁹⁸ Rosenbaum, “Pynchon on the Beach”. See Millard, “Pynchon’s Coast”, for a detailed account of how *Inherent Vice* obeys the conventions of American noir detective fiction.

⁹⁹ Martin, “Review of *Inherent Vice*”.

¹⁰⁰ Ziplow, *Film Maker’s Guide to Pornography*, 22.

making.¹⁰¹ For the first time cinematic porno required plot development: narrative segues as bridges between sex numbers. In *Inherent Vice*, sex certainly does not outweigh the rest, as hardcore requires, but it does run the gamut of conventional hardcore variations and build plot-significant bridges between characters and episodes of detecting, drugs and rock 'n' roll. We may also find that the plethora of "longhaired, short-skirted cuties" (IV 126) who would be required to shoot the glamorous unmade movie of *Inherent Vice*, for all the humour and tenderness with which they are imagined, invites accusations of casual misogyny.

Julie Christine Sears' analysis of perverse sexuality in Pynchon's work lists its ramifications. In general, this means power relations which extend beyond the sexual into the social, the political and matters of life or death:

In *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Mason & Dixon*, Thomas Pynchon tends to equate perverse sexuality with a proclivity to embrace technology as a replacement for humanity, a desire to kill or subjugate masses of people, an indulgence in decadence by oppressive, controlling institutions, and an obsession with suicide.¹⁰²

Pynchon's characters sate urges beyond the sexual. In *Gravity's Rainbow*, among many other things, sexual acts facilitate control of technology, language and other people. Tyrone Slothrop's well-documented bomb-predicting erections, Prentice's ejaculation on to a piece of impregnated paper to reveal a message (GR 71), and the paedophile Ned Pointsman's control of Brigadier Ernest Pudding through the dominatrix Katje Borgesius (GR 232-6) are among a multitude of episodes which reveal that "the actions of sexual deviants have consequences that reach far beyond the bedroom".¹⁰³ Sears goes on to assert that "since *Gravity's Rainbow* Pynchon has revised his presentation of deviant sexuality".¹⁰⁴ In many cases sex has come to be analogous with loyalty.

That process of revision was apparent between *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973) and *Vineland* (1989). The plot of the latter turns on heroine Frenesi

¹⁰¹ "Gonzo became the term to describe a cameraman who intervenes from behind the camera to change the events in front of it" (Span, *Adult Home Movies*, 101).

¹⁰² Sears, "Black and White Rainbows", 108.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 110. See also Lawson for a discussion of Prentice's "interpretive gesture" (234).

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 120.

Gates' betrayal of the countercultural movement and offers her submissive lust for sadistic prosecutor Brock Vond as chief motivation. There's even an account of how, in government custody and having Stelazine and Thorazine forced into her in suppository form, her attitude changes. "I started looking forward to it - I wanted them to come and hold me down, stick needles in me, push things up my ass. Wanted that ritual..." (VL 261) The asymmetrical relationship between the elect and the preterite is expressed in directly sexual terms. Frenesi's great-grand-aunt Lake Traverse's masochistic ménage à trois with the corporate hirelings who murdered her father, Deuce Kindred (who she marries) and Sloat Fresno, in *Against the Day* is similar in theme, if rendered with increased violence (ATD 262). In neither case is the direction of the causal relationship between sexual excitement and complicity with the enemy uncomplicated: neither middle is excluded. It may be possible to read Shasta's fascination with Mickey in *Inherent Vice* in the same light but Wolfmann, for all his Freudian name and reputed annoyance at any erroneous spelling which drops the second 'n', is a shadowy figure of abstract threat who cannot match the visceral impact of Brock or Deuce and Sloat. Another heuristic offers itself: a fetishistic narrative stripped of its transgressive force in a pornified world.

Porno's Inherent Vices

Linda Williams recounts a taxonomy of pornographic "numbers" essential to the hardcore feature. She cites the first seven from Stephen Ziplow's 1977 *Film Maker's Guide to Pornography*, and adds an eighth to compose a list which has dated little to this day. While it best describes the adult feature from the 1970s on, and would require extension to incorporate some of the subsequent innovations of gonzo hardcore, it stands as a monument to what Williams terms "the genre's conventionality."¹⁰⁵ Though Pynchon is largely restrained in his sexual descriptions and flouts hardcore convention in two significant ways, *Inherent Vice* indulges in all eight categories of sexual action in the Ziplow/Williams list:¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Williams, *Hard Core*, 126.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 126, and Ziplow, *Film Maker's Guide to Pornography*, 31-32.

1. Masturbation. Riggs Warbling “couldn’t keep from jerking off anytime Sloane was in the room” (IV 144); “Shasta draped across [Doc’s] lap her hands playing with her pussy” (IV 305).
2. Straight sex. Doc with Luz (IV 143), Penny (IV 279 and 281) and Shasta (IV 305), Mickey Wolfmann with Luz in the shower (IV 63), Tariq with Clancy on Doc’s office floor (IV 288), Sloane with Riggs (IV 144), Trillium with Osgood (IV 227).
3. Lesbianism. Jade and Bambi at the Chick planet massage parlour with its “Pussy-eater special” (IV 20): “Jade was already reaching for that bikini.” (IV 21) “Lourdes and Motella meanwhile were behaving very badly indeed, having chosen to assault a couple of local gun molls as a sort of tag-team [...] Clothing was ripped, hairdos disarranged, skin exposed and many holds with sexual subtexts wriggled in and out of – the usual allurements of girl wrestling” (IV 88). Sloane and Luz, which Luz tells Doc about and gauges his reaction, “You guys and this lesbian...” (IV 143).
4. Oral Sex. Cunnilingus: Jade/Ashley discovers herself, and the truth, on an acid trip: “The era, she couldn’t help noticing, was conveniently providing not only girls, but also sweetly passive long-haired boys everywhere she looked, eager to devote to her pussy the oral attention it had always deserved” (IV 136). Luz sits on Doc’s face (IV 143). Fellatio: Boris gets a blow job (IV 152); Penny sucks Doc’s cock during his explanation of a movie (IV 281).
5. Ménage à trois. (Williams comments: “It seems to go without saying that while two female members of such a configuration may involve themselves with each other, it is taboo for two men to do so in heterosexual hardcore.”) This usually involves two-men-one-woman threesome numbers (Clancy-Aubrey-Thorndyke, Clancy-Puck-Einar, Trillium-Puck-Einar) or a man tacitly assenting to his wife sleeping with another man (Mickey-Sloane-Riggs) but also Doc’s vicarious interest in both Shasta Fay and Luz’s accounts of their sex with Mickey. Perversely, for a novel which lines up women in pairs for us to admire, there is only a single instance of a man with two women: Mickey-Sloane-Luz. This is the only true ménage à trois, being a domestic arrangement, and we do not see them *in flagrante delicto*.

6. Orgies. These carry on between band members and groupies at the hangout of zombie surf band The Boards.
7. Anal sex. Immediately upon meeting Puck, whom she first sees in a bathroom mirror coming up behind her, Trillium Fortnight rapidly finds herself outside in a car "being seen to California Dept of corrections style". Puck is smug: "Chicks say they don't like it this way [...] and then before you know it they're back again, begging." She keeps going back for more because she can't resist: "A humiliating heat would envelop her" (IV 223).
8. "Sadie-max": a scene depicting sadomasochistic relations such as whipping, spanking or bondage, performed with or without paraphernalia. [Added by Williams]. Both Penny (IV 286) and Shasta narrate punishment fantasies to provoke Doc into acts of very mild, playful sadism but only Shasta gets a spanking and then "... no more than half a dozen sincere smacks," (IV 305) before simultaneous orgasm punctuates the scene. The women appear to be in cahoots, or at least Doc thinks his current casual girlfriend Penny has acquainted his reappeared ex-girlfriend Shasta with a fantasy he had (presumably jokingly) related. "She and Penny had met at that same hair salon, where at least one topic of conversation had been him, and sure enough, 'Word's around that you have this thing about Manson chicks?'" (IV 304)

That eighth category added by Williams, which interlocks characters' sexuality with the wider world, readily splits into two mutually exclusive sub-genres. Puck Beaverton's sadistic exploitation of Trillium Fortnight, with all its prison sex overtones, girlfriend beating and overstretched limits of consent ("What'd you do to her, Puck?" "Nothing she didn't want" (IV 319)) could have been taken from an extreme gonzo hardcore movie. The kind of movie made by men, "for men who have problems with women and like to see them humiliated," in the words of Wallace.¹⁰⁷ We hear second-hand about Trillium's admission to hospital, and imagine the damage might be psychological as well as physical.

However, there is also a form of consensual, game-playing sadomasochism on show, with verbal narration at its centre, limits at least implicitly defined, and no evidence of ensuing trauma or

¹⁰⁷ Wallace, "Big Red Son", 27.

suffering.¹⁰⁸ As such it is reminiscent of features hard-core, even conceivably female-authored or couples-market fodder. Penny and Shasta collide in spinning Doc sexual narratives of playful punishment or retribution, assigning him a predilection for submissive Manson chicks which remains safely anchored in fantasy. He remains cheerfully unaffected by this darkness and we cannot detect any latent misogyny. He has no predilection for slapping and castigating misbehaving female hysterics as we might expect a hard-boiled gum-sandal to do. He rescued Japonica Fenway; he wants to save sexual victim and cocaine casualty Trillium from abusive Puck and consults the pre-Internet ARPANET to check whether she's OK; he helps to reunite Hope Harlingen's infant daughter Amethyst with her wayward absent father and he likes Petunia Leeway for more than the view up her skirt. So despite being palpably excited by parading micro-skirted cuties, Doc, our unwavering single focalizer in the novel, retains the capacity to respect and cherish women, if not to sustain long-term relationships.

Sexual episodes punctuate sections of the plot. Ziplow is candid about the calculated balance between acting and action in hardcore: "Before I wrote one of my many epics I was given the percentage of sixty percent sex and forty percent everything else."¹⁰⁹ The forty percent was a new but necessary inconvenience for pornographers in the 1970s, because of the difficulty of filling ninety minutes with sex and concerns about the "utterly without redeeming social value" legal test for pornography dating back to the *Roth* ruling (1957). Slade's porno chronology charts the birth of the feature, and of the "golden age of pornography" it created:

1970: Bill Osco releases *Mona, the Virgin Queen*, the first hardcore feature film to be distributed nationally.

1972: Gerard Damiano makes the film *Deep Throat* for \$25,000 in organized crime money, and the Mitchell Brothers shoot *Behind the Green Door* for \$18,000; both render hard-core pornography "chic."¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ This fits in with the views of Ziplow's porno producer interviewee Mr Blue (a pseudonym) on the limits commercial considerations impose. "Domination is less popular in the physical sense than in the psychological. Mild forms of bondage and pain are acceptable, but if your entire picture relies too heavily on this subject matter, you may be alienating too large a portion of your audience" (*Film Maker's Guide to Pornography*, 18).

¹⁰⁹ Ziplow, *Film Maker's Guide to Pornography*, 28.

¹¹⁰ Slade, *Pornography in America*, 154.

These trailblazers, along with *The Devil in Miss Jones* (1973), in which the protagonist returns from the dead to become the embodiment of lust on earth, set a much-mocked pattern of storyline absurdity. See *Logjammin'*, the fictitious porno film-within-a-film in the Coen brothers' *The Big Lebowski* (1998) for one hilarious satire: German nihilist porn star Karl Hungus knocks on the door of Bunny La Joya-Lebowski ("meine dispatcher says there's something wrong with *deine* cable") as real-life porn star Asia Carrera walks in wearing a towel ("This is my friend Sherry, who just came over to use the shower.")¹¹¹ However, no matter how facile, the early 1970s movies all had plots of a fashion and have become capable of engendering nostalgia. "These films have since been established as classics and milestones in both scholarly and popular porn historiographies."¹¹²

Sexually available women travel in pairs in the novel, but offer themselves to men singly (with the notable exception of the Mickey-Sloane-Luz domestic arrangement, or ménage à trois). For "stewardii" Lourdes Rodriguez and Motella Hayward and house groupies Bohdi and Zinnia, it seems a matter of double-dating. Jade and Bambi at Chick Planet and Sloane and Luz appear to be pursuing at least casual same-sex relationships. Shasta and Penny share hairdressers and intimate confessions. Aside from fetish nurses and dental assistants, a regiment of women offer themselves to the male gaze in swimsuits or high hemlines.¹¹³ The array of fantasy types on offer is almost satirical in its plenty, some of them qualifying as light fetish, like the DA Penny Kimball in "one of those grey polyester business outfits with a very short skirt" (IV 68) and the black-clad grieving widow: "Mrs Sloane Wolfmann

¹¹¹ Since *The Big Lebowski* is very loosely based on film adaptations of Raymond Chandler's *The Big Sleep* (1946, 1978), it is no surprise that Larry "Doc" Sportello reminds us of its dope-smoking, incompetently-investigating protagonist, Jeffrey "The Dude" Lebowski. See Carvill for a discussion the characteristics *The Big Lebowski* and *Inherent Vice* share as "stoner noir" ("The 'Bong' Goodbye"). Porno plot absurdity has also been seen as boring, a punishment. In Mark Leyner's lightweight satirical novel *Et tu, Babe* (1993), convicted felons are taken out of their house each Monday, strapped down in a government white van and compelled to watch three hours of videotape edited together from the narrative segues of porn movies. With the sex missing.

¹¹² Paasonen and Saarenmaa, "The Golden Age of Porn", 23.

¹¹³ The Pynchon narrator and point of view had already evinced a strong, late-sixties short-skirt fetish in *Vineland* through the POV of Takeshi Fumimota, and everyone's nemesis Brock Vond: "There was DL lying in bed, hat long earrings, *miniskirt*? Incredible! This Vond character must be -- a miniskirt man too!" (VL 151). Heroine Frenesi Gates, who Darryl Louise Chastain is impersonating in this passage, also frequently appears in miniskirt or bikini.

strolled in from the poolside wearing black spike-heeled sandals, a headband with a sheer black veil, and a bikini of negligible size made of the same material as the veil" (*IV* 57). Pynchon also jumps into the interracial market segment with lesbian Caucasian-Chicana action between Sloane and Luz and hetero African American man Tariq Khalil with Caucasian Troilist Clancy.

Despite all the lipstick lesbianism, outfit fetishism and interracial action, there are two major ways in which a hypothetical screenplay faithful to *Inherent Vice* would be compelled to flout features porno convention.¹¹⁴ The whole relationship between Puck and Einar, and all the threesomes they engage in, would break the taboo against male homosexual contact in hetero movies, especially given Clancy's complaint: "Don't ask me to go into details. The boys have a slightly different idea of what a three-way is. I ended up feeling, let's say, underused" (*IV* 215). This rivalrous machismo contest would have to be scored in heterosexual conquests rather than energy expended in homosexual coitus. Secondly, no sex scenes are punctuated by the inevitable visible external male ejaculation. In fact, female or mutual orgasms bring things to a close, in opposition to the pattern documented by Williams: "Probably the most striking way that the feature-length hard-core film signals the narrative conclusion of sexual action is through the new convention of external penile ejaculation - or to use the jargon of the industry, the 'Money Shot'."¹¹⁵ Or as Ziplow reminds the porno filmmaker: "when I write a script now I never put in less than ten shots."¹¹⁶ In fact, the novel's only reference to "the money shot" is an act of murderous violence as the camera captures Wolfmann bodyguard Glen Charlock getting shot down (*IV* 142). Strikingly, rather than acting as a full stop or period, this is the moment which kick-starts various strands of the plot, sending both Tarik and Clancy to enlist Doc's services.

Ziplow suggests that the easiest way to segue from dialogue into sexual numbers during the making of what he terms "three-day wonders" (90-minute porno features shot in their entirety within three days) can be expressed in "three-in-one-out theory."¹¹⁷ He claims this

¹¹⁴ Paul Thomas Anderson's film adaptation, *Inherent Vice* (2014), released after the writing of the paper which generated this chapter, includes neither gay sex nor visible external ejaculation.

¹¹⁵ Williams, *Hard Core*, 73.

¹¹⁶ Ziplow, *Film Maker's Guide to Pornography*, 79.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 29.

means that in adult movies one person, a performer who doesn't have on-screen sex but rather provides acting talent for narrative segues, often departs from a gathering of three, leaving the other two free to have sex. In *Inherent Vice*, Doc is left standing by pairs who step (just) out of his company for what appear to be zipless fucks: Trillium and barfly "pussyhound" Osgood (IV 226) and Rudy Blatnoyd and his receptionist (IV 170).¹¹⁸ Clancy and Tariq reverse the pattern when Doc inadvertently discovers them *in flagrante delicto* on his office floor. This inadvertent voyeurism could have been classic porno, but Doc retreats to consider his options. Elsewhere he's not so squeamish and indulges us in his version of a pornographic subgenre called *upskirt* (strictly speaking unauthorized picture-snapping up women's skirts): when he encounters Petunia at the office: "Doc couldn't help noticing her lilac turnout today did not seem to include matching, or indeed any, underwear. Good thing he was wearing shades, which allowed him to gaze for longer than usual" (IV 287). He has evidently been engaging in puerile peeking since high school: "it was Mrs. Keeley, and I got to look up her dress now and then" (IV 277).

Tie-ing it All Together with Paranoia

i. Porno Media

Pornographic paraphernalia surfaces in three ways in the novel: Doc's subscription to *Naked Teen Nymphos* (IV 62), Mickey's collection of porn ties (IV 63), and Adrian Prussia's torture and liquidation of a "pornographer and pimp at the fringes of the movie business, with interests in nudie bars, modelling agencies, and 'specialty publishing'" (IV 321). The first is an old joke about dopehead functional illiteracy and wankmag onanism ("pages stuck together" (IV 62)) which achieves resonance only when Doc's trying to work out why the returned Shasta has tapped into his desires so uncannily. "Hey. You the one's been stealing my magazines?" (IV 304) The paranoid suggestion here is that the magazines, Shasta and Penny have all colluded in constructing a porno simulacrum which maps out his sexuality in advance and precedes the real. Doc embraces the predictability with relish.

¹¹⁸ "Zipless fuck" entered the language after coinage by Erica Jong in her 1973 novel *Fear of Flying* to express a sexual encounter devoid of subsequent consequences.

Just as Shasta goes corporeally missing early in proceedings, her porno image on a tie is missing from womanizer Wolfmann's collection of conquest image ties, a classic hardboiled clue waiting to be solved. The tie as a symbol of elect power (the uniform of corporate control or law enforcement, as opposed to hippy preterite tielessness) is a bizarrely appropriate canvas on which Pynchon can inscribe and record Shasta's chattel status. When Doc (accidentally, as usual) tracks the porno tie down it is hanging around the neck of an oblivious orderly at the Chryskylodon "high-rent laughing academy" but, armed with telescopic voyeur vision, he discerns Shasta "in a pose submissive enough to break an old man's heart, that's if he was in the mood" (*IV* 190). The closing caveat assigns emotional response to this porno image the status of an option. On the way home afterwards he compulsively fills in more detail and comes to "recall unavoidably the hand-painted image of Shasta Fay, on her back, spread and wet, and, if he was not mistaken, though he'd only caught a fast glimpse, just about to come, too" (*IV* 193). Shasta's pornified representation awakes sexual nostalgia. Ultimately, though, his piece of mind is easy to preserve. It just takes a whimsical, philosophical separation between sign and signified: "the nudie necktie is not the girl" (*IV* 194).

The novel, however, contains a starkly opposed reaction to porno from a criminal in the pay of law enforcement, a man who joins two squadrons of the elect. There are a number of powerful, evil men or their instruments who use violence: Glen Charlock (deceased), Mickey Wolfmann (converted to generosity by the healing power of drugs), Puck Beaverton and Einar, Crocker Fenway but the most extreme and perverse of them is loan shark Adrian Prussia.¹¹⁹ He is persuaded to defend Governor Reagan's administration against embarrassment or blackmail from an unnamed pornographer who "had also kept lengthy and detailed files on a sex ring based in Sacramento" (*IV* 321). Prussia mixes "lethal indignation he felt towards pinkos and pornographers" (*IV* 324) with sheer lust for murder and makes the punishment fit the crime by hiring "a couple of professionals who specialized in gay S&M" (*IV* 322) to prepare the man before he kills him:

"You corrupt the innocent," he addressed his victim, who by now, covered with bruises and welts, had grown

¹¹⁹ A corrupt and vicious character with something of James Elroy's Dudley Smith about him: anti-communist and racist, if a porno-hater rather than a porno distributor.

unappeasably erect, "plus, you keep millions of freaks and losers addicted to their stupid-ass appetites for bleach-blonde pussy and oversize cock, you ruin their family life, you get 'em to piss so much of their money away..." (*IV* 322)

The Prussia murders may present an analogy between sex and violence: they are dramatized in plain sight to make them conspicuously prosecutable but with the body removed to exclude a conviction and permit recidivism. In porno the sexual act is dramatized in plain sight with the emotional or physical consequences removed to facilitate instant recidivism. However, if pornography is harmlessly consumed by the lovable protagonist and despised by the evil psychopath, is Pynchon giving us a positive reading of it? The reading is at any rate paranoid since, as well as arousing suspicions about the sincerity of sexual acts, porno, much like drugs and hippie clothes, may occasion the ire of the elect and visit retribution upon purveyors, performers and consumers.

ii. The Female Principal

Although Tarik Khalil initially enlists his help to find the (deceased) Glen Charlock, it is four sexually attractive but unavailable women (only initially in Shasta's case - she unaccountably seduces Doc later) who drive the narrative by contracting Doc to find their missing men.¹²⁰ Shasta comes "along the alley and up the back step the way she used to" and wants him to find her lover Mickey (*IV* 1). Hope Harlingen rings him up at work to commission him to find her undead saxophonist husband Coy (*IV* 35). Clancy comes by the office and wants him to find out why her brother died (*IV* 146). Finally, Trillium wants him to fly to Las Vegas with her to recover lover Puck (*IV* 218). None of these damsels in distress entice the hippie P.I. with promises of cash ("All this time Doc assumed he'd been out busting his balls for folks who if they paid him anything it'd be half a lid or a small favor down the line or maybe only just a quick smile, long as it was real" (*IV* 314)), but they all recount tales of the sexual liaisons which caused the situation they describe. The currency three of them pay in appears to be sexual narrative, with Hope's account more of a wholesome appeal to Doc's personal ethical

¹²⁰ Doc locates women with greater ease. Jade is worried about Bambi but they bump into her almost right away (*IV* 156) and in one of the book's longer flashbacks he locates errant daughter Japonica for Croker Fenway.

system and faith in romantic love and family. Clancy and Trillium inspire immediate tumescence in Doc, associated with “Cootie food” or *coup de foudre*, a thunderclap or love at first sight. Doc chases off to a new exotic location to find something out for these women, but all these alluring customers turn out to point him towards bad shit. Sexual nostalgia and a mental image of Shasta in a T-shirt and bikini bottom takes Doc to the Chick Planet massage parlour where he is knocked out cold, and later, in disguise to the Wolfmann residence. A postcard from her is enough to send him over to the *Golden Fang* dental syndicate and, via Japonica Fenway, to the Chryskylodon nuthouse where he sees her image on a tie. The warm feeling he feels in the presence of Hope Harlingen -- “a California blond [...] almost a 100-percent classic specimen,” (IV 36) -- and her daughter Amethyst takes him to see policeman Pat Dubonet at the Gordita beach station house or “Hippiephobia central” (IV 46) and to zombie surf band The Boards’ house in Topanga, and roomfuls of tubal obsessives of the *Vineland* thanatoid kind. Clancy telephonically confronts him with the spectre of paranoia when she reveals that Boris, with whom Doc had just communed, had disappeared: “Could Bigfoot be right? Was Doc the kiss of death, laying bad karma on everybody he touched?” (IV 215) Trillium’s trip to the Kismet Lounge Casino in North Las Vegas is safe enough but she marries Puck and the last we hear of her she is in the emergency room, “admitted with a concussion, cuts and bruises...” (IV 366).

iii. Two Boys for Every Girl

Despite all the abundant legends of submissiveness and compliance and generically attractive women presenting themselves in pairs, Doc still never participates in a threesome. Even at the beachfront mansion of Lourdes and Motella, the alluring “stewardii” turn out to be “headed down [...] to meet their current heartthrobs [...] wrecking any hopes he might have entertained for any drug induced three-way among just him and the girls” (IV 77). The triangles he joins involve a female object of desire and her former, or at least absent, sexual partner or partners. Here his voyeurism does not involve being in the room while two people engage in coitus. He participates vicariously at a physical remove through narrative, which prompts actual sex, much as the male hardcore features viewer. Shasta Fay reads him the text of her encounters with Mickey to enact and facilitate their own coupling. In non-specialist

discourse “Troilism” means any sexual play between three, but Kaplan and Kruger list five forms of voyeurism as a paraphilia (sexual disorder), including:

4. Troilism (or triolism): a paraphilia wherein there is a dependence on “observing one's partner on hire or loan to a third person while engaging in sexual activities, including intercourse, with that person. A threesome or group sex does not, per se, constitute a paraphilia.” (Money, 1996, 272) Troilism differs from voyeurism in that the person being observed is not a stranger.¹²¹

It is possible to read Doc's distance-voyeurism and excitement as Troilism since he knows Shasta very well and spends much of the novel trying to piece together a picture of Mickey, who he glimpses in the flesh just once (*IV* 243). From page one Doc is wistfully nostalgic about his time with Shasta, and the sexual narrative he constructs about her and Mickey serves to quell this sadness. Shasta's allure increases because she is no longer just a hippie “old lady” and has been appropriated by an elect authority figure, just as in *Vineland* Brock Vond appropriated Frenesi Gates from Zoyd Wheeler. But Mickey is no federal prosecutor with seemingly unlimited powers. His authority rests on money and the bodyguards it pays for, but drug-induced repentance is causing him to give it away. It is no wonder he has to be kept offstage throughout the novel: we can only glimpse big, bad Mickey in our peripheral vision because Doc keeps failing to catch up with him. The sexual pivot of the novel is Shasta's arousal of Doc with a porno narrative of Mickey's dominance:

"Mickey ... He was just so powerful. Sometimes he could almost make you feel invisible. [...] he'd bring me to lunch in Beverly Hills, one big hand all the way around my bare arm ... He might as well have been bringing me in on a leash. He kept me in these little microminidresses, never allowed me to wear anything underneath, just offering me to whoever wanted to stare. Or grab. Or sometimes he'd fix me up with his friends. And I'd have to do whatever they wanted ..." (*IV* 305)

¹²¹ Kaplan and Kreuger, “Voyeurism: Psychopathology and Theory”, 298.

This submissive response to the dominant male grasp is reminiscent of Jessica Swanlake's spontaneous orgasm when her lover Roger Mexico grips her wrist for the first time in *Gravity's Rainbow* (120). However, the Mickey-Shasta game retains the ambiguity Jessica Lawson assigns to the fight between Tyrone Slothrop and Katje (GR 221-222) which leads to penetrative sex and Katje screaming into the pillow: "Depending upon how motives are attributed to these actions, this episode could feature either a sexual assault that is reimagined in the false or distorting guise of consensual play, or an implicitly consensual act, which draws pleasure for its participants by masquerading as an assault."¹²² Lawson refrains from committing to either reading, arguing that such an excluded middle "would rob the scene of its structural richness."¹²³ We can read Shasta's account in several ways: as a faithful rendition of a situation, in which she was complicit, aimed at persuading Doc to emulate Mickey; as a concoction designed to stimulate Doc to enact her desires without her having to ask explicitly; as a way of using experience with Mickey and friends to supply the fantasy material she thinks Doc needs, etc. But since the ostensible compulsion writes a porno text for a third party, it becomes almost impossible to read the Doc-Shasta play as anything other than explicitly consensual. By retrograde extension it seems safe to read the Mickey-Shasta interaction, if it so occurred, as play and at least implicitly consensual. Sears has suggested a long-time progression in Pynchon's fiction away from the pejorative association of perverse sexuality with fascism, morbidity and death. In the context of *Mason & Dixon*, she imagines that: "Pynchon's decision to include fewer examples of perverse sexuality as a negative force could be owing to a greater degree of sensitivity to sexual diversity"¹²⁴ and assesses this as Pynchon texts escaping from or transcending "society's prejudices."¹²⁵ Could we read Pynchon in the context of a sexualized, pornified mainstream which permits the articulation of all kinds of sexual narratives, in marked contrast to the 1973 account in *Gravity's Rainbow* of sex in 1945? Is this articulation beneficial in rendering consent more explicit, more reliable?

Shasta's helplessness as damsel in distress, or even a kind of trafficked slave, recurs in the episode in which she "hustled [her] way

¹²² Lawson, "The Real and Only Fucking", 241.

¹²³ Ibid., 248.

¹²⁴ Sears, "Black and White Rainbows", 113.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 112.

off" the *Golden Fang* schooner (IV 306). She dramatizes her submission through an account of bartering freedom for sex as "desirable cargo" with ship's chief cook Porfirio on a sailing ship with "all the ropes and chains and pulleys and hooks and things..." (IV 307). She is manoeuvring herself into the most categorically adult position of the novel: "She knelt on the couch, put her face down on a pillow, and presented herself" (IV 307). Perhaps this is a second way in which so many of *Inherent Vice's* women are "presentable". Manson chick or not, Shasta's sexual texts objectify her or pornify her, at least in the fiction within the fiction, and spur Doc into two charged references, one to our distant future with its tattoos as sexual decoration : "You need a tattoo right here. How about 'Bad, Bad Girl?'" (IV 307) and the other to a contemporary model of submissiveness derived from the Vietnam War: "What kind of a ChiCom sex slave are you anyhow?" (IV 307).

On the way back to Shasta, Doc had inherited a secondary chattel from Mickey, the obliging (and inevitably "presentable") Luz. The flirtation between them is initiated by her description of the places in the house where Mickey took her to have sex, with Sloane's complicity. Then she spins him the girl-on-girl porno spiel: "That bed downstairs Mickey would never fuck me on? That's ours now" (IV 143). After cunnilingus and fucking, Doc presses Luz for further narrative about Sloane. Or is it really about Mickey?

"Riggs said it wasn't so much that he got to fuck her as that Mickey didn't."

"Uh, huh. What'd Riggs have against her husband?"

"Nothing. They were ol' *compinches*. Riggs would have never gone near Sloane's pussy if Mickey hadn't encouraged him."

"Mickey was gay?"

"Mickey fucked other women. He just wanted Sloane to have some fun, too." (IV 144)

It is hard not to hear both interest and disappointment in Doc's momentary conclusion about Mickey's orientation. He may be ostensibly detecting here, the P.I. cunningly using pillow talk to his advantage, but once again the upshot is more sex after a narrative with Mickey at its centre – and even better with Mickey playing his own Troilist games. Sex with Luz becomes another act of vicarious Troilism, *in absentia*.

Doc's erections in the presence of Clancy and Trillium Fortnight are equally intense but stem from complimentary, opposite erotic texts.¹²⁶ Clancy excites him, apart from the chance to stare at her breasts, primarily because the challenging sexual narrative of herself she thrusts at him. Her insistently proclaimed desire for threesomes with two other men means he fails to match up on his own and needs to bring a friend. Her needs are too specialized for her to contemplate settling for Doc alone and ultimately only black male sexuality offers her an antidote. Trillium offers Doc "a deep, unreachable innocence, all of which sent the throbbing idle of his lecherousness into overdrive" (IV 216). The pull of this "dishevelled girl in a tiny skirt" (IV 216) (another echo of Frenesi Gates) comes from the strength of her desire for another, which is validated by an acceptance of the Puck and Einar two-for-one.¹²⁷ But the greatest satisfaction Doc derives from all his escapades, and the denouement of the novel, is the reuniting of a family unit. He is emotionally drawn to both Coy and Hope and takes vicarious pleasure in the thought that their lives will continue pleasantly: the P.I. as volunteer marriage and drug counsellor (at least if the drug fails to meet with contemporary hippie approval, as heroin does).

One difficulty with hardcore, from the narrowly heterosexual male point of view, is that most of the time male viewers watch men have sex in scenes book-ended by male erection and male ejaculation. This may have a homoerotic element, but the experience is intended to be primarily vicarious: the male viewer inhabits the male performer as avatar, enjoys the woman through him.¹²⁸ *Inherent Vice* may offer the lavish window dressing of female pulchritude, but its true erotic currency resides in the sharing and passing of women, in a sense just as pornographic images can be shared and passed. This sexual carousel needs two boys for every girl, or rather every boy needs his girl to be or

¹²⁶ The Slothrop conditioned response also occurs in the form of Doc's spontaneous tumescence whenever John Garfield co-star Ida Lupino is mentioned (IV 59). This amuses rather than appals Sloane, in very porno fashion.

¹²⁷ In *Vineland* Brock sees Frenesi who, "came striding toward him now through the drizzle, a few pounds thinner, her hair full of snarls, barelegged" (VL 273).

¹²⁸ "Most relevant to our discussion here is the greater narrative coherence of both the feature film as a whole and each of its sexual 'numbers.' In feature-length ' pornos,' these numbers tend to be complete dramas of arousal, excitement, climax and (usually) satisfaction that permit both the (male) character *in* the film and the (usually male) viewers *of* the film to 'withdraw satisfied' after first getting into then back out of the picture" (Williams, *Hard Core*, 72).

have been with another boy, and to tell him porno stories about how good it was.

In the pre-dawn of mediated sexuality, visible pubic hair in *Penthouse's* April 1970 edition was still capable of causing consternation and a *frisson* of excitement.¹²⁹ Showings of *Deep Throat* and *Behind the Green Door* (both 1972) in mainstream cinemas had yet to suffix "chic" to porno and bring sexual representations on/scene. An incremental process eroding the counter-cultural status of speaking about sex was about to begin. Successive technologies mediating sexual images, culminating in Internet streaming video emanating from the worldwide porno-hub which is the San Fernando Valley adult film industry, have since sexualized the mainstream. Since Pynchon's 1970 requires sexual liberation as an inseparable component of its *frisson*, *Inherent Vice* both succumbs to a pre-feminist sexual nostalgia trip, and becomes a palimpsest overwritten with four subsequent decades of sexual codes. This retrograde inflection makes it possible both to fetishize "presentable" short-skirted female hordes and instil in them the drive to erotic variations entailed in 21st century Californian porno industry scripts. It seems that this Californication of sexuality has, in this late Pynchon novel, overtaken and neutralized the taboo-breaking sex still evident in *Vineland* and *Against the Day*. Where these novels dramatized female submissiveness (and only occasionally their assertiveness) as an exceptional vice which, in individuals like Lake Traverse and her great-grandniece Frenesi Gates, is both emblematic of and inherent in elect versus preterite power relations, *Inherent Vice's* California is a state where the mass of women know that sexual availability and versatility are expected of them as matter of course, and must hope to encounter Doc Sportello and not Charlie Manson. It speaks for the power of the Californian mediated sex industry's ubiquitous products that they evince the potential to suborn a writer whose earlier works did as much as any to locate the description of the sexually extreme at the forefront of the counter-culture.

¹²⁹ Slade, *Pornography in America*, 154.

Conclusions

Fiction's Altered Responses and Alliances

As screen sex burgeoned and mutated between 1970 and the early 21st century, the four writers who have attracted the focus of this dissertation exhibited radically evolving responses to this eclipse of sexual transgressiveness in fiction. There is a guiltless enthusiasm about the proponents of pornography, Ballard the anatomist and Pynchon the playful sex scientist, despite the atrociousness and violence of many of the acts they exhibit. In their work, sex is no longer subject to legal constraint, evades bourgeois restraint and becomes a complex logic for expressing power relations, both among humans and between them and hegemonic forces seen and unseen. Amis, long an edgy appropriator mired in complicity, is reborn in his later years as a self-identifying feminist with a quasi-Dickensian or Swiftian moral conscience to offer the land. No longer is it seemly for him to offer graphic pictures of gnarly penises in dirty magazine and satirical plot summaries of the loops at Forty-Third and Broadway as cachet, as trendy slumming, as a literary *style*.¹ He composes himself and issues tracts fictional and non-fictional about the mechanisms and abominations of hard-core. Furthermore, amidst all this writing about sexuality driven by it, *Yellow Dog* is the only text here (other than Palahniuk's *Choke*) to purport to represent industry practice through a lens other than that of the camera, the only one to offer porn stars as characters: Sir Dork Bogarde, Hick Johnsonson and Burl Rody; Dimity Quest, Tori Fate and Karla White. It also looks behind the phone-sex scene: sixty-something Margery impersonating starlet Donna Strange on the *Morning Lark's* lines. Like Amis, but unburdened by his baggage of complicity, Wallace assesses pornography as a substance among substances, an addiction among addictions, in a daydream nation of people who have lost their sense of anything but themselves. In Wallace it has become much easier to align mediated sexuality with other mediated products than with intimate relations between the romantically entwined. His writing is post-libidinal, free of the lasciviousness with which implied authors in Ballard gaze at the lab-coated female doctor; in Pynchon at the microskirt or the sepia-tinted complexity of period underwear; in Amis at the stripper or

¹ See Mitchell, "Self Abuse".

sex worker. Even the persona Wallace offers in his journalism cannot resist the temptations of bawdiness (gawping, for instance, at the calligraphy of a porn starlet at the Adult Video News awards with a Magic Marker partway inserted into her anus) but these jokes are told with a 360-degree loathing for all concerned.² Equally, his short fiction in *Brief Interviews* conversely treats issues arising from pornography's proliferation with surface-level humour which is not intended to mask their seriousness.

Postmodern Fucking Machines

Human individuality can recede in the technological world of pornography, either through conflation with the mechanical or by reduction to a category. Weapon and wound, piston and cylinder: the Ballardian penetrative act can be just another mechanical insertion: affectless, robotic and susceptible of diagrammatic representation, the blowjob in Amis much the same. In Amis and Pynchon, as objective reality and moral values recede there will always be the postmodernist joke: the post-feminist woman clubbing with a spangled *SLUT* on her shirt, the rotational symmetries of a threesome on the state line crosshairs. All three writers offer familiar objectifications derived from hard-core, but invested with literary purpose and susceptible of useful epistemological and ideological inquiry. Which acts qualify as sexual acts? Is there a model in which the appellation *slut* can be reclaimed or repurposed along the lines of *queer* or the N-word? In male-female-male troilism (with the woman carefully positioned in the middle), who is actually having sex with whom? Any claim about these episodes' potential, or lack of it, to stimulate the reader to tumescence would be at best unverifiable, but it should be evident that this is never their sole or main aim. However, these objectifications are usually of women, and the gender of these fictionalists is relevant. Wallace in "Adult World I" and "Adult World II", however, succeeds in taking the reader outside the dynamic of male porn viewership by deploying a female focalizer with such impeded access to her husband's desires that she initially has to deduce his masturbation compulsion entirely from the chafing on his "thingy". Her libidinal imagination also conjures up a faceless male

² Wallace, "Big Red Son", 31. Since the text she inscribes reads, "I am a little fuckhole", this is an instance in which the act of writing is literally pornographic. Pornography begets pornography, in Williams' phrase.

figure reduced entirely to desire, in a sense as rigorously objectified as Ballard's Karen Novotny Sex Kit. In the vanguard of the New Sincerity (as opposed to the other three, who are all to greater or lesser extents postmodern ironists) Wallace cannot approach issues without applying his moral conscience. In his journalism, there is the same struggle between aberration and complicit fascination laced with humour seen in Amis, but it is his speculative fiction which postulates the damage which may have been done. His men are as hideous as in the monsters in *Yellow Dog*, albeit without the acute class-consciousness. Whereas in Amis female characters are calculating erotic manipulators or industry stooges, Wallace holds up for derision the self-actualization Ms. Jeni Orzolek Roberts apparently achieves as a customer of the Adult World emporium after recruiting industry products to suit her own solipsistic masturbatory requirements. Alas, intimacy, sexual and otherwise, does recede from her marriage to a Secret Compulsive Masturbator and the industry has compromised both partners in entirely different ways. Of all the writers treated here Wallace most closely approaches the new wave feminist anti-porn positions of Paul, Dines and Walter, asking awkward moral questions about self-gratification and the erosion of relationships.

It might suit the post-modernist's purpose to exhibit sexual bodies as fucking machines, perhaps seen through lenses like Helmut Newton's, disporting around swimming pools in the California sun.³ In Ballard, the swimming pool would be drained and in Amis there would be less light in the nocturnal fleshpot; in both there might be the luxury hotel either side of the Atlantic. These glamorous automata exhibit the death of affect, interrogate the status of individual identity after copying or cloning and raise wider questions about human sexuality in a cyborg state where the OS can be conceived of as *outside* the body in some sense. The postmodernist may arrange these dolls with one another to form sculptures and hieroglyphics which organic romantic interaction is unlikely to generate, or divide them into excised part-images which articulate in synecdoche what whole humans or complete faces cannot. In both of these, pornography too excels.

³ See also, "the website *FuckingMachines*, on which female characters are supposed to be stimulated by sex machines, machines that can also be seen as figures of an eroticized market economy" (Schaschek, *Pornography and Seriality*, 25).

Damage

However, this sliding of human bodies up and down a scale of signification inevitably attracts a disparagement which extends that dispensed by anti-pornography feminist criticism. If the orgy dehumanizes and the close-up focus on a part-image objectifies, then the text is complicit. Has it somehow divested itself of literariness and become the pornography begotten by pornography in Williams' analysis?⁴ Has it exiled itself from the cannon as genre fiction which restricts itself to what Sontag calls an "inglorious and mostly despised department of the imagination"?⁵ To offer the converse: how would fiction which in some way notionally *rose above* the sexualization of the mainstream engage with carnality between those who live in that mainstream?

The written text cannot scar the performer mentally or physically (and if the author is not necessarily dead for the present purposes, he is at least disembodied) and among the fiction treated here it is only Ballard who purports to mimesis in the sense of representing real living persons. Even Ballard's fascination with the cult of sexual celebrity does not pretend to authentic revelation of the sexual proclivities of Marilyn Monroe, Jackie Onassis and Elizabeth Taylor. The last appears most frequently but is:

... less a sex symbol, and more an emblem of the parallel landscape that celebrity culture in the 1960s and 70s inhabited, a virtual reality colonising the private lives of the masses, which, through the explosion of the consumer landscape, had been exposed to a world as strange as an alien planet yet paradoxically erotic and near - a synthetic substitute for reality itself.⁶

It is possible to extend this further and argue that Taylor's image in Ballard is a perfect simulation which in Baudrillard's terms, "has no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum".⁷ This would, incidentally, absolve Ballard from any charge of invading the stars' marriages, dalliances and divorces like some tabloid gossip-hound:

⁴ Williams, *Hard Core*, 276.

⁵ Sontag, "The Pornographic Imagination", 233.

⁶ Sellars, "RIP Elizabeth Taylor".

⁷ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 6.

in fact he does the reverse in casting aside the personal in interrogating the public. If it were possible to level anti-porn critique in order to demonize Ballard, Pynchon and Amis it would therefore need to affix itself to the text's affect upon the reader.

A Minor Modality

The writers examined here are among those to have transcended the three-category paradigm Susan Sontag ventured in 1967. We may ask whether they write her third kind of pornography, "a minor but interesting modality or convention in the arts"⁸ and the answer will be that Pynchon and Amis have done so but that this is only one among the functions of both their sexual texts. It is only Ballard in *Crash* who aspires to meet the condition she later offers: "The strictest possible criterion of relevance applies: everything must bear upon the erotic situation".⁹ With this arguable exception, given Ballard's claims for *Crash* as a pornographic novel, the authors treated here distinguish themselves from one category covered by Maurice Charney (De Sade, Cleland, Pauline Réage) in that they have not generated "consistently sexual narratives".¹⁰ Furthermore, they evade conflation with another group he addresses (Lawrence, Nabokov, Miller, Roth in *Portnoy's Complaint* and Erica Jong in *Fear of Flying*) in that they are ruled by consciousness of the camera, of the mediated sexual image. As such, though not adapters of screen narratives, these authors are appropriators and remediators who nonetheless defend the vitality of literature against eclipse by the screen. I have followed Charney in confining myself to narratives ostensibly centred on heterosexuality, though there are currents of homoeroticism and troilism in all but the Wallace texts, a significant phenomenon to which I return below.

Seriality

Sarah Schaschek's incisive examination of "Seriality, Repetition, Iterability"¹¹ in pornography yields a measure of the extent to which

⁸ Sontag, "The Pornographic Imagination", 205.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 228.

¹⁰ Charney, *Sexual Fictions*, 163.

¹¹ Schaschek, *Pornography and Seriality*, 7.

these literary tests derive their structure from the screen. Her argument coalesces around the claim that, "As a film genre, pornography derives a great portion of its pleasure from the recurrence and predictability of its images, and the meaning of the formulaic structure of the genre cannot be underestimated".¹² However, this does not distinguish film from the literary text, given the numerous literary exemplars of seriality cited by many critics, Sontag and Charney among them, of which De Sade and Pauline Réage's *Story of O* are perhaps the clearest cut. If we ask to what extent the literary texts under discussion remediate the seriality of screen porn and go in search of loop structures in the narrative, *Crash* would appear to be the only single text here to generate sufficiently frequent iterations of its car-crash-wound-provoked coitus, oral sex and sodomy to condemn it to this categorization. Pynchon is recurrently disposed to offer exhaustive taxonomies of sexual acts which seek in vain to evade seriality through variety. *Money* repeatedly revisits the many forms of mediated sex available in New York and London but subsumes them in more generalized packages of John Self's decadent hedonism along with alcohol, drugs, smoking, junk food and of course the unmediated handjob. Yet, taking a more diachronic perspective across the oeuvres of three of these authors as they have evolved over the decades, seriality of sexual theme is readily apparent. Ballard's professional women (scientists, doctors, secretaries, teachers, nurses) succumb matter-of-factly to their counterparts, eliding sexual negotiation or mention of morality. Amis's "plastic temptresses" don revealing clothes, lingerie, hosiery and shoes to entrance fetish-driven men with wallets or muscles, who they flatter and manipulate in transactional sex.¹³ Pynchon's troubled submissives oscillate between powerful men.

Schaschek problematizes as neurotic a reading of pornography as "compulsive repetition", but also supports it with the remark that "because no depiction of sex is ever entirely identical with sexual experience, pornography does not cease".¹⁴ Ceaselessness has been an invariable, first in the sense of rewatchability: the loop collection which in *The Atrocity Exhibition* frequently recalls characters (varying their names) into sexual situations over and over again; Pynchon offered us a man on a ship watching the same erotic loop endlessly (GR 451). As each iteration is fractionally different from its predecessor, the second sense is the fruitless quest to consume the inexhaustible supply. Wallace's Secret

¹² Ibid., 2.

¹³ Kemp, "A Burnt-Out Case".

¹⁴ Schaschek, *Pornography and Seriality*, 16.

Compulsive Masturbator addicted to porn is the culmination and quintessence of Amis's unflagging queue of Johns, Keiths and Clints sitting in their loop cubicles, rewinding and freeze-framing their VCRs and trawling the Internet. The porno simulacrum is a copy of sex but a copy without an original (because sex is not porno) which then copies itself. It will never stop.

Ineluctability

Inherent Vice stages no professional sexual performance and indeed very rarely refers to pornography, yet shows how its mechanisms and variations have been subcutaneously injected into the sexual culture. Pynchon is no longer appropriating pornography as a cipher, an allegory or an enactment of power: its ubiquity has rendered it difficult to distinguish from its backdrop. Or rather it has become the backdrop, assuming hegemony, and governance of sex in relationships and encounters. "Ironically, pornography has become almost invisible by virtue of its very ubiquity," is Dines' verdict, and it may yet become as absolutely invisible in a Californicated culture as water is to the oblivious young fish in Wallace's 2005 commencement address *This is Water: Some Thoughts, Delivered on a Significant Occasion, about Living a Compassionate Life*.¹⁵ The characters in both *Inherent Vice* and Smiley's *Ten Days in the Hills* are fish who cannot see the water. Smiley's work begs the underlying question: if on the heterosexual axis male vantage points in fiction have been as shown here, what will research yield about corresponding, or indeed conflicting, female vantage points? The sexualization of the mainstream catalogued by McNair and Attwood, the pornification detailed by Paasonen, Nikunen and Saarenmaa, cannot be undone or cast off.¹⁶ Immersion in the dynamic, logic and iconography of the porno industry inflects not only the world, but the brave new fictions written in it.

This study has explicitly confined itself to literary responses to the altered states of sexual representation rather than venturing into the thriving academic discipline of *Porn Studies*. I have avoided this interdisciplinarity partly because, if I leave behind the characters from the fictions treated here for a moment, much greater caution is called for

¹⁵ Dines, *Pornland*, 163.

¹⁶ Attwood, "The Sexualization of Culture".

in any statement about people's behaviour in the real. Despite McNair's argument that pornography is essentially a force for liberal good around the world, that its prevalence and legality correlates positively by geographical area with liberal and enlightened treatment of gendered and queer groups by lawmakers and citizens, the legions of researchers required to verify, qualify or quantify pornography's affect upon its consumers are unlikely to materialize. Equally, the interview, anecdote and poll research models offered by recent schools of anti-porn campaigners would require logarithmic extension to suggest the reverse. Within the scope of literary studies, however, it has been possible to argue that the mediated sexual image cannot be *unseen* or *unheard*: how could literary fiction, which had for so long fought aesthetic and moral battles in the courts and the media to raise societal consciousness of sexual panoply, not engage with the screening of it? But equally, how could it engage uncritically with this burgeoning simulacrum, which, in Baudrillard's terms, at the very least "masks and denatures a profound reality"?¹⁷ The texts treated here all respond to the industry standard by offering, if I may borrow from Joyce, pornography as an ineluctable modality. Though neither implied authors nor characters can cover their ears or eyes, the modality the screen offers is just a partial reality, only a bounded segment of the pornographic imagination, which is boundless. To cast aside the porn gauze and use the literary lens to expose this boundlessness is a purpose as valid as Ballardian geometries, Pynchonoid power structures and the ethical homilies of late Amis and Wallace.

Troilism

If money shot and post-dubbed soundtrack (always dominated by female sounds) constitute "a tacit acknowledgement that such real-live sex acts can be communicated to viewers only through certain visual and aural conventions of representation," this is, as we have seen, where the written text is at an advantage in conveying sexual experience.¹⁸ Writing makes the invisible imaginable without the need for a gaze or listening ear, and eludes the heterosexual audio-visual porno paradox inherent in a male viewer watching another man have sex. See *Yellow Dog* for Karla White's assessment of how gay the customer is (YD 273). Ultimately, the

¹⁷ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 6.

¹⁸ Williams, *Hard Core*, 121.

male consumer observing heterosexual phallic acts is involved in a Troilist experience, focusing on genital action, the meat shot (Williams) and exhibited female pleasure but also asked to identify with the male and measure visible pleasure via his external ejaculation. There is a comparable dynamic for the gonzo porn creator too: male director/cameraman/participant plus female star plus male star. One might argue a similar paradigm for these novelists and short story writers, but I have been concerned here not with the implied author-siren-male lover triangle, for reasons expounded above, but with the text-internal triangle of male focalizer-female conduit-other (usually powerful) male. Ultimately, in the texts examined, it is this Troilism which emerges as almost the dominant modality of sexual relations, along the lines of homosocial desire set out by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. Writing in 1985, she hypothesises "the potential unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual - a continuum whose visibility, for men in our society, is radically disrupted".¹⁹ Both the spectacle of male performer seen by male consumer and the masculine camaraderie of performance (including for instance James Ballard the character and Robert Vaughan in *Crash*, Amis' porn stars, Pynchon's tunnel-drillers and Palahniuk's queueing gang-bangers), have contributed to "the entrenchment of homosocial male eroticism in the marketplace of the commodified sexual revolution", as Thomas Waugh puts it.²⁰ Men will struggle to *unsee* one another having sex.

Objects

While biographical criticism has not been a concern of this study, it should not escape notice that this has been a study of male-authored fictions deploying voraciously sexual woman in prototype: the inviting geometries and contours of Karen Novotny and Katherine Ballard, the unalloyed manipulation of plastic temptresses Selina Street and Nicola Six and the submissiveness of Margherita Erdman and Lake Traverse. Even Wallace indulges, with the young woman disrobing in stylistic imitation of a half-remembered movie ("Think") and the young wife assessing her sexual value against the stars of the video-tape ("Adult

¹⁹ Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 1-2.

²⁰ Waugh. "Off-Screen, On-Screen", 139. Palahniuk's *Snuff* is set in the queue for record-setting 600-man serial gang-bang and focalized through three men in that waiting area and stage manager Sheila.

World I"). Perhaps the 21st century brought some shift in position from object with the assertive polyamory of Yashmeen Halfcourt and Clancy Charlock, the knowing audio-taped lectures of producer and industry insider Karla White/Cora Suzan. One might even tentatively proffer phallic objectification in an unsatisfying attempt to balance a unisex model: Slothrop's programmed penis; *Yellow Dog* adult stars reduced to "life-support systems for a tab of Potentium" (Amis' version of Viagra/Cialis) (YD 273); Jeni's husband reduced in synecdoche to his rubbed-raw "thingy". Token objectifications of the other (dominant) group or gender are, however, hardly pertinent. It is just as fruitless to attempt to deflect the oft-levelled charge of female objectification away from these literary texts as it would be to defend hard-core in the same way. How could porn-infused writing do other than objectify female characters? And yet, Clare Hayes-Brady, defending Wallace against postulated but unformulated charges of misogyny, argues that the distance he takes from his female characters, is born not of "antipathy" but rather of "alterity", which in a footnote (appropriately enough) she goes on to stipulate emphasises not "the independent self/other dynamic but rather the disconnectedness which is also part of that relationship".²¹ I would seek to recruit this alterity as an approach to women Amis conceived in his late self-identified "feminist" period, including Russia Meo and Cora Suzan, though it would be an uncomfortable stretch indeed to extend retrogressive amnesty to the progenitor of Selina Street and Nicola Six. It may even be that the complexity of plot-arcs Pynchon affords "agonists" Yashmeen Halfcourt and Dally Rideout (and later single focalizer Maxine Tarnow throughout *Bleeding Edge*) represents a sympathetic progression from Katje Borgesius, Bianca and Margherita Erdman and their ilk.²² It is only Ballard's women who uniformly resist: they are vectors and moduli and invariably, thoroughly othered.

Ballard and Pynchon enlisted the extreme but diegetic sex scene as a revolutionary protagonist to sweep away not just prudery and romantic convention but, in a wider sense, stilted and limiting conceptions of human sexual response. Subsequently, two moralists fleeing aghast from *fin-de-siècle* internet-streamed gonzo, Amis and Wallace, have come to assign the industry quasi-antagonist status as seas of troubles or sirens against which focalizers Xan Meo or Jeni Orzolek

²¹ Hayes-Brady, "Modes of Power", 131, 149n.

²² *Ibid.*, 132.

Roberts must take arms or steel themselves to resist. No matter which of these approaches, among many others, is taken one change has become irreversible. Whether one expresses this phenomenon as the *on/scenity* of mediated sex, the sexualization of the mainstream, the pornification of society or the democratization of desire, fictionalists will forever struggle to clear it from the room when they ask their characters to have, or even think of, sex.

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Samenvatting (Dutch summary)

In de jaren '60 vonden er in de Verenigde Staten en het Verenigd Koninkrijk belangrijke herzieningen van de censuurwetgeving plaats. De geleidelijke afschaffing van censuur op pornografie en de gelijktijdige technologische ontwikkelingen op het gebied van het opnemen en uitzenden van audiovisueel materiaal werden door de seksindustrie aangegrepen om de verspreiding van porno significant uit te breiden. In dit proefschrift wordt onderzocht hoe een en ander zijn weerslag vond in de representatie van pornografische motieven in het werk van vier toonaangevende auteurs: de Britten J.G. Ballard en Martin Amis en de Amerikanen Thomas Pynchon en David Foster Wallace.

J.G. Ballard maakte gebruik van anatomische kaarten, fotografie, film en video om in zijn werk van de dood van het affect (emotionele afstomping) een belangrijk thema te maken. Tegelijkertijd bleef hij een verklaard voorstander van de vrijelijke verspreiding van pornografie, en wees hij op het belang ervan bij het realiseren van sociale en politieke veranderingen. In de romans van Thomas Pynchon is seks geënt op de pornografie zoals deze zich begin jaren '70 aan het ondergrondse circuit ontworstelde, van korte films voor een select, mannelijk publiek tot speelfilms in reguliere bioscopen en uiteindelijk consumptie in huis- en slaapkamers door middel van dragers als VHS, DVD en streaming. In Pynchons werk zien we de sluipende invloed van hardcore porno op mainstream seks. Martin Amis heeft zich ontwikkeld van een auteur die schaamteloos en tegelijkertijd intelligent gebruik maakte van de pornografie als motief, tot zelfbenoemd feministisch criticus die ervan overtuigd is dat extreme 'gonzoporno' bij zowel uitvoerenden als consumenten daadwerkelijk schade aanricht. De diagnose van David Foster Wallace, ten slotte, was dat pornografie een media-verslaving is, met als primair symptoom het onvermogen te genieten.

Begin jaren '70 was literaire fictie gedwongen haar status als belangrijkste aanbieder van seksueel expliciete inhoud op te geven ten faveure van het bewegende beeld. Zij verloor daarmee op dit gebied haar dominante positie als grensoverschrijdend medium. De in deze studie besproken auteurs kozen in reactie daarop als onderwerp de mechanismen en gevolgen van *mediated* seks.

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Alana Gillespie showed me her model PhD proposal and in 2010 Harald Hendrix took the trouble to scrape up a little research time for me so I could start writing a collection of papers. Once it became clear the research would be in my own time, Hans Bertens, who had supervised my burgeoning *doctoraalscriptie* on Pynchon in 1992, read early drafts of the papers which became chapters 3, 4 and 5 in 2013 and advised that I change tack and write a monograph. I'm indebted to Ted Sanders and Els Stronks for encouraging me to complete, and to venture further.

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It was an enormous fillip when Peter Boxall at *Textual Practice* gave me my first publication on Pynchon, reproduced here with minor alterations as chapter 5. The idea stemmed from Marlies de Vos at our book club, who detected the vice inherent in Pynchon's seventh novel: impossibly gorgeous women greeting the protagonist at every turn. My second chapter on this illusive great could never have reached its current form without incisive, demanding feedback from the editors of the forthcoming essay collection *Thomas Pynchon: Sex and Gender*, foremost among them Georgios Maragos.

At graduation in 1992, just after I started work in the Utrecht English language section, it had been Hans and Peter de Voogd, who held the other chair in literature and had guided me through the bureaucratic miasma which was a Dutch *doctoraal* degree, who

demanded, with bluntness Netherlandish, “Now, are you one of us, or one of them?” Not that I was slow on the uptake, but it took me 18 years and David’s arrival to start working my way back toward being one of them. Or us.

I remain grateful to Rachel Collins for encouraging me to go back to university after I migrated to the Netherlands at the end of the 80s and for helping me, along with those ebullient, sagacious and generous linguists, Paul van Buren, Mike Sharwood Smith and the late Beverley Collins, to evolve into a passable approximation of a university teacher, even though it turned out to be in absolutely the wrong section. Since then I’ve learned a lot about research talking over the fence and after hours with their successors, among whom I must single out Koen Sebregts, Marcelle Cole and Nynke de Haas for being even more fun than the appellation *linguist* might promise. Nynke also helped by playing the lay linguist and reading my summary.

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Curriculum Vitae

Simon Cook has been teaching at the English Department of Utrecht University since 1992 and University College Utrecht since 1999. He currently offers courses in creative writing, journalism and media studies and contemporary American literature. He has also been a curriculum planner and a programme coordinator. His publication debut came in 2015 with “Manson Chicks and Microskirted Cuties - Pornification in Thomas Pynchon's *Inherent Vice*” for *Textual Practice*.