

## Editors' Note: The Pornographic Imaginary

Our aim in organizing this volume was to press for further considerations of, contestations over, and engagements with pornography and the pornographic. We did so as we were concerned that interventions in and by political and cultural theory had unaccountably and unfortunately been in recess while the imaginaries of the pornographic were in a state of hyperproliferation, transformation, and intensification. Ironically, the issues and questions no longer looked sexy. This is changing. We are publishing in the wake of several events and markers that suggest at least a studied recollection of, even if not full reengagement with, these topics: the release of the documentary *Inside Deep Throat* (2005), the “prosecution” of those at the bottom of the chain-of-command at Abu Ghraib, the death of feminist anti-porn activist Andrea Dworkin (2005), the publication of *Porn Studies* (2004), and the renewed “anti-obscenity” campaign recently launched by the Bush Justice Department.<sup>1</sup>

Cultural production, and thus the parameters and objects of cultural critique, cannot be severed from the operations and interrogations of political economy. In “**The Money Shot,**” **Nicola Simpson** draws our attention to the political economy of pornography in North America. It is a massive business. Simpson reports that pornography generated \$12 billion in revenue in the United States in 2002. Simpson highlights the “staggering success of the business” of pornography and argues that this success is indicative of the fact that pornography “is no longer flirting with the mainstream; it *is* the mainstream.” Simpson also discovers that the corporations producing pornography look to, and

model themselves upon, the earlier business models of mainstream Hollywood movie-making (e.g., the “studio system”), and in so doing produce a galaxy of movie stars whose names we know even if their work we have not seen: Jenna Jameson, Linda Lovelace, Traci Lords. Jenna Jameson is our Judy Garland.

In **“Is the Visual Essentially Pornographic?: The Politics of the Body in Godard’s *Le Mepris* and *Weekend*,”** Mohammad Salama begins with the observation that “[o]urs is a cinematic age,” and thus too a visual one. Salama investigates “Godard’s ironic depiction of the pornographic shot, its connection to consumer culture, and its commodification of ‘visual pleasure.’” The temporal and geographic positioning of the pornographic imaginary is called into play here: the locale is mid-20<sup>th</sup> century France. In addition, Salama reads certain scenes from *Le Mepris* and *Weekend* as efforts by Godard to subvert and mock the consumerist logic of the culture industry. Salama states that we must view these cinematic moments in Godard against and alongside “the American commercial film industry that makes of nudity a marketable form of commodification.” Echoing Simpson’s efforts to blur the supposed distinction between pornographic/mainstream, Salama helps us to see via a reading of Godard that the pornographic may not be so easily contained and sealed off in the realm of “pornography.” Salama argues that Godard, in contrast to the Hollywood culture industry, aims “not to satisfy but overwhelm the consumer.” For us, this raises the following question: Does the pornographic imaginary help partially structure both the mainstream culture industry *and* the various avant-garde efforts of subversion?

In **“‘The Hideous Monster and the Beaver’: Sadomasochistic Language in Kathy Acker’s *Blood and Guts in High School*,”** Jennifer Mitchell and Kathryn Parker consider the relationships between—and the politics of—writing, language, representation, sexuality, and gender. They argue that Acker aligns “herself with a violent pornographic tradition of sexual deviance” (such as

Sade) for the purpose of contesting a “complete and unified textual body” (and lived subjectivity). Mitchell and Parker thus read Acker as representing a challenge to both Second Wave feminism and to patriarchal authority even as Acker herself uses and abuses the vocabularies and motifs of those two discourses. Thus we are inclined to posit a link between Acker and Godard that places them potentially (but perhaps only partially) against the anti-porn politics of feminists such as the late Andrea Dworkin: the former attempts an incitation and realization of subversion from within and through discursive practices, whereas the latter campaigns for censorious abolition and politico-cultural closure from an imagined pure space of the outside.

Lastly, we publish a “**Critical Exchange**” between **Lila Lee and Jack Jackson**. Lee critiques the Call for Papers announcing this special issue for itself being complicit with and constitutive of the harms inflicted upon women as women through the production and consumption of pornography. Jackson responds by attempting to disrupt any monological reading of something called “pornography.” Further, he insists that any political agitations, critiques, and/or mobilizations must be informed by and conversant with radical differences pulsating through and between and against sexed bodies, sexualities, and subordinations.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> *Inside Deep Throat*, dir. Fenton Bailey and Randy Barbato, 92 min. HBO Documentary Films, 2005; Andrea Dworkin, the author of texts crucial to the development of North American feminist political thought generally, and to the debates over “pornography” specifically, died on 9 April 2005; *Porn Studies*, ed. Linda Williams (Durham: Duke Press, 2004); CNN reports that “[s]ince 2001, 40 people and businesses

have been convicted and 20 additional indictments are pending” for violations of the federal “obscenity” statutes. In contrast, “there were four such prosecutions during the eight years of the Clinton administration.” [www.cnn.com/2005/POLITICS/05/05/obscenity.prosecutions.ap](http://www.cnn.com/2005/POLITICS/05/05/obscenity.prosecutions.ap) last viewed 5/10/05.