

**Hans Maes and Jerrold Levinson (eds.)**  
*Art and Pornography: Philosophical Essays.*  
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*Art and Pornography* explores various philosophical problems raised by the relationship between pornography and art. Traditionally, pornography has been analyzed from the point of view of feminism, post-feminism, and gender studies, which attend to its moral implications for gender roles and social behaviours. However, after Susan Sontag's seminal essay 'The Pornographic Imagination', few philosophers have questioned whether pornographic works have any artistic merit. This book, edited by Hans Maes and Jerrold Levinson, shows different aspects of this problem that until now had not been fully analyzed.

The book is divided into four sections. Most of the articles argue in favour of or against pornography as art or pornographic art. Many arguments given are based on a distinction between pornography, which aims to elicit sexual arousal through sexually-explicit representations, and erotic art representations, which in contrast do not intend to elicit such a response but instead aim at major aesthetic ones.

Part I explores many of the arguments surrounding this distinction of aims. It begins with an essay by Hans Maes, in which he elaborates on many of the arguments sustaining that art and pornography are incompatible in virtue of pornography's representing sexual explicitness (18), its moral status (19–20), its artistic quality (20–22) and its prescribed responses (22–24). Such arguments are unproblematic for erotic art, and the rest of the authors put emphasis on one or more these issues. However, Maes gives reasonable counterarguments for each point. The most important, following Kendall Walton's 'Categories of Art' (1970), is that pornography and art are not necessary mutually exclusive, according to the way a work plays with standard, variable, and contra-standard features of a relevant artistic category. For Maes, there are some cases that play with standard and contra-standard features relevant to not only erotic art, but also to pornographic art. Unfortunately, Maes does not give convincing arguments in defence of the category of pornographic art, simply saying that its merit is relative to the features we highlight when we approach such works. However, he gives an interesting analysis of most of the arguments we can find in the book that should be considered further defences or rejections of the category of pornographic art.

In a completely different vein, Alex Neill gives his interpretation of Schopenhauer's aesthetics in order to argue that erotic art presents the same kind of tension as the sublime aesthetic experience. Later, David Davies develops a very interesting approach to pornographic art. He dissents from Jerrold Levinson, who denies in 'Erotic Art and Pornographic Pictures' (2005) the artistic status of pornographic representations, on the grounds that they are transparent because, unlike erotic art, the receiver attends to what is represented rather than to the medium, in order to get sexual arousal. In contrast, Davies defends an intended-response-oriented approach in order to argue that pornographic art is possible and that it might function in a similar way to religious or political artworks. Following his own proposal in *Art as Performance* (2004), Davies claims that art appreciation requires the receiver to regard the work in virtue of its artistic vehicle, which is constituted by the way the assemblage of the work's elements articulate the intended function of its content. For that reason, for Davies, if a pornographic representation is articulated in such a way,

and if there is, as such, a receiver's artistic regard that is a 'precondition to the intended satisfaction of the non-artistic interest' (79), then the representation might count as art.

In the following chapter Jerrold Levinson responds to Davies. He argues that Davies' proposal is too inclusive, since it can comprise any artefact that embodies meaning. On the contrary, for Levinson pornography is in conflict with any artistic function, whereas, i.e., religious art is not, for the same reasons he has given in previous work (2005). Hopefully the Davies–Levinson debate will reignite discussion on the role played by the presence of non-artistic functions in artworks.

Part II provides insightful reflection on the fictional status of some pornographic representations and the relation between pornography and imaginary mental states. Previously Roger Scruton in 'Flesh from the Butcher: How to Distinguish Eroticism from Pornography' (2005) analysed fantasy and imagination in relation to erotic art and pornography. This book provides some novel approaches. Two of the most interesting are those provided by Cain Todd and Kathleen Stock. Cain Todd distinguishes non-fictional pornography, which is transparent, from fictional pornography, which presents a fictional narrative 'where fictional actions and events are represented for us to be imaginatively engaged with' (107). Using Gregory Currie's analysis of I-desires (desiring in imagination) regarding fictions, Cain Todd explores the role these kind of desires play in imaginative engagement with what he defines as fictional pornography and how they might let this sort of pornography entail a cognitive value in relation to our real desires. His approach is appealing. However, he takes for granted that *de se* imagining (imagining from the inside) is the way we imaginatively engage with fictions. In the following chapter Kathleen Stock explores the limits of this concept. She explores whether pornography can be understood as 'imagining something about oneself'. Looking to the work of François Recanti in *Imagining De Se* (2007), Stock explores different kinds of *de se* imagining in relation to fiction: explicit *de se* imagining, implicit *de se* imagining (from the inside), and imagining *that there is x-ing* (117–18). She provides arguments against the common view that the second is the only way we can imaginatively engage with fictions. Regarding emotional responses to fictions, she sustains that fictions represent affective properties that are appropriately imagined; however, aroused responses, i.e. of particularly erotic properties, do not involve *de se* imagining but are experienced 'as out there, in the world'. Stock's approach is interesting not only with regard to art and pornography but also to the paradox of fiction, and this article advances on arguments she has put forward in previous papers.

Part II concludes with an article by Christy Mag Uidhir and Henry John Pratt. In 'Why Pornography Can't Be Art' (2009), Mag Uidhir provided arguments for rejecting pornographic art based on his distinction between artistic manner-specificity and pornographic manner-inspecificity. Maes provides counterarguments to this position (37). However, in this paper Mag Uidhir and Pratt concede that there are works that are on the pornographic edge (i.e. Hentai films). These kinds of works are incidentally porn but constitutively fiction, so they fail to satisfy their function as porn, that is, satisfying sexual arousal. Unfortunately, Uidhir and Pratt's minimal characterization of fiction (150), in contrast with Stock and Cain Todd, does not explain what kind of imaginative attitude a fiction invites the audience to have. However, their arguments may be interesting to explore in the context of the Davies–Levinson discussion about the role of a non-artistic functions in art.

Part III presents discussion of different art-forms. Petra Van Brabandt and Jesse Prinz analyse films and offer empirical evidence against those who argue that there are a limited number

of aesthetic responses and emotions, in order to defend the idea that feeling sexual arousal is one such valid response. Nevertheless, they argue that pornography can be art only if it is used as a means of creative expression. Unfortunately they do not explain which aesthetic properties a work needs in order to count as art or even in order to be counted as creative.

After this, Bence Nanay uses the photographic series *Distortions* by André Kertész to illustrate his position. Using a well-known distinction between the recognitional ('the what') and the configurational aspects ('the how') of pictorial representations, he analyses the series in order to argue, with Levinson, that the configurational properties of Kertész's work enhance the aesthetic experience of the pictures, making the recognitional aspects irrelevant in contrast to pornographic representations where those aspects are significant. Finally, Michael Newall analyses pornography in literature from the point of view of the transgression of morals and discusses how pornographic representations can arouse disgust, moral disgust or even laughter.

Last, in Part IV we find original approaches to the traditional discussion of pornography, morals, and gender. Most of the positions presented in this book do not question the category of erotic art, but this section does, at least from the point of view of those that have supported their arguments by turning to the moral realm.

Brandon Cooke gives an interesting view on the discussion about the fictional status of pornographic representations. He provides arguments against the distinction between pornography and erotic art based on morals, emphasizing analysis of a work's particular features and the non-correspondence between fictions and actions. After this, Andrew Kania recognizes that there are different modes of reception and, like Davies, compares pornographic representations to religious art. For him, as for Prinz and Brabandt, it is possible to experience sexual arousal and at the same time to appreciate the artistic use of a medium.

Next, A.W. Eaton elaborates on an interesting critique of feminist approaches to the problem, expanding the discussion to what she calls 'methodological individualism' (300) through the analysis of specific works, in the same vein as Brandon Cooke. Following Martha Nussbaum and Rae Langton Eaton, Eaton disputes some feminist critique for not considering the objectification of the female nude in many artistic representations, including erotic art. She analyses female nude representation and challenges the notion of erotic in art history as 'morally permissible', showing what pornography and erotic art have in common. Finally, Elisabeth Schellekens proposes an approach to voyeurism in art. She argues that voyeuristic representations, which are depicted as intimate acts, can be morally problematic just like porn.

Although most of the discussions of pornography in this book are concerned with the way in which sexual explicitness and the intended sexual arousal pornographic representations aim to induce affect their artistic status, it suggests number of interesting approaches to moral concerns. Despite the fact that the role played by art criticism in the reception of artworks that show sexually explicit scenes is unacknowledged, this book contributes to reflection not only on pornography but also on the artistic and fictional status of many representations and the relation between ethical and aesthetic evaluation. By introducing the relation between art and pornography, the book leaves many topics open for further discussion.

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