

MORALS AND MARKETS: DEVIANCE

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LAURA KERTZ <laurakertz@earthlink.net>
*City University of New York Graduate Center
135 Fifth Avenue, New York City*

Abstract. Digital media are exceptionally efficient at segregating hard and soft core messages, based on such simple notions as bandwidth, noise, and push versus pull. The market for low-band, hard core media is limited, and decreases with the kink of its content, while high band soft core media is routinely pushed to the masses. The mass (soft) consumer market thrives on discarded (and slightly softened) hard core themes, however, and the notion of deviance is undermined by a relentless recycling, a symbiosis between the mass and the niche market.

MEDIATION

Somewhere near the beginning of the average scholastic text on porn comes a small apologia/explanation for the project. They all read differently, but somehow the same. From Linda Williams' *Hardcore: Power, Pleasure, and the Frenzy of the Visible*:

[...] even though I know that the slightest admission that not every image of every film was absolutely disgusting to me may render my insights worthless to many women, I also know that not to admit some enjoyment is to perpetuate an equally invidious double standard [...] (xvii).

From Denis Giles' "Angel on Fire: Three Texts of Desire:"

[...] Once the film ends, [the viewer of pornography] must return to the 'real' world. What is he to do outside the theater with his aroused libido? He can redirect it from the fantasy love object on the screen to a real sexual partner who may or may not live up to the fantasy. He can once again repress his desire, or it can be sublimated into such tasks as writing this paper (41).

These little libidinal acknowledgments and scholastic qualifiers are set apart from the body of the text in the preface or introduction, and they function to declare the content of the tract itself: "Scholastic ruminations on the nature of pornography informed by acknowledgment of scholar's own sexual drives appended. Please continue."

CODING

The field of electronic communications has a term for this kind of information. It's called "header." Considering that telecommunications has done nothing short of revolutionize the paradigms for production and consumption of mass media, decent or indecent, at least twice in thirty years, the borrowing of the term is apt, and the following pedagogic detour warranted.

Any email message is made up of header and body. The body is that message the sender typed for transmission to the receiver, and the header records the message subject, the sender, the receiver, and the route taken between the two.¹ Web pages are divided into header, which contains the title, author, key words, and other descriptive information about the document, and body, which contains the text for the page actually shown on the screen. The header and the body are literally "tagged" or coded in the document. <HEAD> means begin header information, and </HEAD> means end header information. This tagging sets the hidden header content off from the visible body of the page.

In case there's any ambiguity about the meaning or intent of the body text on a Web page, you can always select "view source" from your browser and peruse the header, just to see what it suggests about the page. The samples below distinguish two sites with lots of pictures of cheerleaders.

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<HEAD>
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<TITLE>Cheerleader Central</TITLE>
```

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<META NAME="KEYWORDS"  
CONTENT="cheerleader, cheerleaders,  
49ers, 49ers Goldrush, Chargers, Charger
```

¹ The header also holds information that can perform the trick of distributing the message into chunks for transmission and then reassembling them at the other end. This is related to a process called "packet switching."

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Girls, Dallas Cowboys, Miami Dolphins,  
Denver Broncos, Oakland Raiders,  
Raiderettes, Saintsations, Rams  
Cheerleaders, Patriots Cheerleaders">  
  
<META NAME="DESCRIPTION"  
CONTENT="Dedicated to the talented and  
beautiful women of professional  
cheerleading">  
  
</HEAD>  
  
<HEAD>  
  
<TITLE>Cheerleaders naked. Wet t (sic) and  
topless cheerleaders strip  
naked.</TITLE>  
  
<META name="DESCRIPTION"  
content="Cheerleaders naked. Wet t and  
topless cheerleaders strip naked.">  
  
<meta name="KEYWORDS"  
content="Cheerleaders naked. Wet t,  
topless, cheerleaders strip, naked.">  
  
</HEAD>
```

In many cases online, the header info matches the body. Take a look at the body of "Cheerleaders naked," and you discover what looks like pornographic free-verse,² but is actually advertising for a porn site, as you might have guessed, working from what's coded in the header. The scholastic disclaimers we began with are just as informative and reliable. Before we get on to conflicts between header and body, I'd like to expand our notion of header a bit more.

Offline, we could conceive of header information in the case of films as trailers prepared for the film, the trailers of other films screened before the feature, the title on the marquee, the theater where shown. For magazines, we can consider the magazine cover, whether it's distributed by mail and if so

² "Watch these cheerleaders get fucked senseless. / As a member you will see / Lesbian Rape / What's in that glass of wine that makes her spread her legs? / You'll moan with pleasure / When the head cheerleader / fucks her pussy / with the / giant dildo."

whether in a wrapper, whether it's only available at a vendor and if so on what shelf. For books, we can look at the jacket, the forward, the blurbs, the preface, the publications that have reviewed it. Based on these parameters, we'll expand our concept of header to any and all information announcing the content of the text.

There is a twist, however; an analysis which acknowledges the significance of header is by no means chained to the reading that header suggests. There's reading header info, and *reading* header info. Any spam (unsolicited email) victim knows that that email message with subject line "Be Your Own Boss, \$200K per week" belies a merciless and demeaning pitch in the body of the message. This approach suggests that learning to *read* the header (*Dedicated to the talented and beautiful women of professional cheerleading...*) is as important as learning to *read* the text, and that the real fun begins when you line up the two.

An example of header/body conflict is detailed in Brian McNair's account of British hardcore skin mags (110-112). The catch is, technically, there's no such thing. Great Britain has been diligent in limiting the explicitness of Brit porn, and as a result, British consumers have learned that for hardcore, they must turn to Dutch or other liberal sources. A quick-on-the-uptake David Sullivan (Brit porner extraordinaire) capitalized on his audience's savvy and began stapling his own limp British fare into Euro-inspired covers.

The British account is covered more thoroughly in Mark Killick's *Sultan of Sleaze*. The commentary reverberates, however, through McNair's own book. The author is admittedly anxious about his style and his subject, quoting Sallie Tisdale in his own preface/porn scholastic header with quips about the erotophobic dryness of much academic work to date. Unsurprisingly, McNair's text, while a thoughtful and thorough examination, is rather staid. To compensate, it's bound in metallic gold, with a low-res black and white image of a woman (?) in leather gear. SEX is the largest word in the title. Judging from looks I've gotten on the N train, the jacket boasts a book much racier than the one inside.

The falsified (or hyperbolic) header, however, is nothing new. The early pornographic "bibliographies" and diaries from girls' school share in

common with the letter to *Penthouse* a certain "transparency of use."³ The fake header as ruse is less interesting than the earnest header as indicator of anxiety, however, –the anxiety of a text that's not comfortable in its skin.

In 1936, the Second Circuit Court of Appeals considered a little volume called *Black Lust*. The book served up a conceivable if flimsy premise of a young girl abducted and forced into sexual slavery. In the court's opinion was the suggestion that the work, while explicit, was necessarily so, in service to its larger theme as a rumination on dominance and pleasure. And while the publisher's advertisement (header) for the book certainly exaggerated its potential analytical appeal, it was unlikely, as Judge Learned Hand suggested, that the average reader might not be wise to the ploy (Ernst 105-106). The pitch was made with a wink, the book was coded for kink, and there was nowhere in evidence the scrambling apology that more mainstream media now attempt.

After all, the same story wended its way through the print media, the nightly news, and then the evening news magazines in 1997-98 and no one seemed quite so smug in that case. It began when the *Dallas Morning News* ran a relatively thoughtful exposé by Gregory Katz examining the new traffic in young girls out of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Republics. The story circulated a bit, and then made its way to evening television, at which point video was added, and *for the sake of the story* the viewer was subjected to *shocking* footage depicting girls bought and sold, their living quarters, their taped testimonials, and their dancing on tables (*Prime Time Live*). The correspondent's grim tone and the anchor's anxious segues, however, were so much more grasping than the *Black Lust* pitch. The anchors winced and commented with neither wink nor nod. Their journalistic integrity demanded it. And besides, they warned us this material might not be suitable for younger or more sensitive viewers. Being neither young nor sensitive, we all knew what that meant: we're going to talk about sex, but we're not going to like it.

Which brings me to Catharine MacKinnon. MacKinnon is very good at talking about sex and not liking it. Not content to qualify (to code) her own work, MacKinnon has set out in her writing (which includes legislation) to impose a meta-header on all of pornography. Whatever the text may say

³ For bibliographies, see Walter Kendrick's *The Secret Museum: Pornography in Modern Culture*. For diaries from girls' school, see Lynn Hunt, ed., *The Invention of Pornography: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity, 1500-1800*. The phrasing "intended use" is borrowed from an unpublished seminar presentation by Deborah Lutz on the bibliophile/pornophile parallel at the CUNY Graduate Center, 2000.

about itself, any of the works MacKinnon targets are re-coded as texts about the degradation and exploitation of women and about men's hard-wired libidinal reaction to such. There's a bit of a chicken and the egg issue of whether a work is degrading because it's pornographic or vice versa, but no matter—conflation is the name of the game. To be fair, MacKinnon does cite some rather disturbing images, and she often makes a sound case for the degrading theme in the work she showcases. Her examples are extreme, however, and the pornographically uninitiated might accept MacKinnon's word that they are representative.

Where a headed work signals one that might be marked with subtlety or ambiguity, MacKinnon's *Only Words* is anything but, and coincidentally boasts a lengthy footer. She begins with a second person onslaught that collapses a number of individual accounts in a kind of pornographic retelling of the age of mechanical reproduction. As the text does not announce itself, but instead dives in, it is the diligent reader who wades through the footnotes to find that very specific antecedent to each offense or that very dubious injunction to "trust me" (113).

It's a distrust on MacKinnon's part that discounts the capacities of the reader, as if a great sexual disconnect—an inability to decode any message that deals with sex, impairs us all. I'm shocked by how well this text works performatively. Perhaps I am just overly Susceptible, but on every reading, I find the hot wax bit of the first few lines just the teensiest bit titillating, until, that is, MacKinnon reminds me this is torture. It seems no matter how you frame it, there's just no telling what will turn some people on. As a result, Catherine MacKinnon isn't taking any chances.

BANDWIDTH

Linda Williams' guide to the moving pornographic, *Hardcore: Power, Pleasure, and the Frenzy of the Visible*, details the cinematic evolution of hardcore from the stag film, identified with "primitive" cinema to the full length narrative "porno" (identified with raincoats). The distinguishing primitive characteristics Williams cites include brevity and "lack of narrative coherence." She describes one particular film *Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son* thus:

Not only does it center and fix the genital details of the sexual couplings that constitute its primary action, but it does so obsessively and repetitively—though without also providing temporal continuity. It is as if, having mastered the limited degree of narrative

technique necessary to bring the hardcore genital action into focus for the spectator, the stag film was then content to offer up these details as so many discontinuous spectacles, each separate shot being, we are to infer, a good enough show in itself (65).

Williams traces a "development" from stag's emphasis on meat (penetration) to narrative porno's emphasis on money (satisfaction, more specifically, ejaculation). She suggests that the latter accomplishes a more complicated narrative feat, comparing the stag's intention to arouse to the porno's intention to "offer satisfaction on more exclusively narrative terms." This assertion relies on an image of a man in an arcade booth feeding quarters into a machine, which plays the contemporary equivalent of a stag loop. He's masturbating, and the film stops when he does. This is contrasted with the image of a man in a porn theater audience, presumably with his hands folded in his lap. As the film ends, he (in Noel Burch's terms) "*withdraws satisfied*" from the narrative, needing never to unzip his pants (Williams 67-75).

I find this characterization dubious. It overlooks a culture of cruising and semi-public sex acts as well as the existence of pause buttons on VCRs. I argue that instead of looking at "modes of reception" to elucidate the marked differences between stag and porno, we should look further at the act of encoding. Williams gets at the issue herself when she mentions that the average stag film is a single reel, i.e., approximately 1,000 feet of film or 15 minutes. Considering that a typical porno might clock in around 80 minutes, that's at least four extras cans we have to account for. The question that begs is *What's filling up those four extra cans?*

The issue can be summed up in a word: bandwidth. Bandwidth refers to the amount of data in a message and the correlate capacity requirement of the conduit ("pipe") carrying that message. In digital terms, it's quite specifiable. An average email message runs anywhere from 2 to 5k (that's kilobytes), while the electronic file for this paper amounts to roughly 175k. You can watch the correlation of bandwidth and content as you move up your radio dial from around 80 MHz or so, where you find your local college stations, the odd jazz/classical station, up past the 90's and into the 100's, where most of the space is owned by the same entity (Clear Channel) but divvied up into format-driven, commercial-heavy rock, alternative, R&B, or Top 40.

A more relevant explication of bandwidth involves the porn mag *Hustler*. Started as little more than a pin-up advertisement for Larry Flynt's strip club, *Hustler* today is a multi-page pornographic phenomenon that's wriggled its way into the Supreme Court, popular film, and that bastard scholastic

endeavor–porn studies. Laura Kipnis, in her *Bound and Gagged* essays, reads *Hustler* for its ongoing assault on class privilege, normative depictions of sexuality, and any commonly held notion of taste or comfort. Discourses themselves tend to demand high bandwidth, and it wasn't until *Hustler* expanded beyond pamphlet size that the articulation of those cited made their way in.

Kipnis remarks:

[*Hustler*]'s commitment to disobedience and subordination, to truth-telling—as it sees truth, anyway—and exposing social hypocrisy prompts the question of whether it's *Hustler's political* project (fueled by Flynt's long-standing grudge match with the state) that makes it the most reviled instance of mass circulated porn. In other words, maybe it's not just those naked women (124).

In still other words, maybe it's the difference between signal and noise. If we consider naked women the signal and politics the noise of *Hustler's* message, it's easy to see how the low-bandwidth *Hustler* broadsheet was mainly signal and incidentally offensive, but noisy *Hustler* magazine drew fire. While noise technically is inadvertent distortion of the signal, in this context I note that noise can either "enhance" the signal or else undermine it. It's hard to imagine any accidental conformity or prudishness that might undermine the *Hustler* project—such is the benefit of coding a signal based on the rest of the world's conception of noise. It's those who are effecting taste who are more likely to suffer from noise distortion. As Kipnis notes in an aside, *Playboy*, in reaction to *Hustler*, tried to slum it a bit by "running a photo spread of a beautiful *post-operative* transsexual, unintentionally reminding readers that the requirement to become a *Playboy* centerfold is, as usual, simply vast amounts of cosmetic surgery and silicone, whether you're born male *or* female" (131).

This conception of noise is not all that different from what has been called a subtext, displaced text, repressed text, unconscious text, etc. The important distinction, however, is that noise is encoded into the message. It does not lie in wait, some enigma, for the scholar who will unlock it. Like static on television, noise can be read by anyone, and is. An additional caveat in considering noise is the general tendency, as evidenced by *Hustler*, toward an increase in noise with an increase in bandwidth. In fact, it's a pretty safe bet, getting back to Williams, that *noise* is what's filling up all those extra cans.

Just as those garrulous headers signaled a text uncomfortable in its skin, so the presence of significant noise suggests an otherwise anxious text. In the

low-bandwidth, low-noise stag film, we detect, on the contrary, a certain complacency. In Williams' words: "[...] the stag film was then content to offer up these details as so many discontinuous spectacles, each separate shot being, we are to infer, a good enough show in itself" (65). This would seem to suggest, as an evolutionary model, that we would have *started* with anxious, noisy, narrative porn and ended up at the pinnacle stag film. This runs completely counter to Williams' own suggested trajectory that sees "progress" in the technical and narrative complexity of late porno. If we take a good look at the development of porno, we find that neither trend is in evidence. Rather, we see wild oscillations from low-bandwidth, low-noise messages to high-bandwidth, high-noise and back down again.

Leaving the stags to prehistory, let's map some developments from the last 30 years. (For the record, this will be a quick fly-over.) Starting with vintage 70's narrative porno features (high-bandwidth, high-noise) we move through the 80's home video revolution (low-bandwidth, low-noise) and on to the 90's cable fare (high-bandwidth, high-noise) up through mid-90's Internet porno (low-bandwidth, low-noise) and expect some time in the next decade or two broadband (TV+Internet) porno to be high-bandwidth, high-noise. Before I begin, I'd like to acknowledge that there are certainly a variety of trends and counter trends within the larger culture and within the porno industry itself, and I am limiting my focus to the greater commercial trends. I'm less interested in devising a predictable trajectory (I don't even know what I'd prefer), and more interested in demonstrating the correlation among bandwidth, noise, and *anxiety*.

Perhaps the best testament to the anxiety evident in 70's narrative porno is the academic attention it attracts. Linda Williams sees in *Deep Throat* a "problematization of sex," a grappling with the elusiveness of the representation of pleasure (110, 113). In *The Devil In Miss Jones*, Denis Giles sees an intricate psychoanalytic confrontation with woman as lack. In looking for these titles at the local video store, I'm confronted with the standard home video fare—frenzies of parts and acts that hark back to the complacency of the stag film. These videos aren't categorized by drama, action, adventure. Rather, some problem-solving clerk devised a system of curvy m's and w's that loosely approximate butts and boobs. These angst-less texts aren't given so much academic attention.

If the narrative porno found itself grappling with extra film and time as well as a need to justify itself, it certainly came through in all that narrative noise. The advent of the VCR, however, offered a low-budget, quick-return market for working out the most utilitarian of products. As consumers (less anxious about their viewing) gave their feedback in rental and sales figures,

producers (less anxious about their bottom lines) responded by cutting out the noise. Out was *Behind the Green Door* and *The Opening of Misty Beethoven*. In was "blow, dog, mish, pop," shorthand for the porn formula blow job, doggie style, missionary, pop shot (O'Toole 180). It wasn't until the "couples' market" began to take off that noise got back into the picture.

There's a lot of guesswork involved in creating couple's porn. There's also a bigger budget, more story, and an approximation of artistry. One take on couple's porn is that it is for people who wait till the end of the movie to have sex, hence the laborious narrative. Laurence O'Toole sums it up as "all very *9 1/2 Weeks*," and purist porn star John "Buttman" Stagliano calls it "porno for people who don't like having sex" (O'Toole 182, 210). Whatever it is, it's making a killing. Be it premium video or pay-per cable, there's a market out there ready to pay for a little extra bandwidth.

DIRECTION

No discussion of porn today is complete without an homage to the Internet. But as most Internet connections (at least to the home) are at present technically low-bandwidth, the significance of porn on the Net lies elsewhere. There's this particular Net porn pic I keep stumbling upon. It's a photo of a woman inserting a fish into her vagina (Fig. 1). I saw it first as a print-out someone else had made from a for-pay bestiality site, and while it's not technically the kind of conjugal image one expects from beastie-porn, I imagine the site producers just couldn't pass it up. The fish fuck image is also available at mulletsgalore.com, a Web site dedicated to the ridicule of a hairstyle dubbed the "mullet" and any unfortunate who wears one. There's a feature section on mullet porn, and again, the pun was too good to resist. I've come upon this image twice, as I stated, but I've been mucking about in porn for a good while now. The Average Person, uninterested in fish fucks, has probably been carrying on unmolested.

To the contrary, when a particular intern, with the assistance of a particular world leader, inserted a cigar into her vagina, there was not a man, woman, or child (in the Western world, at least) spared that knowledge. Such is the nature of "push" media. Mass communication, until very recently, has relied upon a model of one-to-many, very many. One (well-funded, corporate) sender encodes a message and then broadcasts it, prints it, or otherwise exposes it to huge chunks of the population. There's very little barrier to receiving the message—you turn on your TV/radio, open your newspaper, or glance at the ads on the train. The peculiar side effects of mass communication, its function as national parlance and media outlets'

incestuous cross-pollination, ensure that whether you watch ABC or care to read the *New York Times*, you won't escape knowing what's being peddled by both. Ever hear of JonBenet? Monica? Darva? Chandra? How about Richard Jewel? Elian Gonzales? or that guy who lost weight eating only Subway sandwiches?

On the other hand, you may be unaware that physicists at the University of Washington have measured the value of G, the gravitational constant, to within 0.0014% or that Hustler is now featuring pee shots (AIP, Madebyredaktion). The basic nature of "pull" media requires of the consumer some form of request for information prior to transmission. The economics warn that the material itself is of limited appeal. Hardcore porn offers a prime example. With hardcore, you've got to know what you're looking for, and you've got to ask for it. Until very recently, that meant pointing to the magazine up on that top shelf or dipping behind that "adults only" curtain at the video store. These barriers of access to hardcore were understood to keep children and other impressionable types away from such material. But it undoubtedly functioned to keep a good many good husbands and curious wives away too.

The Internet, however, changed all that. To find anything on the Net, you've simply got to type in a request or click on a link. In the early days, the Internet was all pull. Newbies (users new to the Web) spent loads of time surfing, trying to get a feel for what was out there. The limitless number of domain addresses guaranteed you'd never see it all. Today, a number of major media corporations have teamed up to build "portal" sites that have reconfigured the Net experience into something much more like push media. They've colonized a certain percentage of WWW servers, but there remains an awful lot to pull from, physics news and porn included.

The offline hysteria surrounding children, pornography, and the Internet⁴ is really a swirl of at least two main themes: child as victim, child as innocent. First is the concern that children are being targeted and victimized by child molesters and/or child pornographers (there, no distinction necessary). This dark and bizarre pop cultural fantasy has caught on since the widespread kidnap worries of the eighties and speaks much more to American preoccupations than to actual crime statistics (Kipnis 3-63).

⁴ As epitomized by the June 1995 Time Magazine cover story "On a Screen Near You: Cyberporn," complete with image of child being lured into computer.

The second concern regards child as innocent. Without those barriers like trips downtown, or cash on hand, the theory goes, little Johnny can simply sit at home and be inundated with porn. Despite lower barriers, porn on the Net is still pull media, and overlooking that significance suggests a concern not for those who are innocent by nature, but those who are innocent by default.⁵ Besides children, this class includes good husbands, curious wives, and any of the rest of us who might have trouble walking up to another person and asking for pictures of women vomiting on each other. (Which leaves, more or less, academics, artists, and the truly depraved—but more of that in a moment.)

As antidote to the anxiety many people experience in attempts to "pull" pornographic material, mass media generally push plenty of noisy, ambiguously coded sexual content. No need to go to *schoolgirlfantasy.com* when Ross is dating one of his students on *Friends*. You don't have to actually pay for a Russian sex slave, not when *The Dallas Morning News* is doing a thoughtful and provocative exposé on the topic. And anyway, aren't those Kenneth Cole ads (Fig. 2) during your rush hour commute doing it for you?

DEVIATION

It is *anxiety* which animates and inflates "softcore" media; it demands higher bandwidth and garbles the header. Anxiety does not, however, translate one-to-one to prudishness. Consider the couples' market. It's unlikely that, in Stagliano's words, high-band pornography is simply "porn for people who don't like having sex" (O'Toole 210). More likely it is porn for people the tiniest bit more anxious about sex than the "Buttman" himself. Couples or individuals who watch these movies, and proceed to get it on (whether during or after) are well aware that the sex they're having is related to their watching the movie. They're probably even aware that the movie is turning them on. Undoubtedly, they're also aware that there is plenty of fare out there a lot freakier/kinkier/more explicit than *The Red Shoe Diaries*.

⁵ Consider those kids from suburban Cleveland, three boys and a girl, ages 14 to 17, who videotaped *themselves* having sex. The tape was quickly reproduced and has since spread-- apparently across the nation. There's also the New Jersey 14 year old who was busted for sending child porn to an FBI investigator. See Steinberg, David. "Comes Naturally #87" *Sexuality.org*. 27 August 1999. [2 November 2001] <<http://www.sexuality.org/1/davids/cn87.html>>.

Likewise academic porn. *Deep Throat* or even *The Devil in Miss Jones* is hardly the raciest flick ever made. These two top the porn studies "reading list," however, and they offer a fix beyond the autonomic turn-on. It's the same story with those Kenneth Cole ads on the train (Fig. 2). The kind of amateur/low budget porn with unconventionally attractive young people that the ads quote is out there—in spades. The perk you get, though, with the softcore movie or the academic text or the racy advertising, is extra noise, ambiguous coding, "the media" pushing it at you—in short, any of a variety of structures for accommodating anxiety.

It is important to note that all these media messages are shuttling about within a consumer culture. Whatever sexual acts may coincide, the consumption of these media products is primarily a commercial act. Consumer culture depends upon a certain level of low-grade anxiety buzzing through the populace, urging us to consume in order to quell it. Of course that brand of anxiety can never be quelled, and that's why it all works so well. The consumerist pitch is writ large in high-bandwidth noise. Consider *Playboy's* packaging as the product of a "lifestyle." And think of all those gems coming out of orifices in couple's porn (O'Toole 182). That worry that the Jones's drive a better car is rather entwined with the worry that the Jones's also have better sex.

This is not, however, to imply that consumers of hardcore comprise a class of the extremely well adjusted or that they operate outside of a capitalist structure. As described in the previous sections, "hardcore" indicates a constellation of media products that declare themselves as pornography, dispense with extra bandwidth, and are generally accessed by pull-your-Hardcore-Cheerleaders and your Buttman videos. The hardcore message, however, focuses not on anxiety, but *satiety*. See the pretty cheerleader. Enter your credit card information. Now see the pretty cheerleader naked. The economics of satiety dispense with the need for a subtle and intricate pitch, and this is why hardcore can look so clumsy, from a consumerist perspective, next to a slick feed-your-anxiety spiel. From a market perspective, however, it's simply a matter of strategy.

This satiety pursuit indicates what I will call a "pornography" culture, one that addresses the problem of *recurrent* desire with a supply of hardcore material. Contending with this trend is the traffic in anxiety, the problem of *persistent* desire that is solved simply by maintaining it through coyly coded, lots of noise, push media-products of a "pornographic" culture.

It works like so: Pornography announces itself. (Think Naked Cheerleaders.) The pornographic demurs. (Think *National Geographic*.) Pornography

promises satiety. (Think come shot.) The pornographic traffics in anxiety. (Think Bob Dole hawking Viagra.) Pornography depends upon recurrent desire. (Think pay-per.) The pornographic desire is persistent. (To be continued...) Pornography's best customer is the addict; the pornographic's the neurotic. (And aren't we all a little of both?)

Most importantly, perhaps, pornography is illicit, while the pornographic is generally sanctioned. This is typically constructed as a legitimacy issue. While pornographic texts may have a story or a moral, or at least good lighting, pornography is often lambasted as a simple masturbatory aid, as utterly lacking in literary artistic, social, or political value (LASP). Dubious as this distinction is, it's a functional one. It codifies a high/low divide and traces the boundary between "normal" and "deviant."

It is a societal classification, however, one which functions in the workplace and at the dinner table. From a market perspective, the concept of deviance is moot. Anything that can be sold will be. The salient distinction between hardcore and softcore is the size of the audience.

ANXIETY AND SATIETY

To illustrate, I offer a few significant cultural byproducts. Consider our government's two most laborious accounts of sex: *The Meese Report* and *The Starr Report*. *The Meese Report* (né *The Final Report of the Attorney General's Commission on Pornography*, 1985,) itself a sanctioned text, catalogues nonetheless every manner of illicit act, and it's cited most often by such pull fanatics as academics and activists. *The Starr Report* (*The Findings of Independent Counsel Kenneth W. Starr on President Clinton and The Lewinsky Affair*, 1998,) on the other hand, was hailed as pornographic before it was even released, with every pundit slyly winking. It went straight to paperback.

That paperback is an astounding read. It capitulates in lurid detail what has got to be the most neurotic, least satisfying tale of seduction ever told. *The Report* itself is justified as a dogged illustration of eleven acts which "may constitute grounds for an impeachment" (5-6). The acts take two pages to enumerate, and then another 400+ to detail. There is a list of key dates (7-8), and then the *dramatis personae* (9-18), which includes every insider and outsider from Yitzak Rabin to Matt Drudge. There is an introduction, written by Starr's office, (19-30), but this is tucked away well behind the nine (yes, nine) introductory analyses, written by *Washington Post* staff (IX to LIII), as well as the Publisher's Note (LIV).

Bearing 75+ pages of header, indicating no less than eleven viewpoints on the nature and significance of the work, I would hasten to call *The Starr Report* ambiguously coded. That effort is echoed as affect in the body of the work itself, which embarrassingly quotes Lewinsky and Clinton's uninspired lovers' code and double-entendre.

A letter dated September 30, 1997, styled as an official memo, was found in Ms. Lewinsky's apartment. According to Ms. Lewinsky, she sent this letter or a similar one to the President. Addressed to "Handsome" and bearing the subject line "The New Deal," the faux memo proposed a visit that evening after "everyone else goes home." Ms. Lewinsky wrote: "You will show me that you will let me visit you sans a crisis, and I will be on my best behavior and not stressed out when I come (to see you, that is)" (95).

Lewinsky and Clinton's obsession with orgasm, with consummation, became a national obsession as well. As Linda Williams notes, in certain forms of pornography, and in the popular culture at large, the female orgasm is discounted as altogether too complicated and difficult to confirm, while the male orgasm, with its spectacular display, is emblematic of pleasure, of satisfaction (49, 194). Clinton consistently postponed his own orgasm throughout the affair, and we all know what happened when he finally came. That blue dress and its DNA "sample" provided harsh recrimination for Clinton's willingness to abandon the anxiety of his situation and seek satiation. It chided the public as well, which was so content to rehearse forever the technicalities of sex, the probability of his guilt, the hypocrisy of everyone from the Congress to the feminists to the media. But then Clinton, finally caught, apologized to us all, and the satisfaction of knowing was no satisfaction at all.

Far more satisfying, and indeed utilitarian, is the compendium of magazines, books, and films included in *The Meese Report*. Forget finding one of these actual publications, just perusing the titles is a kick all its own:

JUST FOR LUST (BA, DC)
 JUST FOR YOU (BA, PA)
 JUST FUCK ME (DC, NY)
 JUST ME AND TWO DICKS (PA)
 JUST MEN (BA, DC, PA)
 KAREN SWALLOWS CUM (BA, DC, BN)
 KEYHOLE (PA)
 KIDNAPPED GIRLS AGENCY (DC)
 KING OF THE THOROUGHBREDS (PA) (395).

This goes on for 30+ pages. Satisfaction is afforded the "deviant," who takes pleasure in the titles themselves, as well as the "activist," "citizen," or other concerned party, who takes satisfaction in the evidence of deviance. To call *The Meese Report* hardcore is almost an understatement. Granted, there is arduous contextualization, but the hardcore content is set off in bullets, charts, tables, and summaries for easy reference and consumption. In detailing a Canadian study on the effects of pornography, report authors comment on the classificatory difficulties porn can sometimes pose:

[...]The stimulus materials were constructed (primarily because no materials could be found that exclusively contained the intended manipulations) from existing commercially available entertainment videos to represent one of the following:

1. Sexual violence – Scenes of sexual intercourse which included a woman strapped to a table and being penetrated by a large plastic penis.
2. Sexually explicit and degrading – Scenes of sexual activity which included a man masturbating into a woman's face while sitting on top of her.
3. Sexually explicit – Sex activities leading up to intercourse between a man and a woman (297).

Overlooking, with extraordinary restraint, the conditions where government-backed researchers double as pornographers, generating tailor-made hardcore re-mixes,⁶ I note the satisfaction, for the deviant, the activist, the citizen, who scans *The Report* and happens on this hardcore nugget.

In keeping with the hardcore format, *The Meese Report* is rather unambiguously coded. There is a publisher's preface, which in no uncertain terms defines the project: the government's and the publisher's. The publishers lament the exclusion of certain specific quotations of hardcore books, movies, and videos, not for decency's sake, but on account of copyright. The publishers chose to relocate at the end of the report the commissioners' biographies, acknowledgements, notes, and statements, i.e., the "header" content provided by the Commission. The publishers insert

⁶ Check, J.V.P. The effects of violent and non-violent pornography. Report to the Department of Justice, Ottawa, Canada. 1985.

their own introduction by a Michael J. McManus, reporter with a mission, who followed the Commission through every trial and tribulation. Though rambling, McManus' introduction is "on message." It positions the work as a hardcore guide for the citizen/activist. "Anyone who studies the *Report* will become equipped to be an effective advocate for enforcement of existing laws against hardcore pornography and child pornography" (ix). Satisfaction guaranteed.

PORNOGRAPHY AND THE PORNOGRAPHIC

And then there's Calvin Klein. We had all gotten used to those grainy noirish Obsession cologne ads when the child-porn series of jeans advertisements came along in the summer of '95. Nothing really outstanding happens in either. One Obsession commercial relentlessly travels Kate Moss's blank face as waves crash somewhere. A lovelorn male voice (possessed by someone equally sexy, we presume) whispers, "I love you, Kate." We think 40's film. We think consuming passion. We think gendered psychoses like hysteria and jealous rage.

In the jeans ads, youngish models in jeans and tank tops or no tops sit in a wood paneled room and answer questions from a speaker positioned behind the camera. The kids giggle or squirm and answer to the camera. Immediately we think 70's shag. Someone's basement. Wait a minute, this is an audition for some two-bit porno! When it was discovered that some of the models in the ads were underage, the campaign was labeled kiddie porn and pulled. It didn't matter that the kids weren't actually doing anything close to having sex. What was important was that it made us think of these kids having sex—and not like Kate's grainy sex near the beach, but like 70's pornography.

With the Calvin Klein ads, it's all in the noise, and Obsession ads mimicked noise from sanctioned genres. The jeans ads simply didn't. In fact, it seems the culture now unconditionally reads Calvin Klein for sex, and wood paneling for porn (Fig. 3-4). It happens that Britney Spears was caught in the same trap at the 2000 MTV Music Awards. When the teen princess abruptly shifted from a high-bandwidth, naughty schoolgirl brand of trampiness to low-band stripper tease, moms were suddenly worried (Fig. 5).

Advertising, while generally short-format, is inherently high-band. Because advertising is pushed to a mass audience, anxiety must be triggered by a subtle and well-crafted hint, one that will make it past the network censors. Innuendo, as Ms. Lewinsky demonstrates, is softcore. And so, until very

recently, even advertisements for pornography had to conform to the pornographic culture's mores if they were intended to have mass exposure. The usual tricks are predictable: a compelling interview with Hugh Hefner on a prime time news show, a cinematic retelling of the trials of Larry Flynt—odd contributions to the anxiety traffic that might or might not pay off in subscription sales. The dawn of the Internet age, however, has enabled pornography to advertise on pornography's terms. It's called porn spam, an uninvited email pitch for pornography on the Web. Following is a typical sample:

```
LIVE XXX ACTION Voted#1 site on the
net!!!
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```
ANYTHING GOES ON THIS SITE!!!
FULL OF WET HORNY VIRGIN TEENS!!
You must be of legal age to view this
site as it is very sexually explicit.
Cum see us now
```

```
http://1043619229/austie/index.htm
(email from 44hgfh7@wmin.ac.uk)
```

Low bandwidth, low noise, an anything but subtle pitch, the porn spam operates on a satiety model. Unlike Kate's vacant stare, which awakens some nameless want for an unattainable vision of sustained sexual intensity, and which may or may not lead you to hedge your bets and buy a bottle of cologne, with porn spam, you're one click (and a credit card number) away from wet horny virgin teens. And while the porn spam is the electronic equivalent of a mass mailing, it is nearly impossible to regulate, try as legislators might.

If pornography and the pornographic are both characterized by very specific "rules of play," they are not, however, exclusive models. Pornography culture and pornographic culture coexist within a larger consumer context, and many of us move within both. Indeed the same consumer who clicks for tits might also suffer that weird ache the best advertising for Versace or Volkswagon can induce. And just as no person is bound to one camp or the other, neither is any message.

The fall of 1999 saw another bold attempt by pornography to advertise in the mainstream. Pornpreneur Ron Harris let slip a little press release announcing he would be auctioning off the eggs (yeah, like ovary) of a number of actresses and models. It was all a thinly veiled ruse to drive traffic to his porn site, but the push media jumped on it. Newspapers across

America debated the ethics of beauty engineering, while anyone really interested could visit the site to find a typical pay-to-see-the-goods scheme with teaser images of models from Ron's other sites. Ron himself was scuttling to cover his tracks, but it didn't matter. Most reporters eventually learned of the hoax, and waxed idiotic about the ethical issues anyway (Moreno).⁷

No one really needed another porn site on the Web, at least not one that was so ambiguous about its actual project. It seems the message of the models' eggs was better suited to a pornographic culture. A story about attractive women and their private parts, coded as news, and packed with lots of ethico-philosophical noise that got pushed to the public for several days turned out to be just what we needed for a little dose of anxiety about sex, science, the status of women. The pornography itself dropped out of the story.

A message which seems to have migrated in the opposite direction is *Deep Throat*. *Deep Throat* opened in 1972 at the New World Theater in Manhattan, and it was the pornography industry's hope and delusion that porn was about to go mainstream. "Regular" couples made an evening of *Deep Throat*, and word got out that this skin flick had a plot (O'Toole 70-75). In retrospect, it looks as if *Deep Throat* simply enjoyed the benefit of a brief period of porn chic among the style set, a trend that be would recycled and mass marketed in the 90's with porn revival. For those of us who weren't around at the time, it's antithetical to consider *Deep Throat* in its day as a potential crossover hit, especially when all of its porn attempts for legitimacy—the flimsy plot, the goofy editing, low budget effects, and ridiculous sound track now read as standard coding for pornography, and *Deep Throat* has entered the hardcore canon.

If *Deep Throat* didn't play the expected role of carrying pornography into the mainstream, it did in any case function very briefly in a pornographic context. *Deep Throat* operated on the anxiety model that warns the masses that the hippest, chicest, and latest may be too much for them. The truly anxious responded by lining up for tickets. It's uncertain whether *Deep Throat* also operated in its day on a satiety model. With its historical context, it's a little difficult to approach it now as potentially libidinally satisfying, much in the way classic horror films aren't really very scary. But

⁷ ABCnews.com even links to the site <<http://www.ronsangels.com>>, where, above banner ads populated by naked women, Ron boasts, "Over 5,000 articles and 500 television stations worldwide have featured Ron's Angels."

we shouldn't just chalk it up to camp. *Deep Throat* is still a favorite among aficionados and porn scholars, offering multiple other fixes. Read in the context of cinematic porn, it conforms to a variety of generic expectations. Viewed with the Linda Lovelace story in mind, it can be scanned for any indication of coercion or drug induced impairment. Based on consumption, *Deep Throat* has more in common with specialty pull media like vintage *Star Trek* than with racy mainstream fare like *Sex and the City*.

THE CENTER AND THE MARGINS

Indeed the push/pull distinction is in many ways the real story behind the high/low divide. At present, low pornography (as distinguished from erotica) is considered the rightful province of artists, academics, and the truly depraved—those generally perceived as either above or below morality. We've grown well accustomed to the notion of high culture looting low culture, smoothing the edges and feeding it to the masses. It's what brought us heroin chic, S/M chic, gangsta chic, et cetera.

Just as persistent as the high/low binary is a gendered reading of porn, both by academics and the lay public. Academics have given women short shrift in theorizations of porn. Intricate analyses of male viewing have proposed sophisticated gender identification schema (Williams) and the rehearsal and neutralization of male anxiety through fantasy production (Giles). And then there's a lot of *woman as lack* (from Laura Mulvey on down.) In the popular imagination, the pornography/pornographic divide is gendered as well. The mushy, noisy, softcore couple's programming on pay-per view was devised for the neurotic feminine, while the masculine hardcore addict has been popularized by *Oprah* and theorized in Dworkin-MacKinnon legislation.

What has been put forth alternately as a high/low, masculine/feminine distinction, however, is really a matter of cartography. In the absence of a true avant garde, consumer culture depends upon a market mechanism, based on limited audience and obscurity of reference, which pushes what was once pulled. It is the center looting the margins.

This relentless recycling, this fattening and winnowing of media themes undercuts any notion of deviance as an organizing principle. It is a market imperative and not some moral overlay which distinguishes licit and illicit, hard and soft, the seemly and the un.

SELECTED IMAGES

Fig. 1. The Average Person, uninterested in fish porn, has probably never encountered the image above. To the contrary, when a particular intern, with the assistance of a particular world leader, inserted a cigar into her vagina, there was not a man, woman, or child spared that knowledge. Source: Mulletts Galore Web site
<<http://www.mulletsgalores.com>>



Fig. 2. The kind of amateur/low budget porn with unconventionally attractive young people that the Kenneth Cole ads quote is out there—in spades. Source: Kenneth Cole Web site
<<http://www.kennethcole.com>>



Fig. 3. Calvin Klein's Obsession ads suggest 40's film, consuming passion, gendered psychoses like hysteria and jealous rage. Source: Calvin Klein Ads Unofficial Archive
 <<http://pobox.upenn.edu/~davidtoc/images/ck.kate6.jpg>>



Fig. 4. Meanwhile the jeans ads feature wood paneling, noise the popular culture associates with amateur porn. Source: Calvin Klein Ads Unofficial Archive
 <http://pobox.upenn.edu/~davidtoc/images/ck.chi1d_ad2.jpg>



Fig. 5. When Britney Spears abruptly shifted from a high-bandwidth, naughty schoolgirl brand of trampiness to low-band stripper tease, moms were suddenly worried Source: <<http://www.charlotte.com/justgo/ent/mtvvideo2000/art/1152mtv2k8.jpg>>

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