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When I began working on *The Price of Pleasure* over 4 years ago, I expected, more than anything, to learn the process of filmmaking. That the film's topic was to be pornography was, at the time, of a secondary consideration. I had what can be considered conventional liberal beliefs about pornography and the contemporary pornography industry – pornography was free speech; pornography represented a liberatory sexuality, intervening in the repressive moral codes of religion, conservatism, and infantilizing protectionism; that pornography was a “free” choice, made by both consumers and performers who made their living by engaging in sex onscreen; and I had also assumed that the majority of the pornography out there looked very much the like the pornography I had experienced as an adolescent, or saw at bachelor parties during my career in investment banking – mostly “conventional” sexual practices, with a nominal degree of mutuality.

I will not attempt to say that these assumptions were simply false, but they certainly weren't true, either. During and after the process of making this film, I realized the complexity that marks the relationships between pornography, sexuality, gender roles and identity, fantasy, and pleasure. I also discovered a politics that the analysis of pornography enabled. That is, the complex patterns of social and sexual expressions are inexorably linked to our economic system in a mutually constructing dance. It is this complexity that, I believe, is precisely how this film moves beyond the binary rhetorics of the so-called “porn wars” of the 80's and 90's, while also giving us a way to understand – and challenge – the politics of representation, and its tendency to focus on aesthetics.

This film is not a simple history of pornography, although we recognize the historical contingencies, especially related to technology. The film is not an indictment nor a celebration of an “absolutist” First Amendment, although we acknowledge that legal practices and outcomes are intimately linked with concentrations of power. The film is not a moral judgment on performers, nor a simple acceptance of choice as an unconstrained expression of freedom and liberation; we acknowledge the difficult, and sometimes imprisoning, conditions which choices are made, while respecting an individual's agency to exert some measure of control over their lives. And finally, this film is not about a claim of effects that equates pornography with rape, nor do we subscribe to the notion that pornographic media has no effect on our identities, sexual desires, and pleasures.

So, then, what is this film about? Over the four years, we've struggled to be able to answer that question in a single sentence. During the multiple rough-cut screenings, we would often hear, “What's your thesis?” After thousands of hours of debate, frustration, thinking, and engagement with one another, I believe it is safe to say that if you have difficulty finding a central thesis, that is precisely the point. It is not that the film is lacking a thesis, but rather that the thesis is not reducible to a sound-bite that would be sufficient. We want audiences to work, to engage and locate their own point of entry into the film, rather than offering a reductive sentence which can easily be accepted or rejected without engaged contemplation.

We struggled through the post-production of the film to strike a “tone” that would best intervene in the discourse of pornography. At different points in the process, one of us felt the film needed more didacticism (usually me); one of us would be frustrated at the lack of narrative imagery (usually Miguel); or one of us would be hesitant to make certain claims visible (all of us). I can not describe the role that Chyng Sun played through this process, as she consistently held that audiences are complex, thoughtful, and capable of dealing with ambiguity. I am deeply indebted to Chyng for (finally) teaching me how to strike that balance between polemic didacticism, and allowing for audiences to locate themselves in the text, and to assemble complex meanings from the film's narrative.

I agree with Chyng in saying that for those audiences who expect a neat outcome with a perfect resolution to the issue will be disappointed. Deeply disappointed. For those audiences who wish to confront the intervention we've made, we hope that the ensuing process and discussions are fertile, productive and allows for some insight – we look forward to hearing and learning about these in the weeks and months to come.

I would also contend that for those who are seeking a singular “feminist” perspective will undoubtedly be disappointed. I say this not to imply a rejection of feminism, but rather as a way to acknowledge that there are multiple feminisms. As is plainly evident in this film, the term “feminist” itself is contested, and one of the most significant tensions we as filmmakers experienced is an external need to collapse the film into a unitary and stable “feminist” perspective. “Radical feminism” comes the closest, perhaps, to elucidating the theoretical roots of the film. Our understanding of radical feminism stresses the “radical,” where we insist on questioning the roots, assumptions and institutions which dominate our culture from the perspectives and experiences of those most often silenced and invisible. Even then, the multiple contingencies of social location, institutions, and practices continues to insist that we assume a multiplicity of feminisms. To what degree any form of feminism is “right” or holds a particular “truth”, we leave that for audiences to find for themselves, and stress the ways in which these feminisms link up.

No film is produced without its own internal politics and competing values. Many of these tensions we experienced in the making of the film are indeed reflected in the film’s text. Many are also left out, due to the limits of representation or conventions of filmmaking. The frames of the film text both allow an engaging screen for audiences, while also screening out the processes that lie “outside the frame.” For instance, one can not “see” the debate about the decision to use graphic imagery. As one can tell from the film, we decided that the graphic and explicit imagery was a crucial element in revealing the character and nature of the images found in popular pornography today. To not include these images would have distorted the reality of what is being actively consumed by viewers – a distorted version of reality that, interestingly, benefits the porn industry, enabling the industry to continue to construct an image of pornography that is harmless, sexual representations of consensual sexual activity, and masks the ideological world that pornography depicts (to see our research which examines the content of the most popular pornography videos, see our peer-reviewed article in the “Resources” section of this site). The internecine ways in which mainstream media has increasingly condoned, profited from and distributed pornography is largely left out of the film’s text, as the scope of mainstream media’s involvement with the porn industry is both tangential and obfuscated in official financial and marketing reports. Time Warner’s annual report, for example, is remarkable for the absence of revenue from pay-per-view pornography offered on their cable systems; and the relationship between Time Warner’s subsidiary HBO and its predilection for content that celebrates the pornography industry and sex work (e.g. Pornocopia and Cathouse) does not easily translate into one way that Time Warner produces a market for their pay-per-view offerings. Also, the complexity of the choices faced by performers, producers, and viewers is apparent, while the multiple contingencies which limit the action of any social actor are inadequately comprehensive. There are many more such moments to cite, and I leave it to audiences to not only identify these tensions, but to “fill in” the gaps that exist outside the frame.

Earlier in this essay, I asked, “What is this film about?” I still hope I haven’t answered the question in any reductive or deterministic way. I will offer my opinion of what the film offers: A chance to develop a politics that will enable the world to be a better place. At the time of this writing, the United States is waging 2 (official) brutal wars, indiscriminately destroying lives and ways of being. The United States’ and global economy has never experienced a moment of such extreme disparities in wealth distribution, where so many lives exist in squalor, hunger, stress, and disease. The global environment is in peril, threatening to cease providing us with ways of life. More jobs are performed under precarious, monotonous, and alienated conditions than ever before. Intolerance of differences, so biting for so long, continue to rationalize a multitude of inhumane values, actions and laws. Gender inequality is real throughout the globe, and racial inequality has taken on a new, permanent character.

What does all of this have to do with pornography? Everything. You will often hear defenders of the pornography industry claim that with such dire events occurring all over the planet, why focus on pornography as a site of critique? Surely, they often say, there are far greater concerns for attention than pornography, especially when it provides jobs and is engaged in consensually.

While those claims are not wrong, they are distorted, and reflect a worldview that nothing is connected, and that media images have nothing to do with reality. Certainly, there is no *direct* way that pornography produces the myriad of inequities and injustices in the world today. At its best, pornography robs us from a more open,

engaged and creative sexuality, as it inscribes normative definitions of pleasure and desire while excluding any challenges that might appear in response its narrow, market proven definition of sexuality. At its worst, pornography reproduces a world view that valorizes the accumulation of economic and social power. Using the bodies of men and women in their content, pornography mobilizes its audiences to see the world as a contest for power, competing for scarce resources, visibility and acceptance. These concepts produce the very system which presents sex work as a viable, if not necessary, labor choice; these concepts produce an imperialist view of gender and race, where male white power attempts to retain its "way of life", no matter the consequences. Just as the economic logic of capitalism situates nature as an object to wield power over, in order to exploit (and exhaust) the world's resources, the logic of pornography and its articulations of dominance rationalize this worldview that everything is for sale, exploitation, and exhaustion. As Maria Mies has eloquently stated, feminism rejects this "power over" construct, and advocates a world of "power with" – a more just and equal way of organizing and relating. At the end of the film, Bob Jensen claims that a critique of pornography doesn't "take us to the San Fernando valley...but rather into our own bedrooms." I can think of no other statement that captures what is at stake in the intervention this film attempts. An examination of our own desire, ways of attaining pleasure, fantasies, identities and sexualities are not separate spheres in the human psyche. More importantly, they are not isolated from the social world in which we inhabit, but rather are intricately informed by the connection between the two. Fantasy is not a sacrosanct place where the social world ends and our imaginations begin; fantasy is, perhaps, the most illustrative way to identify our own complexity, where we can identify and locate the array of experiences, forces, and images which enable us to both imagine a better world, and find the limits to what is possible. The images that pornography provides rob us of our own creative capacity, and colonize our fantasies, desires and ideas of pleasure as objects to be consumed, rather than shared and experienced among one another. In order to create a better world, we need new fantasies, new desires and pleasures that acknowledge our own and the world's vulnerabilities, and that reject the world that pornography proposes.