

THE “FINE ART” OF PORNOGRAPHY?:  
THE CONFLICT BETWEEN ARTISTIC VALUE AND  
PORNOGRAPHIC VALUE

CHRISTOPHER BARTEL  
APPALACHIAN STATE UNIVERSITY

bartelcj@appstate.edu

**The Problem Introduced**

Can pornographic works have artistic value? Much pornography closely resembles art, at least in many superficial respects. Films, photographs, paintings, literary works—all of these can have artistic value. Of course, films, photographs, paintings and novels can be pornographic too. Is there any reason to believe that pornographic works cannot have artistic value?

We might get a better grasp of these issues by examining the kinds of attention that we pay to works of art and works of pornography. When attending to an object, whether it is an image, a text, or a piece of music, we can take an *artistic interest* in the work. Typically, when we do this, we will offer criticisms, interpretations or judgments of the work; and the result of these activities seem to be fundamentally what we are concerned with when we attend to an object artistically. We can also take a *pornographic interest* in a work—our interest in the work is in the service of our own sexual arousal. That these two kinds of interest in a work are distinct should be immediately obvious—one need not be sexually aroused in order to appreciate the artistic value of a work, and one need not appreciate the artistic value of a work in order to be sexually aroused. But is it ever the case that one actually must be sexually aroused in order to appreciate the artistic value of a work?

Of course, I imagine that it is possible for someone to take a pornographic interest in a work at one time and take an artistic interest in the work at another time. A viewer could take an artistic interest in the texturing on Michelangelo’s *David* at one time, and at another time simply

take an interest in David. That is not very interesting. Think again of the initial question I asked—can pornographic works have artistic value? While some philosophers and art theorists have argued that they cannot,<sup>1</sup> other philosophers have argued that they can, but these “pro-pornographic-art” philosophers also seem to suggest that the artistic value of the work is somewhat independent of the work’s pornographic content—that is, a work can have artistic value *despite* its having pornographic content.<sup>2</sup> I think that is probably true; however I also find that to be a fairly weak argument. This claim is essentially the observation that one is able to take multiple kinds of interests in a work, which is not surprising. There are many kinds of interests and many kinds of values that one can attribute to a work—artistic, historical, financial, sentimental and of course pornographic. Certainly while these interests and values can sometimes be related, often they are not—a child’s finger painting might be artistically poor but still have great sentimental value to the child’s parents, or a work that currently demands a high financial value might turn out later to be historically unimportant.<sup>3</sup>

A stronger argument in defense of the “pro-pornographic-art” view would hold that a work has its artistic value *by virtue of* its having some pornographic content. This would be the claim that, in some instances at least, one discovers the artistic value of a work through taking a pornographic interest in that work—that it is a necessary condition for appreciating some work artistically that one take a pornographic interest in that work. That would be very interesting if true. Unfortunately, I think that it probably is not. The purpose of this essay is to explain why. To explain this, we will need to address the following questions: What does it mean to take a “pornographic interest” in a work? What does it mean to take an “artistic interest” in a work? And finally, is it ever the case that one discovers the artistic value of a work through taking a

pornographic interest in that work? This last question is the philosophical “money shot” of this essay.

## **Two Caveats**

Before I begin, two caveats. In this essay, most of the examples I discuss are taken from the visual arts. Despite this, the argument I am making is general enough, *mutatis mutandis*, that it would apply to all cases of pornography in whatever form they make take. The general question I am asking is whether or not the aims of the production of pornography are consistent with the aims of the production of works of art. This general question could be applied equally well across all genres, styles and forms of art, and in each instance the question is a pertinent one. Certainly, special problems may arise in the case of some art forms, problems that other art forms would avoid. Is pornographic literature necessarily artistically inferior as it seemingly must rely on clichéd or repetitive literary devices that limit the work’s artistic scope?<sup>4</sup> Is it possible for pure music to be pornographic?<sup>5</sup> While these are certainly interesting questions, it is not my intention to address them here. Additionally, most of the examples I discuss are works that are typically intended for heterosexual males. However, this choice is not because I wish to promote any hetero-normative conception of sexuality. Rather this choice is motivated by a desire to write with some authenticity! The validity of the argument presented here is not dependent on my choice of examples; rather my argument should be general enough to apply to all cases of pornography regardless of what sexual orientation that pornography assumes.

Second, I really do not think that my question—can pornographic works have artistic value—has very much to do with whether or not pornographic works should count as *art*. My thinking is that whether pornography should be classified as art or not has little to do with the interests

that these works serve for us or the values that we attribute to these works. Still, should works of pornography count as art? Seeking an answer to this question would be frustratingly complicated. We would first need to establish a satisfactory definition of *art*, which would be a particularly difficult task, and an examination of these problems would take us too far afield. Even if we had a satisfactory definition of art, we would then need to understand the reason to ever think that pornographic works might be restricted from being art. Is there some moral reason to think that pornography cannot be art? While some may be tempted to think so, this seems intuitively groundless to me. Is it necessarily true that all pornographic works are immoral? And if so, then why should an object's moral value have anything to do with its art-hood status? Some philosophers have argued that immoral works of art must be necessarily bad works of art,<sup>6</sup> but we should keep in mind that for something to be a "bad work of art" it must first of all *be* a work of art! For instance, in 1990, Rick Gibson constructed a piece of performance art that would become infamous. The work consisted of a 25 kilogram weight suspended above a rat, named Sniffy. Between the rat and the weight were two sheets of canvas. Gibson would take this contraption to a street corner where he would offer "art lessons" to any of the passersby. He would instruct his new-found art student to pull a lever that would drop the weight and crush Sniffy between the two sheets of canvas. Gibson never had a chance to complete the piece however—an angry mob forced him to stop. He then returned the rat to the pet shop, where Sniffy was later sold off to be fed to a snake!<sup>7</sup> Some would argue that Gibson's piece is not art by virtue of the fact that it is immoral. Without offering an argument for this here, it is my view that Gibson's performance is an immoral work of art—meaning that the piece both *is* a work of art and *immoral* for its use of animal cruelty. While this might be a rather extreme example, my thinking is that what makes something a "work of art" is quite different

from what makes something “morally blameworthy”; that evaluative criteria like “being morally good” have little to do with an object’s being a work of art; and that the concept of “immoral art” is *not* an oxymoron. So I would not think that an object’s being “morally bad” should count against its being art, and that it matters not whether we are talking about Sniffy the rat or works of pornography.<sup>8</sup>

Alternatively, some argue that works of pornography cannot be art because they must rely on clichéd or repetitive artistic devices. It has been argued by some that pornography is too fantastical, or too predictable, or too sexually explicit to be art.<sup>9</sup> But again this seems to me a bad reason to restrict pornographic works from art. At best, these arguments could only serve to show that such clichéd, repetitive, fantastical or predictable works are not very *good* works of art—but so what? It is not a necessary condition for something’s being a work of art that it must be “good” (whether moral or aesthetic). So, in the end, should works of pornography count as art? I really do not care. The question that I wish to address in this essay is essentially about the interests and values we may attribute to objects. While an object’s ontological category may affect the way in which it is valued, I am inclined to agree with Rea that “pornography” is not itself a genuine ontological category.<sup>10</sup>

### **Distinguishing Interests and Values**

One might think that the natural place to start is to examine what makes a work pornographic. The idea would be to determine what the necessary and sufficient conditions might be for a work to be considered pornographic; however there appears to be no straightforward answer to this question. If we take all of the works that might be considered pornographic as a class of objects, then we would likely find that there is nothing that all objects making up this class have in

common—nothing that is either necessary or sufficient for an object to be a member of the class of “objects that might be considered pornographic”. Some pornographic works are not very explicit (e.g. the images in a *Playboy* magazine certainly depict nudity, but they are not terribly explicit) while other pornographic works do not even involve the depiction of nudity (e.g. Fragonard’s painting *The Swing* may have been titillating to a contemporary viewer for its coded suggestion of illicit sexuality, but everyone in the painting has their clothes on). In the end, we should simply acknowledge that it would be complicated and rather tricky to define pornography, and even more tricky to explain away all of the seemingly idiosyncratic cases. Luckily we do not need to define pornography in order to address my question. Rather it would be sufficient for our purposes to determine what it means to take a pornographic interest in an object, whether that object is an innocent shoe catalog or a really hardcore, sexually explicit video.

A “pornographic interest” is a kind of attitude that a person can take towards a certain object. As stated previously, there are many kinds of interests we can take towards an object. Taking a pornographic interest means essentially two things: that the consumer identifies something in the content of the work that would normally excite his or her sexual interest, and that the consumer imaginatively engages with that feature of the work in a way that would normally result in his or her sexual arousal.<sup>11</sup> Of course, the kind of content that an individual finds sexually arousing will certainly differ from person to person, but despite this, instances of taking a pornographic interest always share this in common: that the individual focuses his or her attention on the arousing content in such a way would normally result in his or her being sexually aroused.

The necessity of the first condition of this definition—that one identify something in the content of the work that one would normally find sexually arousing—would appear obvious. If you are not into that sort of thing, then you are not going to take a pornographic interest in its depiction. It is the necessity of the second condition that needs some explaining. Imagine a case where someone identifies something in the content of a work they find to be sexually arousing but they do not imaginatively engage with the object in the required way. Consider this example: I imagine that the editors of pornographic magazines choose which photographs to publish because they expect that one photograph will be more arousing to their consumers than another—that is to say, the editor identifies something in the content of the work that they expect would excite the sexual interest of the magazine’s consumers. Despite this, a particular editor may not actually be aroused by a photograph in a particular instance, and even if he did recognize the photograph to be sexually arousing for him. Imagine that the editor is working on the layout of the magazine, like cropping the photograph to fit the page properly—it would be highly distracting for him to be sexually aroused at that moment! When an editor is attending to the design qualities of the image (the image’s size, color, contrast, resolution, etc.), he need not at that moment take a pornographic interest in the image—that is, one might recognize that the image contains some content that one would normally find sexually arousing, but are not at that moment imaginatively engaging with the image in order to be sexually aroused. Rather, the editor is just trying to get his jobs done. Without imaginatively engaging with a work in a way that would result in one’s sexual arousal, one is simply stuck in the mode of attention that the magazine editor is in: the content is identified as containing something that would be arousing in an almost detached, academic way. So, to take a properly pornographic interest in a work, the “imaginative engagement” condition must be necessary.

What does it mean to “imaginatively engage with an object in the required way”? As a general claim, I would think this means to imagine oneself in some way participating in a sexually fulfilling action with the depicted subject. Of course, this would differ from person to person depending entirely on what the individual happens to find “sexually fulfilling”. If an individual is aroused by Michelangelo’s *David*, then I would expect his or her arousal to partly be the product of his or her imagining participating in some sexual act with the person that the sculpture depicts. Again, I should point out that the idea of “pornographic interest” that I have described is an entirely subjective, psychological state. The exact details of what one finds sexually arousing or sexually fulfilling is entirely down to individual sexual preferences. That being said, my general claim would still hold—that to take a pornographic interest in something is for a consumer to identify something in the content of the work that would normally excite his or her sexual interest and that to imaginatively engage with that feature of the work in a way that would normally result in his or her sexual arousal.

If this is what it means to take a pornographic interest in a work, then what does it mean to take an “artistic interest” in a work? This concept may be somewhat more controversial, mainly because the range of objects that one can take an artistic interest in would appear to be far more diverse than the range of objects that one can take a pornographic interest in, and one would wonder whether there is one distinct kind of interest that could be described as *the* artistic interest. The worry is that there may be many interests that one can take towards works of art that may all with justification be described as an artistic interest. This is a much deeper problem, which I unfortunately do not have the space to address here. Still, if the definition of artistic interest that I will provide is not exhaustive of the phenomenon, it still remains to be seen whether my definition of artistic interest is compatible or not with pornographic interest.



A common understanding of artistic interest holds that this is not simply the interest that one takes in the content of a work. Rather, when one takes an artistic interest in an object, one is fundamentally concerned with the formal qualities of the work. If the work happens to contain some recognizable content—that is, if the work is not wholly abstract—then one’s artistic interest may include the way in which the content is represented through that particular medium. In this case, one’s interest strikes a balance between form and content. Specifically, what one takes an interest in is the manner in which the artist has rendered their chosen content given the constraints of their medium and technique. One does not take an interest solely in *what* is depicted, but rather one takes an interest in the *manner* of depiction. As Jerrold Levinson says, “an image that has an artistic interest, dimension, or intent is one that is not simply *seen through*, or *seen past*, leaving one, at least in imagination, face to face with the subject. Images with an artistic dimension are thus to some extent *opaque*, rather than *transparent*. In other words, with artistic images we are invited to dwell on features of the image itself, and not merely on what the image represents.”<sup>12</sup>

When one takes no real interest in the formal qualities of an object, it is as if one simply looks through a transparent medium at the represented object, which would allow one a good vantage point to take a pornographic interest in the object.<sup>13</sup> Alternatively, when one lingers appreciatively on the formal qualities of the object, even if one is still in some sense mindful of the content of the work, then one is taking an artistic interest in the object. This distinction between *opaque* and *transparent* nicely captures the general idea of what I mean by “artistic interest”, even if this distinction is rather difficult to apply in some cases. For instance, it is rather difficult to imagine how pornographic literature might be transparent in the way that Levinson describes.<sup>14</sup> Still, even in the case of pornographic literature, we might distinguish

between the interest we take in the author's use of metaphor, allusion or alliteration on the one hand, that is, a *literary interest*, and the interest we take in the scene or actions that the author describes on the other hand.

Employing this distinction between a pornographic interest and an artistic interest, we may offer an analogous distinction between *pornographic value* and *artistic value*. Essentially, to take an interest in an object in a certain way is to value that object in a certain way. So, if you take a pornographic interest in an object, you place some pornographic value on that object; and if you take an artistic interest in an object, you place some artistic value on that object. An object is "valued as pornography" insofar as it is the sort of object that would reward a pornographic interest. If taking a pornographic interest in a work is to identify something in the content of that work that one would normally find sexually arousing and to imaginatively engage with that feature of the work in a way that would normally result in one's sexual arousal, then a work has some pornographic value if it is conducive to this sort of interest. Some objects will be more rewarding as pornography than others. Likewise, an object is "valued as art" insofar as it is the sort of object that would reward an artistic interest. Of course, we should notice that, as these notions of value are inherently tied to a psychological state of taking a particular kind of interest in an object, then which objects have pornographic value and which have artistic value would be relative to the subject—thus, pornography really is in the eye of the beholder!<sup>15</sup>

Of course, these are not the only values that we can place on an object—as stated previously, objects can serve many interests and can hold many different kinds of value. For instance, if I have an historical interest in an object, then I place some historical value on that object. Pornographic value is merely one value among many, and one that may sit alongside and be weighed against other values that we may attribute to a work. Furthermore, the degree of value

that we ascribe to an object may differ greatly depending on what kind of value we are talking about. It is not the case that objects having a high value in one regard must also have a high value in its other regards; or, just because an object rewards one kind of interest does not mean that it must reward any other kind of interest. For instance, think about the early musical compositions written by Mozart when he was a young child. Artistically, these works might not be very good—we might place very low *artistic value* on Mozart's childhood compositions—but still, these works hold a high *historical value*. With this distinction in place, we can think about the pornographic value of a work in relation to the artistic value of that work.

### **Relations Between the Pornographic and the Artistic**

I take it to be uncontroversial that a single work can be valued in many different ways or excite many different kinds of interest in a consumer. It seems intuitively obvious to me that a person may use a single object to serve different interests at different times, and as one's concern for the object shifts between these different kinds of interests, one may attend to distinct qualities of the object that serve these interests (though in some cases it may be true that one's different interests in an object are actually directed towards the same qualities). To take an artistic interest in the paintings of Elvgren, for example, is to appreciate the way in which the artist handles his medium in the representation of his chosen subject. Alternatively, to take a pornographic interest in the paintings of Elvgren is simply to find something in the content of his paintings that one finds sexually arousing, which in this case would be ladies in various stages of undress, and to imaginatively engage with that feature of the work in a way that would result in one's sexual arousal—imagining oneself helping those ladies in getting undressed! Elvgren's paintings would

be valued as art to the extent that his paintings reward an artistic interest, and Elvgren's paintings would be valued as pornography to the extent that his paintings reward a pornographic interest.

While I think it is obvious that a single object can satisfy many different kinds of interest and could be valued in many different ways, what I am uncertain of is how these kinds of interests and values might be related. Is it ever the case that valuing a work artistically necessarily requires one to take a pornographic interest in that work? Is it ever true that one *cannot* appreciate the artistic value of a work *without* taking a pornographic interest in that work? I believe that this is false—to value a work artistically never requires one to take a pornographic interest in that work. Indeed, I would go further and say that taking a pornographic interest in a work is incompatible with one's taking an artistic interest in that work. The reason is because taking a pornographic interest in a work requires the consumer to look past the medium of the work and fix one's attention solely on the work's content while taking an artistic interest in a work requires the consumer to attend explicitly to the medium of the work. Certainly, a consumer could shift her attention between her pornographic interest and her artistic interest in the work seemingly at will. My point, however, is that a work does not excite her artistic interest *by virtue of* its exciting her pornographic interest—what makes the object good art is not what makes the object good porn.

We should remember the distinction between transparent viewing and opaque viewing: to view something “transparently” is to look through the object in such a way that one pays little attention to the medium through which one is looking; to view something “opaquely” is to linger on the particular formal qualities of the medium in an appreciative way. Now, to take a pornographic interest in a work is to identify something in the content of the work that one would normally find sexually arousing and to actually imaginatively engage with that feature of

the work's content in a way that would normally result in one's sexual arousal. To take a pornographic interest in a work is to treat the medium of the work as if it were transparent, that is to treat the medium of representation as if it is just a vehicle for representation. One need not artistically appreciate the formal qualities of the medium in order to take a pornographic interest in a work—certainly, one can, but the point is that taking an artistic appreciation in those formal qualities is not necessary in order to take a pornographic interest in a work. Alternatively, to take an artistic interest in a work is to appreciatively linger on the formal qualities of the work's medium—that is, to view the medium of the work opaquely. And here is the problem: one takes a pornographic interest in the content alone, not in the balance between content and form. To a pornographic interest, the medium is transparent—one sees past the formal qualities of the object to behold and imaginatively engage with the content of the work itself—and an artistic interest is opaque. One will never find the artistic value in an object that one regards transparently because one must regard the object opaquely to appreciate its artistic value.

Incidentally, I wonder if the reverse kind of scenario is ever true—does one ever appreciate the pornographic value of an object through taking an artistic interest in that work? This would be a case where one's pornographic interest in a work is somehow satisfied by paying attention to the formal qualities of a work, where one finds sexual arousal in attending to those qualities of the work that are normally associated with one's artistic interest. A possible case might be bondage photographs. Someone who is sexually aroused by bondage might pay special attention to the stillness of a photographic image. Perhaps paying attention to the stillness of the photographic image actually heightens the consumer's sense of anxiety and suspense, or the sense of being “bound” by the photographic image aids in the consumer's sexual arousal. If this is what one is sexually aroused by, then this might be a case where taking an artistic interest in a

formal quality of a work serves the double-duty of also contributing to the consumer's sexual arousal. However, one point should be made clear about this "double-duty". If the case I have described above is correct, then what is happening may simply be that the same formal feature is involved in the consumer's artistic interest as well as in her pornographic interest. But this is not to say that the consumer must take an artistic interest in the object in order to take a pornographic interest in that object. Rather, it just happens to be the case that the stillness of the photograph—a formal feature of the object that the consumer takes an artistic interest in—also serves the consumer's sexual interest. Basically, this consumer would appear to have a "formal fetish"<sup>16</sup> for photographic stillness. I see no reason to doubt this possibility; however idiosyncratic this fetish may be, the possibility of this sort of case is really an empirical question.

How would we explain this case? The possibility of a formal fetishes does not conflict with the argument of this essay. Rather this just simply illustrates a point that I made earlier—that there are many interests that a consumer may take in an object; and while these distinct interests may be served by attending to distinct qualities of the object, in some cases the various interests that a consumer make have are actually directed towards the same quality. The case of bondage photographs may simply be one of those cases—the stillness of the photograph serves both a pornographic interest and an artistic interest. However, importantly, this does not yet prove that one appreciates the pornographic value of an object through taking an artistic interest in the photograph. To prove this, we would need to establish that the consumer's artistic interest is a necessary condition of their pornographic interest, and that has not been established by this case.

So, can pornographic works have artistic value? Yes, an object could satisfy both an artistic interest and a pornographic interest. But is it ever the case that one artistically values a work *by virtue of* one's taking a pornographic interest in that work? No, because an artistic interest

requires one to take an interest in the formal qualities of the work, and a pornographic interest ignores these qualities in order to attend to the content of the work solely.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See for instance Jerrold Levinson, “Erotic Art” (Edward Craig, ed., *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, New York, Routledge 1999: 406-409) and “Erotic Art and Pornographic Pictures” (*Philosophy and Literature* 2005, 29 (1): 228-240); Joel Feinberg, *Offense to Others* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1985); and George Steiner, “Night Words: High Pornography and Human Privacy” (Douglas Hughes, ed., *Perspectives on Pornography*, New York, St. Martin’s Press, 1970: 96-108).

<sup>2</sup> Specifically, I have in mind Matthew Kieran, “Pornographic Art” (*Philosophy and Literature* 2001, 25: 31-45). See also Levinson (2005) for his response to Kieran’s argument.

<sup>3</sup> An example that springs to mind is Damien Hirst’s sculpture *For the Love of God*, which is a platinum cast of a human skull encrusted with 8,601 diamonds produced in 2007. This sculpture may be worth quite a lot of money today, but this alone does not make it artistically valuable or even historically important. Personally, I like much of Hirst’s work; however I wonder whether *For the Love of God* will really stand the test of time.

<sup>4</sup> See for instance Steiner (1970).

<sup>5</sup> By “pure music” here I simply mean music that has no lyrics—instrumental music. Certainly some pure music might be associated with pornography, but this association does not make the music pornographic. For pure music to be pornographic I would think that the music itself would need to be sexually arousing. Whether this is possible or not may really be an empirical question.

<sup>6</sup> See for instance Mary Devereaux, “Beauty and Evil: Leni Riefenstahl’s *Triumph of the Will*” and Berys Gaut, “The Ethical Criticism of Art” (Jerrold Levinson, ed., *Aesthetics and Ethics*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1998).

<sup>7</sup> I am unaware of any philosophers that have directly discussed the moral problems associated with Gibson’s piece, however Thomas Heyd offers an interesting discussion of this work with regard to the artistic status of performance art in an essay titled “Understanding Performance Art: Art Beyond Art” (*British Journal of Aesthetics*, 2001, 31: 68-73).

<sup>8</sup> A more plausible suggestion in my view is that the immorality of Gibson’s piece necessarily renders his work *artistically* flawed. This is a claim that would be supported by Gaut’s (1998) theory of ethicism. While I think this claim has some plausibility, I also have my worries. Would we think the same about pornography? If some pornography is immoral, then is that pornography necessarily artistically flawed? I hesitate to accept this because, as the argument of my paper shows, an object can serve many interests for a consumer. Moral interests and artistic interests seem to me distinct kinds of interests, as are pornographic interests and artistic interests. However my hesitation is due to the observation that one’s aesthetic response sometimes is dependent upon one’s moral sensibilities. Think of dirty jokes: to appreciate their humor, it seems that one must recognize that the joke is dirty—that is, one must be aware of the ethical implications of the joke in order to appreciate its risqué humor. This suggests that moral sensibilities sometimes do play a role in our aesthetic responses. Unfortunately, I do not have the space to pursue this thought here and must leave it aside.

<sup>9</sup> Steiner (1970) argues that pornography is necessarily repetitive because the pornographic imagination is limited to what one finds sexually pleasurable, which he thinks must be rather limited. As he says, “In most erotic writing, as in man’s wet dreams, the imagination turns, time and time again, inside the bounded circle of what the body can

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experience. The actions of the mind when we masturbate are not a dance; they are a treadmill” (101). See also Feinberg (1985), Ch. 11.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Rea, “What is Pornography?” (*Nous* 2001, 35: 118-145). Rea makes a similar point regarding the category *work of art* in his essay “Constitution and Kind Membership” (*Philosophical Studies* 2000, 97: 169-193). While I am tempted to agree with this too, I also think that the category *work of art* is relevant to evaluation and appreciation in a way that the category *pornography* is not. The category *work of art* is useful to evaluation even if this is not a genuine ontological kind.

<sup>11</sup> I say “normally” here in order to avoid cases where defeating conditions arise—like being impotent, or being otherwise distracted, or whatever. We should of course also recognize that what is “normal” about one’s sexual arousal will differ from person to person.

<sup>12</sup> Levinson (2005): 232.

<sup>13</sup> See Kendall Walton, “Transparent Pictures: On the Nature of Photographic Realism” (*Critical Inquiry* 1984, 11: 246-277) for the idea of photographic “transparency”. For discussion of the “transparency thesis” and the aesthetic value of photography, see Roger Scruton, “Photography and Representation” (*Aesthetic Understanding*, London, Methuen, 1983) and Dominic Lopes, “The Aesthetics of Photographic Transparency” (*Mind* 2003, 112: 433-448).

<sup>14</sup> It is worth noting that Levinson regards photography as “the prime medium for pornography, that which has displaced all other such media in that connection. For photography is the transparent medium *par excellence*, that is, the medium that comes closest to simply presenting the requisite object—typically, a woman or a man or combinations thereof—directly, as material for sexual fantasy and gratification” (2005: 232). To my knowledge, Levinson has not commented on the idea of pornographic literature.

<sup>15</sup> Again, it is for this reason that I do not think of *pornography* as a substantial ontological category.

<sup>16</sup> Thanks to Dave Monroe for this phrase.

<sup>17</sup> My thanks go to Jennifer Courtney-Bartel and Dave Monroe for the many helpful suggestions that they each made on earlier versions of this essay.