

Pornography and Its Censorship in Cyberspace

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ABSTRACT

This essay discusses general philosophical questions on the issue of pornography and their special applicability to the internet environment. It argues that the issues raised by internet accessibility to pornography are unique to this environment and make the issue of censorship particularly urgent. In the four main sections of this paper, the author discusses 1) the ways studies on pornography in general incorporate psychoanalytic theory to interpret the psychic apparatus of male audiences as they see pornographic representations; 2) the issue of social classes in discussing net pornography and their unique manifestations on the internet; 3) the ineffectiveness of censorship of pornography in general, which compels the interventions of psychoanalysis, and 4) the technological and legal difficulties of net censorship especially in regard to pornography. Despite the difficulties in censoring pornographic materials, the essay argues that some attempt to regulate net pornography must be made. Though it will never be wholly effective, the attempt to censor pornography remains a move in a general dialectic on sexuality without which the monological perspective of pornographers would perhaps become normative.

KEY WORDS

pornography
internet
information superhighway
cyberspace
gender
class
psychoanalysis
male gaze

scopophilia
voyeurism
narcissism
fetishism
other
female desire
libidinal fantasy
censorship

Since 1969, when a group of American scientists successfully implemented a computer network to provide researchers in diverse locations with a telecommunication link to share and transmit information, a globally extended network of networks, the Internet as people have come to call it, has been growing steadily on the basis of this prototype. Rather than a mere product of the development in telecommunication technology, the Internet, with its far-reaching impact on social character, has already become a new "cultural icon," giving concrete form to the visionary and elusive term "cyberspace," coined by the science fiction writer William Gibson a few years ago (Kantrowitz and Rogers 46; Elmer-Dewitt, "Snow Balls" 41). One of the main political rallying cries of the Clinton administration is to participate actively in organizing and restructuring the so-called "National Information Infrastructure (NII)," or, in its more popular form, the Information Superhighway (the I-Way). Given America's leading role in this emerging global network, this move of the Clinton administration has affected the administrative maneuvering of info-technology in other countries that are either aspiring to or confronting rather reluctantly with a coming information age.¹ After NII, a further move in setting up a Global Information Infrastructure (GII) has also been proposed. As the basis of NII and GII, the Internet is already prospering at such a quick and rattling pace that long before any political interference actualizes itself, it has developed on a gigantic scale—enough to force government to pay attention to it.² Precisely because of its massive scale, the Internet has moved beyond the technological and deeper into the social and cultural to necessitate a scrutiny of its influence on society.

Initially a harbinger and advocate of total freedom, the Internet, because of its growing number of participants, has inevitably transmuted itself from its earlier spirit (of cyberspace as almost equivalent to freedom without much rigorous definition of both terms) into more explicitly a social character. This change is predictable and quite natural given the fact that, no longer a space dominated by computer hackers as in earlier times, the Internet has become a social and public space occupied by people of different ages, colors, genders,

from different classes, with diverse, even conflicting, political aptitudes and various nationalities. The social bearings of the Internet account for the recent debates on some urgent issues concerning the organization and structure of the net, to which, undoubtedly, the American government and public have responded most eagerly. In addition to the polemics on privacy,³ pornography in cyberspace has become probably the hottest issue that attracts popular attention and invokes passionate discussions both inside and outside the Internet. In fact, pornographic information flooded the net before turning into a social issue. Taking the Internet as an example, the hottest top five newsgroups are related to pornography (Elmer-Dewitt "Battle" 38).⁴ This phenomenon has embarrassed advocates of the Internet and pushed government officials to seriously reconsider the implications net pornography may have for society as a whole. Part of the reason net pornography has become a major concern in public discussion is the increasing popularization of the net which makes the net a space with a strong social character, hence its inevitability in taking up social responsibilities. Yet net pornography is never a unique phenomenon coming from nowhere. It is closely associated with pornography already existing before the net's emergence on the scene. Pornography, even of the net, is never a pure technological issue, but rather an issue of power structures embedded in gender, social, and cultural politics. This paper will divide itself into four parts to discuss the interrelations among pornography, cyberspace, and censorship. In the first part, a detour will be made to analyze the way studies on pornography in general incorporate psychoanalytical theory to interpret the psychic apparatus of male audiences as they see pornographic representations. The second part will bring into focus the issue of social classes in discussing net pornography which, besides sharing with other kinds of pornography the psychic apparatus underlying male gaze, has its own unique features. The third part will deal with the ineffectiveness of censorship in confrontation with pornography, which more or less accounts for the fact that psychoanalysis makes its way into discourses on pornography and that it has its political limitations. The last part will concentrate on the difficulty of censorship, especially when coping with net pornography, a difficulty which is quite different from that of the censorship of pornography in general and which results not only from the unique technological structure of the net, but also from the rising conflict and negotiation between global structure and local areas. The discussion in this part will take its examples from two Taiwan cases.

I. Vision, Pleasure, and Anxiety

Among instances of pornography studies, Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" has a significant place. Mulvey uses the theoretic model of psychoanalysis in her discussion of how main-stream narrative cinema in phallogocentric society manipulates the visual apparatus to fix the female body in cinematic diegesis to consolidate male pleasure. This move to psychoanalyze the male visual mechanism in many ways has inspired later pornography studies, of which most works cited here, we shall see shortly, involve a dialogue with Mulvey. In Mulvey's analysis, the visual pleasure of the male audience is based on three different yet interconnected layers of scopophilia: voyeuristic, narcissistic, and fetishistic. Voyeuristic scopophilia comes from distancing the (male) viewer and the (female) viewed to objectify woman in the act of viewing, thus turning woman into a defenseless other under the exploitative gaze of the male. Behind this objectification of the female a strong sense of sadism also lurks. Both sadism and voyeurism, moreover, require narrative to reinforce the underlying pleasure; hence the cinematic narrative (Mulvey 434, 438). As for narcissistic scopophilia Mulvey borrows the Lacanian concept of the mirror stage to explain how the male audience, when allured into cinematic diegesis to undergo "depersonalization by assimilation to space" (Caillois 30), at the same time construct and fortify male subjectivity by identifying with the mirrored image on the screen (Mulvey 435). In her discussion of fetishistic scopophilia, Mulvey follows Freud's study of the fetish and points to the alleviation of castration anxiety as the main cause of the fetishization of the female by the male erotic gaze (438). This kind of cross-reference between (male) seeing and psychoanalysis easily lends itself to pornography studies, especially given the fact that the primary implied reader of pornography is a man whose pleasure is appealed to. Yet this condition does not guarantee a practical application of Mulvey's model to pornography studies. In fact, there are vague points in which Mulvey does not elaborate much. A contradiction, for example, could be found between the mechanisms of voyeurism and fetishism. For Mulvey, the fetishistic gaze, unlike the voyeuristic gaze that concentrates on the unfolding of narrative, is almost equal to the impulse to freeze the narrative chain and focus on a particular image-object, thus achieving the compensation for the castration anxiety. Therefore, when Mulvey suggests the possible alternative of disrupting the narrative diegesis of main-stream cinema, she does not deal with the problem of how to avoid

the danger of this disruption of narrative being turned into fetishism. On the other hand, the mechanism of fetishism also causes some confusion. According to Freud, the fetish appears to cover up the fact that women are castrated, being itself a substitute of women's lost penis. Thus men's feeling about the fetish is a mixture of "affirmation and disavowal," affirmation in that the fetish dissimulates the truth of women's castration by a simulated fiction and disavowal in that this simulation never dissimulates the fact completely but represses it. Because of this mixture of discordant feelings about the fetish, men are always thrown into neurosis, dangling between reality and imagination (Freud "Fetishism" 156). Thus the mechanism of fetishization already has a strong tendency to destabilize itself. If fetishization can only bring up scopophilia as Mulvey affirms so positively, the male in this context is no less than being trapped in Freudian psychosis: he would go completely beyond reality into pure imaginary spheres without any anxiety left. Thus some studies, aiming to subvert phallogocentric pornography, may easily slip into simplified versions of Mulvey's theory and consider that, by merely displaying female genitals, pornographic representations can disrupt the male pleasure based on a fetishized fiction, thus destabilizing the male domination over the female body. Griselda Pollock has pointed out that such a naive strategy, by exhibiting female genitals, only "reappropriates" subversion into the visual mechanism of paternal society; rather than destabilizing fetishistic scopophilia, it strengthens its voyeuristic pleasure by "inviting rape." For Pollock, images of man and woman have already been socially and culturally constructed in an "asymmetrical" way which determines the visual mechanism (142-43). Any subversive undertaking guided by mere contraries to psychoanalytical tendencies will be doomed to the loss of political effectiveness.

Mulvey's interpretive model, however, is directed mainly to mainstream cinema rather than pornographic representations, so her exposition of the fetish can stand in a general sense. If the same model is to be applied to studies of pornography, some points will have to be modified to give a more valid explanation of the frequent appearance of female genitals in pornographic representations. On this point, John Ellis turns attention away from the Freudian biological penis to the cultural phallus in order to impart new meanings to the fetish. Thus in representations of female genitals, masturbation (auto-erotism), and love making by lesbians, the fetish as a substitute for the lost biological penis becomes the fetish that represents a cultural phallus which will produce (female) orgasm. In other words, the fetish in this context belongs, not to the male but to the female who, having her orgasm guaranteed by rubbing or penetrating with dildos into her genitals,

makes a strong claim, not to her loss of the penis, but to her having (or still desperately needing) an (absent) cultural phallus to warrant the (present) orgasm. Under this condition, the appearance of female genitals can no more induce castration anxiety in male viewers than mollify their anxiety by using female genitals themselves as a fetish to signify and/or substitute for the abstracted cultural phallus as a *sine qua non* of female orgasm (Ellis 163-64). This explains partially why the appearance of female genitals in pornographic representations can never disrupt male visual pleasure but, on the contrary, reinforces the sense of phallogentric power in male viewers, for this cultural phallus in the long run can only be offered by male viewers from outside. Though Ellis bases his psychoanalytical exposition mostly on heterosexuality which easily incurs controversy,⁵ his analysis of the anxiety of paternal power structure in its failure to possess the secret of female orgasm, which is evidently implied by the male viewers' eagerness to procure and consolidate the phallic power through pornography, coincides more or less with the key attitudes of other pornography studies. Pornography is related closely to Freud's question, "What does a woman want?" The only way for the male to get an answer appears to be through pornographic construction and fabrication. Yet the male also has a strong feeling that the answer thus constructed may not be true. This does not come from the knowledge of what the truth is which would deny the validity of the constructed answer, but from the recognition that the truth can not be so easily revealed; thus in seeing pornography the male is always torn apart by opposite forces of feeling, at once pleased by the fabricated answer of pornography and anxious because of the answer's unconvincing demonstration. As a result, the frequent display of the so-called "come shot" ("money shot") in pornographic representations, where the actor ejaculates outside the female body and the actress rubs or even swallows the ejaculated semen, is an attempt to demonstrate not only male pleasure, but also female pleasure (she really gets what she wants). Yet in this sort of representation, female pleasure is always metaphorical, never as explicitly and convincingly signified as male pleasure (Crabbe 61). This metaphoricality cloaking the secret of female pleasure not only brings forth male anxiety over failure in getting to the answer, but also explains the repetitive nature of pornographic representations which betrays the powerlessness of the pornography industry in its attempt to nail down and signify female desire through phallogentric signifiers. The plotless plot in circular repetition in pornography, in fact, consists of voyeuristic and fetishistic mechanisms pointed out by Mulvey—it presents a narrative chain in repetition to freeze the narrative. This repetitiveness does not, however, double scopophilia because of the combination of two mechanisms, but rather

betrays male frustration and anxiety that turn up again and again in seeking an unattainable (or unrepresentable) answer, which leads to an addictive inclination to go back to pornography. This addiction is also correlated with the unsteadiness of male subjectivity. In Mulvey's model of narcissism, seeing is considered as a subtle process that aims to construct and solidify the self's identity by losing the self in its identification with the other. Out of this process something unstable will emerge due to the fact that what is singled out as the other is often an effect of the self (or the self's desire) projected outside, so the other is, rather than the other as such, the self's other. When Freud mentions that into the formation of the narcissistic ego ideal is always infused a sizable volume of homosexual libido ("On" 559), the statement is based not only on pure biological considerations, but also on this state of non-differentiation between self and other. The non-differentiation embedded in narcissism introduces into the pleasure of male viewers of pornography an anxiety about the consolidation and signification of male subjectivity which relies on the phallogocentric order of signifiers based on difference. Thus the narcissistic scopoc mechanism in pornography fails to lay bare women and their desire, making them into nothing more than the libidinal fantasy of male desire, and also problematizes the signification of men and male desire for the lack of contrasting points of difference. The anxiety that would drive men repeatedly back to pornography stems thus both from the unavoidable frustration in attempting to unveil the secret of female desire and from the recurrent miscarriage in riveting male subjectivity by fixing the difference of female subjectivity in pornography. Taking up the model of narcissism, Gary Day proposes that in pornography seen by men, the female plays two roles at once: as the signifier signifying male desire and as the signified which is the object of male desire. In this circular signification, the female is kept in "a closed loop" without any rupture that could admit phallogocentric signs (87, 98). On the opposite side, the male and his desire are also locked in the same loop, being signifier and signified at the same time and also trapped in pure "vacuum" with no meaning. Thus the pleasure produced by the scopoc mechanism in men's pornography bears a certain degree of frustration and anxiety which, in turn, contributes to men's addictive hankering for going back to pornography repeatedly, and to the repetitive narrative structure prevalent in pornographic representations.

II. Commodity Fetishism and Difference in Classes

Because net pornography is also based on the scopoc mechanism,⁶ the interpretive model inspired by psychoanalysis in these pornography studies

can be adapted to incorporate net pornography. Yet in addition to the scopic mechanism, net pornography, on account of the peculiar structure of the net, has peculiarities in the transmission of the material. This gives net pornography a quality rarely found in other kinds of pornography. Pornography as a commodity has to operate in a market, and the consumption of its exchange value is meshed with the psychic (and/or physical) consumption of its use value. Pornography on the net, on the other hand, is a different sort of commodity for it is basically free of charge. The Internet is initially built upon the premise that it would offer communication links for the exchange of academic or scientific information, which imparts to the net a "free" spirit presumably resistant to the domination of the market. Therefore, access to the Internet depends less on the (financial) standing of net users than on the specific qualification required of them as being a member of academia or a (higher) educational institution.⁷ Being circulated in this unique environment, pornography on the net is free of charge for users who consume its digitized files. The costlessness of net pornography is evident in its two extended effects: its being thus worthless and its being remarkably invaluable. Because the consumer of net pornography need not pay a dime to get it, a commodity like this is totally worthless. The net user-consumer can just download files to see, to consume, and to use, and then dump and delete them with no hesitation. Though Pollock emphasizes that the bourgeois ideology of capitalist society contains the notion of the female body as "salable commodity" (142), we should avoid being too optimistic in regarding the unsalable commodity of net pornography as a revolutionary weapon to subvert pornography's domination. Once pornography appears and circulates on the net, the exploitation of the female body may become more hideous than that in market pornography. Products of market pornography at least require that a price be paid for any consumption, while the female body, once digitized and circulated on the net, loses any quantifiable price, let alone other qualities like dignity or female subjectivity. Women and their bodies transmitted through net pornography are thus reduced to pure, libidinally consumed, bits which drift in gigantic digital information systems to be copied, transferred, used, disposed of at will, and then recycled for another round of exploitation. Yet this costlessness of net pornography also induces the opposite effect, the fantasy that net pornography as a commodity with no price label is not worthless but invaluable. This is a case of commodity fetishism. Commodity fetishism in the Marxist sense signifies a mystification of some commodities (gold, silver, or even paper money) to rid them of the power structures behind social productive forces and establish their exchange value, which is thereby turned into value inherent in the commodity's nature

(Marx 31, 33). Following this idea, we may say that in an age when people are never tired of celebrating the advent of information society in which information becomes the universal equivalence defining the (exchange) value of information commodities, the computerized or digitized information circulating on the net will most easily be mystified as a fetishized commodity that is worshipped, adored, and pursued by people (especially those who do not have access to the net), valued as transcending social power structures. As a result, the difference of net pornography from other kinds of pornography lies in the fact that it is not only digitized, but enhanced by being part of the most valuable form of information currency, the net. This kind of pornography, even if it is worth nothing, may not become totally worthless, but by being itself a special form of information currency may turn out to be mystified as a commodity fetish. And a fetish as such, in the Marxist sense, actually hides power structures, especially the often imbalanced deployment of power among different social classes.

Although from the outset, the net, with its free flow of information and non-hierarchical structure, brought people hope for the final elimination of differences and discrimination among classes, races, cultures, and economic groups in preparation for real democratization and the grand emancipation of humanity (Burnett 19; Poster 113, 117-18; Wooley 122-25), people became aware of the fact that the advent of an information society is not equal to the coming of a classless society and that, along with new social and cultural dynamics, it also introduces into the old social structure new class divisions. Information flow appears not so free as it was thought to be; the Internet restricts access to some rather than all; computers and peripherals are not affordable to everyone; and to be fully conversant with computer and net information requires a knowledge base which is never easy to acquire. Recently, both *Newsweek* and *Time* have reported on the rise of new class divisions based on information and its social implications (Hancock 26-33; Ratan 23-24). The new divisions are between two classes: the haves and have-nots. Here haves and have-nots mean more than those who have and do not have computers or access to the Internet, but, on a deeper level, those who have and do not have means of production in an information society. The statistics of the reports indicate that computer technology as well as the information network is not blind to the differences among races and in economic capabilities. In the U.S., according to the figures of *Newsweek*, only one third of the population have their own computers and only 7 percent of the children have parents who can afford to connect them to the Internet. And most of these families are whites of the white-collar class with high salaries. This class advantage, we can say, gives future warrants to those privileged children

who would be better acquainted with the means of production in an information society. How the society will be divided between classes in the future seems to be foretold by the division of children at present. Figures in *Time* also show that besides the difference between children of haves and those of have-nots, even in the world of adults today the incomes of people who know how to use computers are more than 15 percent higher than the incomes of those who do not (Ratan 23). A few months ago, when asked how the poor Americans can reach the net, the House speaker Newt Gingrich, also an advocate of the Information Superhighway, answered with "a tax credit for the poorest Americans to buy a laptop" ("Netwatch" 41; Hancock 28). Though this has been labeled "a nutty idea" that may be a joke or may point to serious political agenda, there is no doubt that the United States as the origin of the Internet is beginning to face the issue of class divisions. This social issue, however, is easily buried under the commodity fetishism of net information which often makes people (especially cybernauts) ignore the class divisions and turn their attention to the promised freedom and democratization on which they lay their utopian hope. Net pornography, in this context, inscribes both an unequal power structure between men and women which has been constructed socially and culturally, and a sense of commodity fetishism hiding an unequal power structure among different social classes. Costlessness is a unique quality of net pornography. Yet this quality only worsens the exploitation of the female and further hides the social and economic relations among classes underlying the information system of the net. In addition to the scopical mechanism of pornography in representation, net pornography is thus characterized by the invaluableness of commodity fetishism widely shared by the digital information circulating on the net, which masks, however, new class divisions.

III. Censorship and (A)Political Psychoanalysis

If pornography (on or off the net) discloses an intent to abuse cultural and social power in representing sex, it is definitely censurable and should be put under censorial surveillance. Yet pornography, as Ellis points out, is not naturally so, but is rather like a field of signification lined by different and always conflicting agents like cultural codes, laws, movements (of feminists, moralists, liberals), and powers involved in a constant struggle with each other. And this struggle for signification in pornography is always situated in diverse historical contexts, which makes pornography highly elusive (Ellis 147-48). In other words, pornography can never totally rid itself of censorial

efforts; yet when what is to be censored is always so amorphous and vague, the effect of any censorship can only be dubious. Moreover, once censorship is set up, the problem of who is qualified to censor arises. Lesley Stern, who compares earlier feminist movements which concentrate on rape with the later agenda focused on pornography, concludes that this shift of focus from studies on the "invisible" social power structures underlying rape to those on the "visible" pornography with its epidermalization of power structures and ideology actually indicates a process in which feminist spirits are assimilated to institutions of power. And this process is further evidenced by the attitude of anti-pornography movements which appeal naively to censorship as a powerful means in countering pornography, leaving aside the critique of the legal system itself which is thus regarded as neutral and self-reliant (Stern 198, 207). Therefore, even when censorship is legally enforced, the legal system itself will be questioned for its trustworthiness. Partly because of this dubiousness inherent in the political and social practices of pornography censorship, the interpretive model borrowed from psychoanalysis finds its way into pornography studies. If there is little chance to subvert pornography from outside (as through law enforcement), it may be a better alternative to destabilize it from within (as through psychoanalysis).

In this regard, psychoanalysis is at once a political and an apolitical means for confronting pornography. Its politicality lies in its primary intention to induce subversive analysis to redistribute the resources of sexual power and to restructure sexual power patterns. Thus in studies of scopophilic mechanisms, in addition to the male visual pleasure there is always a marked emphasis on male anxiety. Ellis remarks that pornography involves not only the question "what is female pleasure?", but also the question "what is male pleasure?", because male desire can never be satiated by pornography (166). Paul Willemsen proposes the notion of "the fourth look" along with the three looks mentioned by Mulvey (the camera looking at events, the audience looking at characters, and characters looking at each other) to introduce a more specific analysis of visual pleasure in pornography. This fourth look refers to, on the one hand, the cultural taboo and legal prohibition which cause in male viewers the anxiety that they might be caught on the scene (yet this anxiety, it must be noted, is also a source of pleasure for the fact that this would-be-caught is actually never caught), and, on the other, signifies the female onlooker's look at the male viewer looking at pornography. The pleasure produced by this female fourth look comes from the insidious desire of men to punish women by forcing them to see how men will dominate women either by looking at or by acting out pornography, thus consolidating the power base of the paternal society. Yet Willemsen also points out that the

need of this female fourth look in fact betrays the unstableness of the paternal power structure; only when they sense the rise of female threat would men want to punish them by this fourth look. Thus underlying the pleasure of the fourth look is the latent anxiety of unstable paternal power (Willemen 178-79). And Gary Day, in his study of narcissism in pornography, also elaborates on the extreme unsteadiness of male desire and identity in pornography (87, 98). All these interpretive strategies exemplify the aim of the psychoanalytical model not only to reveal the destined failure of pornographic efforts in underpinning female desire, pleasure, and subjectivity, but to highlight the power of pornography in destabilizing male subjectivity and even displacing the hegemony of paternal power structures. Yet with its implosive political strategy, psychoanalysis also becomes apolitical because of both the possible effect of its discursive practices and the inherent limitation in its model.

In terms of the effect of psychoanalytical discursive practices, too much emphasis on the destabilization of men and paternal power may easily lead to deducible equivalence which, simply put, implies that pornography is psychically harmful to both men and women who are, in a sense, equally exploited. This may suggest that, seeing pornography, men will have anxiety about their desire and pleasure, their subjectivity is destabilized into vacuous fragments, and the paternal power they hold threatens to be displaced and even destroyed. Therefore, rather than being censored, pornography should instead be encouraged and widely disseminated for men to see and consume, for in their seemingly exploitative consumption of the female body, revolutionary seeds are already sown. The more men see pornography, the more they will feel anxious about themselves and the sooner they will lose their social and cultural privileges. Obviously, to agree with this reasoning is in one way or another to eschew the possibility of social and political change and to place too optimistic an emphasis upon the autonomy of cultural representations in revolutionizing society. The political side of the psychoanalytical model in interpreting and criticizing pornography may turn out to be a-political in regarding men and women as equally exploited and abused victims. On the other hand, any critical discourse on pornography that bases itself on the psychoanalytical model has first of all to endorse the validity of the Freudian "family romance" with its triangle of papa-mama-me relations as the very foundation upon which narcissism, fetishism, or voyeurism is constructed. Yet this endorsement may turn political psychoanalytical interpretations of pornography into apolitical explanations of the inevitability of men's consumption of pornography. If everyone (especially a man) has to undergo the oedipal stage with all its implications in libidinal repression,

transference, and displacement to adapt oneself to society, then pornography's allure would amount to no less than a logical result of oedipalization. Thus the fact that men would consume pornography is not only natural, but also ineluctable. The psychoanalytical model would undermine itself by acknowledging the predominant power of the family in oedipalizing individuals to strengthen social control and domination over individuals, and thus becoming itself part of the ideological state apparatus (Lash 68). This limitation inherent in the psychoanalytic model constitutes its apolitical side.

This, of course, does not mean that psychoanalysis is theoretically invalid or ineffective in pornography studies. Only by borrowing the psychoanalytical model can critical discourses on pornography get at a basic issue: that the construction of human subjectivity is not only incomplete from the outset, but relies heavily on imaginary signifiers. That is why Lacan would insist that in the mirror stage, when man first obtains a sense of self, it is actually achieved through an imaginary identification which renders the recognition of one's self nothing more than a misrecognition. This imaginarity with its inherent lack will haunt man even after he enters into the symbolic order of language and society. Men will be interpellated by pornography, to follow Althusser, because pornography can fill the lack inherent in male subjectivity, making faceless and indefinite individuals stand out as concrete subjects (see Althusser 172-74). Thus ideology (to which pornography also belongs) is not only a functional means of social control over individuals, but also a necessary way to constitute the imaginary subjectivity of the human psyche. But the lack in human subjectivity is present from the very beginning in the formation of the self and can never be completely filled in. Thus pornography is one and never the only one form of ideological interpellation that man has to respond to. By being interpellated *solely and constantly* by pornography, the male subject is endangering itself by allowing its desire and subjectivity to be riveted in pornography's enslavement, thus smothering other possibilities of ideological interpellations which can fill the (sexual-libidinal) subjectivity in various ways.⁸ One way to disrupt the domination of pornography is, therefore, to set up a censorial stance with pertinent social and political practices to constrain the harm and exploitation of pornography, in spite of the dubiousness and ambiguity inherent in such an ideological struggle. This position, however, does not attempt to install an oppressive authority to cover up the dubiousness and ambiguity, but rather to incorporate them into censorial considerations and practices. Yet, while in traditional pornography, censorship has never been completely absent and is productive of limited effects despite its ultimate

helplessness in the confrontation, in its encounter with net pornography censorship, as it were, never works. And this difficulty in censoring net pornography is basically a result of the negotiation and conflict between the global structure and local areas which are increasingly evident.

IV. Censorship of Net Pornography

In the middle of 1994, a bulletin board in the server of National Ching-Hua University (part of TaNet) that provided a forum for public discussion on erotic literature was closed by the Ministry of Education, Taiwan, for its ambiguous affiliation with pornography. In the middle of December 1994, an American producer of adult videotapes hired Taiwan lawyers to sue a local pirate company for copyright infringement; and the Taiwan court dismissed the case on the ground that those videotapes, by publicly disseminating immoral materials, were excluded from the protection of copyright law. These two cases about pornography not only show that censorship is always on the watch, but also reveal (as shown in the first case) the difficulty faced by the nation as a local entity confronting the global structure and (in the second) the conflict between nations as globally interrelated parts. The difficulty, simply put, is that Taiwan's Ministry of Education has only the right and power to censor and even shut down one branch of the Internet, the TaNet, but is powerless to stop the influx of pornography from the global Internet. With access to TaNet, the user can bypass the local network to tap the global Internet to download voluminous pornographic files. Though the majority of Taiwan's academic institutions would delete or hide the names of pornography newsgroups or databases from their lists, this strategy will not dupe net users for long, because, after becoming acquainted with the structure of the net, users can still subscribe to those groups. Even the gopher server of the Ministry includes a quite complete list of groups that should have been censored or erased. When the net crosses geographic and national boundaries to become a global structure, the nation and its legal system face severe challenges. In fact, almost no extant legal system can interfere in the global network. One distinctive feature of the net is its decentralization in both the ideological and the technical sense. On the ideological plane, decentralization expresses a political attitude against any oppressive attempt to censor the net for fear that the Orwellian Big Brother would arise to control the powerful telecommunication technology (Levy 13). This ideological inclination affirms unconstrained freedom and seriously obstructs any effort to set up any form of censorship on the net. On the technical level, the net's global

structure defies the right and power of any political entity to control and administer. Vic Sussman points out that because the communities are globally structured, information that is legally defined as pornographic in one state may not be against the law in others. The extant legal systems are mainly based on geographic and national boundaries, and destined to be ineffectual when dealing with the non-territorial information flow of the net (Sussman 59). On the other hand, because the Internet is constructed on a rhizomic pattern of interconnected net servers in parallel, not on an arborescent one with a central server occupying a dominant position in a hierarchical structure, censorship is almost technically impossible. Even if part of the net is cut off, this will not affect the net's function as a whole in transmitting information and the cut part will also fix itself in a short time. This difficulty of censorship in the net environment, caused both by the ideology of decentralization and by the decentralized technical structure, leads to some strange ways netizens employ to censor pornography. Some pornographic groups, for example, have to deal with people like parents or anti-pornography activists who keep posting messages, saying "you will all be burned in hell," thus initiating long "flame wars" in which subscribers spend too much time to fully indulge themselves in pornography. After a period of time, when people find that the whole group has become a barren land without any pornographic stuff that is attractive and interesting, they unsubscribe to the group, which turns at last into a webbed site and is closed off shortly to die a natural death (Elmer-Dewitt Battle 38). This strange pattern actually results from the difficulty in putting legal censorship into effectual practice on the Internet.

The global structure of the network with its constant negotiations with local areas seems to give a full proof of what Alvin Toffler has predicted: that in the third wave of civilization ensuing from computer and information technology, the nation as a political entity will occupy a somewhat embarrassing position for its indefensible failure to cope with the political issues of global macropolitics and the infinitely diverse agenda of local micropolitics. Thus the nation would have to transfer part of its power either upwards to global political organizations or downwards to local political groups (Toffler 456-60).⁹ Through its boundless global structure, the net has undoubtedly laid bare the issue of how local areas would adapt to the global structure and how these local areas would interact with each other in a global environment. While the first of our cases expresses the difficulty in censoring pornography in the global network, our second case exemplifies a conflict between local unities in dealing with pornography by means of legal censorship. In the second case there is a clear conflict between the legal

systems of different nations (two local unities) in judging what is pornography (which, here much as on the net, is also part of an information flow across geographic and national boundaries) and what the law would legitimately rule out from its protection. Whereas in the first case, law and its institutions of enforcement (the Ministry of Education) censor pornography through an active interference (to shut down the electronic forum), the second case, however, displays a more passive attitude in censorial interference (not to give any protection to pornography). This passive law enforcement can be explained as an attempt to drain the industry of its profits. If the pornography industry profits by commodifying the female body, then one possible way to stop the industry is to make it totally profitless by excluding it from copyright protection. Then the voluminous pirate copies of pornographic products would increase at such a pace that one day the industry would be expelled from the market, and pornography would be economically eliminated from society. Following this reasoning, we may say that there is no better place than the net to put into practice this censorship of pornography by not protecting its copyright. As one American copyright official once remarked, "The Internet is the world's biggest copying machine" (qtd. in Sussman 59); there is almost no copyright on the net. Because of its capability and speed in illegally duplicating pornographic commodities to crush the profit base of the pornography industry, net pornography should never be banned but should be encouraged to enhance its self-destructive force. Yet if this way of censoring pornography can be partially valid in a social space, it is because pornography has already been so "popular" among all classes (Ross 223) that a move to counter pornography by revoking copyright protection will not favor particular classes. However, if the same method is put into practice on the net, which is now fully accessible only to some in society, the danger may be incurred of serving the libidinal needs of particular social classes. Although this way of censoring pornography simplifies the issue by equating pornography with industry and by taking industry not as an effect but as a cause of pornography (in this respect, the psychoanalytical model may be more subtle in its interpretation of pornography), it still makes clear that in addition to its peculiar technical structure and ideological inclination, the net's affiliation with class divisions would present any political censorship of net pornography with complicated problems that are already inscribed in the relations not only between the local and the global and between the local and the local, but also between classes.

V. By Way of Conclusion

If we may accept that pornography, on or off the net, has to be censored to a certain degree, it is not because pornography twists sex and, when it is censored or even eliminated, sex could be restored to its normal and original form. Psychoanalytically speaking, sexual truth as such has little or no chance to be known empirically. Pornography should be censored rather because censorship may function as a counterpoint to display a dialectical stance, through which people with different positions and ideologies can engage in negotiations, communications, and even conflicting encounters in a social space to unmask the power relations of gender and class that are veiled by pornography. This space of communal negotiations would allow political practices and theoretical discourses to differentiate pornography (as the signifier) from sex (as its signified), and loosen the grip of pornography on the body, desire, and ideology of both men and women. Sex, in this way, can be free from the barren interpellation of pornography to obtain the capability to seek other alternatives. Although these alternatives may still remain imaginary and without the power to fulfill subjectivity or to lead people back to the sexual truth, it is better for people to know, as it were, that there are more alternatives than pornography, which is in fact merely one of the supplementary signifiers to sex. Censorship, in this sense, is not a form of mere oppression or suppression, but rather a necessity in opening a dialogical social space in which the struggles among different voices would force not merely pornography but censorship itself into incessant phase changes out of which a new dimension of political practices and theoretical considerations may emerge. Without censorship, pornography would always be in the danger of being not only neutralized, but also naturalized, which may result in the extinction of all possibilities of political and discursive reflections.

Yet it seems harder for this dialectical space to appear on the net because of the net's peculiar technical structure of decentralization and its global pattern of diverse local areas. Although the net has high potential to become a perfect dialogical space, it seems not so promising when it comes to pornography. Nowadays, opinions among netizens about pornography are not only divided (between liberals and moral corrects), but so passionate to be almost incommunicable. This situation is further worsened by the absence of any effective political interference, which unsurprisingly results in a strange pattern of private censorship as mentioned above. Although the two modes of official censorship discussed in the last section are not the ideal forms of

censorship because of the obvious monological power of these forms in dictating rules without leaving much room for a dialogical space, this does not mean that we should give up the efforts to set up official censorship with a more dialogical character, and abandon ourselves to private censorship. For private censorship is still likely to become another form of monological power with no room for different voices to engage with one another. That is part of the reason why private censorship on the net has had no marked effects, but only worsened the conflicts without transforming them into dialectical communications and negotiations (once a forum is closed, people would open another one in another corner of the net with the attitude that probably goes like: "to fight and even to talk with people like you is only a waste of my time"). A better form of censorship might be a kind of official censorship arising from the public space. I decline to call this "public censorship" because in a way I still believe that even though a censorial standard will come into being as a result of conflicting negotiations and encounters in the public space, it still has to be legitimized through certain political processes (such as passing a bill) to achieve any effective social practices. It is necessary not to be too romantic in thinking that without official institutions and the legal system, censorship can still function effectively. In official censorship, that which is signified by the word "official" has to be kept, for only through official legitimation can a standard of justice become a reference point by which social beings can possibly live and act collectively and even in collaboration. When this kind of censorship is set up, its standard of justice is never to become a timeless and monological truth, but is always in preparation for any valid modification derived from the negotiations and dialogues of the public space where censorship and pornography are engaged in continuous mutual critique and reflection. This is probably a more ideal form of censorship, though how far it is from reality remains obscure. Yet there are urgent problems the net will face in the near future: not only how a standard of justice can be reached as a criterion for public activities, but also what officials, what legal system, and what political institutions can legitimately take the responsibility of official censorship. Especially when the nation as a political entity is becoming increasingly powerless in face of the global net, these problems are not going to disappear until people both outside and inside the net work out feasible answers.

Notes

¹ An example at hand is Taiwan. In June, 1994, the government of Taiwan passed a bill to organize the "NII Task Force," a group consisting of professors, government administrators, scientists, and representatives of the computer industry, to set out to design a blueprint of NII. The aim is not only to give Taiwan's industry a competitive edge in production for years to come, but also to pave the way that may lead Taiwan to be the center of commerce and transportation in the Asian-Pacific area. The documents concerning these efforts can be found in net sites such as `gopher://inform.nii.gov.tw:70/00/news` and `gopher://inform.nii.gov.tw:70/00/nii`.

² According to a statistical figure issued on net by *The Internet Index* in November, 1994, the present rate at which the net is growing becomes so rapid that all people on earth will probably have their own access to Internet by 2003. Although this figure is only a prediction whose validity will depend on other considerations like the supply of accessible links, the delegation of power in controlling net routes, and the deployment of political and economic resources, it nevertheless indicates the irrefutable fact that the net has been popularized to a remarkable degree and more and more people are contributing their time and energy to the net, attempting to take full advantage of the new tool of information technology.

³ Last year the FBI appealed to the American Congress to pass the Wiretap Bill (the Digital Telephony Bill) to install a chip (the Clipper Chip) in all telecommunication products for easier wiretapping when necessary (as the need, for example, in defending national security arises). Although the bill does not give the FBI unconstrained authority to Wiretap communication because the FBI's authority to access the unscrambling function of the chip is shared with the courts (whenever the FBI attempts to wiretap, it has to appeal to the courts officially to get the permission and the additional "key" to put the Clipper Chip into function), the public and especially the netizens still oppose the bill for fear that a Big Brotherly society foreseen by Orwell might come true. The bill, however, was passed despite the opponents' efforts. The documents of the bill can be reached in `gopher://gopher.panix.com/00/vtw/clipper/vtw-clipper.faq`. One electronic journal called *The Wiretap Watch* also has detailed reports on the bill from issues Oct. 1 to Oct. 7, 1994. These issues can be obtained from `listserv@cpsr.org`.

⁴ I can also endorse this statement my own experience. Of about twenty newsgroups I subscribed to, the pornographic ones can be flooded by

thousands of messages in less than two weeks, comprising both text and binary files (pornographic pin-ups) which can be downloaded freely. This amount, compared to that of other newsgroups which usually get less than 10 messages a month, would have evoked strong anxiety of information overload if the messages were not pornographic. *Time* magazine recently published a figure indicating that in the last six months about 45 thousand pornographic text and image files stored in the net have been downloaded more than 6 million times by users in America alone (Quittner 45). The figure, we can imagine, would be higher if we considered global users. Generally speaking, the hottest "services" on the net are those related to pornography.

⁵ For a critique of Ellis' exposition from a homosexual point of view, see Pajaczkowska 193-195. However, in a recent interview Juliet Mitchell defends psychoanalysis by saying that, though psychoanalysis is often criticized for its heterosexual hegemony, it is still significant and inspiring in leading us back to the "primal scene" of the heterosexual structure which undeniably still dominates the intersubjective and the sexual (either heterosexual or homosexual) relations of the present society. See Moi 939-40.

⁶ Because the main focus of this paper is on pictorial pornography on the net rather than on the sex chat, the scopoc mechanism is relevant here. For a preliminary study of the sex chat as well as teledildonics ensuing from the development of virtual reality, see Branwyn's article.

⁷ According to records in my hand, the sites connected to TaNet, one branch of the Internet, are almost all those of academic institutions. In the U.S. the Internet is now open to non-academic and business people, although there are still severe restrictions on any business activity on the net. The regulation on TaNet of non-academic activities is even more rigorous, so much so that activities to transmit business information are treated in the same way as those to transmit threatening, unfriendly, and pornographic information. The reader may consult newsgroups `tw.announce` and `tw.bbs.comp.network` to get files about TaNet.

⁸ In his psychoanalytical study on pornography, Mark Bracher points out that one positive effect of pornography lies in its representations of "the phallic signifier," which provide "points de capiton" to combine "the Real of one's bodily sensation and the Imaginary grasp of one's bodily unity with the signifiers of the Symbolic order that pin down one's identity." Men who see pornography can thus get rid of the danger of becoming psychotic. Yet Bracher also points out that pornography is only one of the many sources of "points de capiton." Being too obsessed with it, man will place other parts of

his body under castration by the Symbolic order, subordinating all his desire and jouissance solely to the phallic (Bracher 98-99). Thus we must recognize pornography as one form of ideological interpellation available among others to construct subjectivity and identity, and try to remove ourselves from the dominance of the phallic signifiers in order to have the chance to enter other areas for other alternatives.

⁹ For what political organization is the proper authority in administering the global network, see files on cpsr-global@cpsr.org from Nov. 8 to 9, 1994. This forum is focused on cultural, social, and political issues ensuing from the GII.

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