

Book Reviews



Porn Archives. TIM DEAN, STEVEN RUSZCZYCKY, and DAVID SQUIRES, eds. Durham, NC, and London, UK: Duke University Press, 2014. x, 503 pp. ISBN 978-0-8223-5671-4.

Porn Archives is a collection of 21 essays that grew out of the international conference *At the Limit: Pornography and the Humanities*, held in 2010 at the University of Buffalo. The editors of this work are all affiliated with the English department of the State University of New York (SUNY) in Buffalo: Tim Dean is a professor of English and Comparative Literature, and the director of the Center for the Study of Psychoanalysis and Culture; Steven Ruszczycky recently completed his PhD; and David Squires is a PhD candidate.

This important multidisciplinary work is a vital addition to the field of porn studies. It contains contributions from scholars in a wide range of academic disciplines, including art history, ethnic studies, literature, and film and media. Its scope is quite broad and extends well beyond the traditional boundaries of archives, libraries, and museums. The essays are arranged in six separate sections. The first, "Pedagogical Archives," examines the structures in place for the creation of porn knowledge (universities and academia, archives, libraries, and museums), which enable the critical reception and discussion of porn. As its name implies, the section "Historical Archives" focuses on specific textual documents and key moments in the history of porn. The third section, "Image Archives," contains essays dealing specifically with porn in the form of photographs, visual arts, and film. The final three sections are thematic in scope. The fourth, "Rough Archives," looks at porn that contains depictions of imagined or real non-consensual sex. The fifth, "Transnational Archives," discusses porn from within other geographical borders (in this case, Puerto Rico and Brazil), as well as records that cross the boundaries of what traditionally qualifies as porn (specifically war porn, in which the theatre may be Iraq and Afghanistan, among other locations). The last section, "Archives of Excess," examines porn that falls

outside the mainstream, featuring essays on foreskin fetishism, the sexuality of children, and amputee porn.

In his contribution to this work, Ramón E. Soto-Crespo reflects on his adolescence and early adulthood in Puerto Rico in the 1980s and 1990s, at a time when the state had effectively banned pornography throughout the island. He remembers how he and some friends managed to amass a small cache of pornographic magazines obtained from acquaintances who had smuggled them back after travels to the United States. He and the other boys preserved these materials in an old trunk with a secret bottom compartment, which they kept in a clubhouse they shared. They referred to the trunk as “*el archivo*” (pp. 304–5). This image of the secret porn stash becomes a powerful metaphor for porn archives in general. As is made abundantly clear throughout the volume, particularly in Dean’s introduction, porn archives are notoriously fragmentary and ephemeral; the holdings are at constant risk of destruction either by becoming accidentally soiled or by being deliberately discarded; and they are shrouded in secrecy, with only a privileged group of initiates having access to them. The lack of a proper porn archive is a major impediment to the full development of porn studies as a scholarly discipline, according to Linda Williams (p. 35). In spite of the fact that Williams’s own groundbreaking work, *Hard-Core: Power, Pleasure and the “Frenzy” of the Visible*,¹ a foundational text of porn studies, was published more than a quarter of a century ago, she notes, with a nod to scholar Dave Andrews, that the study of porn continues to be “a field that is always on the brink of emerging but that never quite arrives” (p. 35). She provides a compelling example by indicating that there is still no academic journal in this field. (As luck would have it, when *Porn Archives* was at the press in early 2014, Routledge in the United Kingdom did indeed launch a scholarly journal called *Porn Studies*, and Williams contributed an article that appeared in its inaugural issue.²)

Archivists and librarians will find particular value in the essays of Squires, and in Jennifer Burns Bright and Ronan Crowley, who discuss the physical space accorded to pornography in public libraries, archives, and museums, as well as access issues for these materials. Both essays offer an incisive critique of the cataloguing and descriptive practices of the past, which were ostensibly meant to protect members of the general public from gaining access to materials deemed to be offensive. While cataloguers aimed, on the one hand, to ensure that the material was preserved in designated repositories, on the other hand they effectively described it in

1 Linda Williams, *Hard-Core: Power, Pleasure and the “Frenzy” of the Visible* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989).

2 Linda Williams, “Pornography, Porno, Porn: Thoughts on a Weedy Field,” *Porn Studies* 1, no. 1–2 (2014): 24–40.

such a way as to condemn it to bibliographic obscurity. Bright and Crowley, in particular, point to obscurantist terms such as “gallantiana” (p. 110), “facetiae,” and “kruptadia” (p. 123), which librarians and book dealers once used to describe pornographic works in an obvious attempt to obfuscate meaning, and to restrict access to only the most knowing of specialized scholars. These authors also speak of library books that remained in the reserved stacks but whose bibliographic records were pulled from the public catalogue to prevent retrievability. In this way, says Squires, quoting cataloguer Sanford Berman, they committed “bibliocide” (p. 98, note 35). Bright and Crowley provide a thoroughly fascinating survey of access practices for porn collections in various well-known repositories around the world. Their essay also contains a highly enlightening and useful discussion of the paradigmatic shift in access policies for porn in contemporary libraries and archives: access continues to be closely monitored, but whereas in the past these measures were meant to protect the patrons from the collection, they are now chiefly intended to protect the collection from the patrons (p. 111).

Perhaps the single most important contribution of this volume to the archival discussion of pornography is the attention it pays to the proliferation of porn, and to its increased production and accessibility in the digital environment. Time and again, the contributors point to various porn sites as de facto archival repositories, where online users can retrieve the files they are searching for quickly and easily, and tag them for future use. As Dean states in the introduction, these rapid changes in digital technology “have so dramatically increased not only access to porn but also awareness of the significance of archival techniques” (p. 1). The clear implication here is that the general online public, many of whom are accessing porn from the Internet (according to conclusive search results on various web browsers), are developing a more refined archival literacy and, consequently, have higher expectations of their archives and libraries when they are not searching for porn.

The main weakness of this volume may well stem from the expectations of its intended readership. A title like *Porn Archives* may lead potential readers to assume that this volume is directly related to archival science and information studies. However, the link is not always so clearly established. The editors and contributors often use the term “archives” in its widest possible sense, applying it to the entire pornographic body of work that has been, or is being produced. While the introduction and some of the essays address traditional archives and libraries directly (namely the work of Williams, Squires, and Bright and Crowley), and some other authors write slightly more tangentially on online archives specifically (for instance, Marcia Klotz, John Paul Ricco, Prabha Manuratne, and Harri Kalha), the vast majority of the essays presented in this volume focus on a particular text or a genre or sub-genre of porn that may or may not yet have made its way

to a traditional or online repository. This may irk archivists and librarians, as well as literalists. Still, this should in no way be read as a critique of the superb critical analyses contained in this collection of cogently argued and carefully written and edited essays, many of which make critical advancements in the broader field of porn studies.

It should be stated that the collection contains essays that may very well challenge the reader. In picking up this volume, one may reasonably expect to read graphic descriptions of sexual activity and to see sexually explicit illustrations. But the reader may not be prepared to read essays on more difficult topics such as bondage and non-consensual sex (the essays of Lisa Downing, Eugenia Brinkema, and Klotz); war porn, that is to say graphic depictions of humiliating acts performed on living, injured, or dead war combatants and filmed for the pleasure of a specific online community (the essays of Ricco and Manuratne); and child pornography (Ruszczky's essay). That being said, these more challenging texts on more difficult subjects are nonetheless critically engaging and persuasively argued, albeit perhaps not directly related to archives and libraries.

Porn Archives ends with an extensive appendix that is sure to be of interest to researchers and scholars in the field of sexuality, as well as to archivists and librarians. Compiled by Caitlin Shanley, the appendix presents an annotated list of repositories around the world that are known to hold important pornographic collections. The 15-page appendix will prove to be an indispensable resource for those wishing to contribute further to the advancement of porn studies, and to the continuing inventory of the porn archive.

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Re-Collection: Art, New Media, and Social Memory. RICHARD RINEHART and JON IPPOLITO. Cambridge, MA, and London, UK: MIT Press, 2014. 297 pp. ISBN 978-0-262-02700-7.

Re-Collection is a book about the specific situation of new media art and the preservation challenges that attend it. The intersection between the set of readers interested in new media art and the set that includes the readership of *Archivaria* may, admittedly, be limited; however, *Re-Collection* should be of interest to a broader archival readership for the way it analyzes and frames the threats to the survival of all digital culture. Specifically, the recognition of the material qualities of digital records by a number of recent authors means that “look and feel” is increasingly acknowledged as more than a superficial attribute of records, and examining the