The material and legal status of women in the West has radically changed since the end of second-wave feminism in the 1960s and 70s. Yet, the stigmatization of female sexuality has virtually disappeared. In Luis Buñuel's Belle de Jour, a woman from before second-wave feminism embarks on a journey of sexual liberation and is condemned to it forever. In Audre Lorde's Uses of Eroticism, the power and liberating properties of Lorde's definition of eroticism stand in direct opposition to pornography. Finally, Ovidie's Porno Manifesto demonstrates the value of sexual liberation, discriminates against pornography and sex work, and validates porn as a creative human expression. Through the discriminatory stance of pornography and sex work, we, as women, can pave the way for our own erotic and sexual liberation.

In the film Belle de Jour, Luis Buñuel highlights the gap between a woman's social role and her access to erotic pleasure. The film opens with the numerous sexual fantasies of Séverine, the heroine, tied to a tree by her husband, who orders another man to rape her. In the first part of the film, the viewer discovers the monotony of her privileged life and the absence of erotic passion in her marriage. Her classically handsome husband is a wealthy doctor who provides her with a luxurious life, rich in ski vacations, but they sleep in separate beds every night. During one of these vacations, Séverine learns, through gossip with another privileged housewife, that a woman they know has prostituted herself in a brothel, purely for pleasure. This inspires her to do the same.

In this brothel, Séverine, frightened and speechless, discovers a very well-mannered and well-supervised staff and madam. She finds the brothel clean and bathed in sunlight. The madam is polite and professional with her, and the other sex workers don't seem to be mistreated women, but rather confident in their profession. One of the most disturbing scenes in the film is when Séverine enters one of the rooms with her very first client. She struggles with what she is doing

and with the man who has introduced her. The madam has to speak firmly to her, and the client has to be very physical with her for her to have sex. As a viewer, it is very disconcerting that Séverine returns to the brothel after this experience, while she continues to go there every day while her husband is at work.

This harrowing scene illustrates the almost impossible task of surrendering to and finally obtaining what one desires. After so many precepts stemming from the culture of purity in French society and Catholicism, it is unimaginable to go against everything you were taught during your upbringing. The violence suffered by Séverine is not only physical, but spiritual: as in a real birth, she is painfully reborn into the sexual being she has always dreamed of being.

In one scene, a client wants to act out a dominance/submission scenario with Séverine, which she doesn't understand. He becomes agitated when she doesn't play her part in this playful scene and demands that another sex worker take her place. The woman and Séverine observe through a peephole in another room how the other sex worker knows exactly how to handle this client, with confidence and respect. She sees here the opposite of her usual sexual fantasies, and of all the sexual encounters Séverine has experienced so far in the film, where she is the submissive one and the man the dominant one.

Séverine continues working at the brothel for a long time, long enough to develop a favorite client who becomes obsessed with her. At the end of the film, this client, Marcel, goes to her apartment building and tries, unsuccessfully, to kill her husband. Marcel is quickly shot dead by the police. We discover that this gunshot wound has paralyzed Séverine's husband forever, and that she is destined to care for him until his death. The filmmaker, Luis Buñuel, effectively warns women with the ending of his film: women cannot combine erotic love with social class and privilege. We must have one or the other. Pursuing both will lead to tragedy and eternal

damnation. Buñuel's tragic film, aimed at women, was released the same year the contraceptive pill was legalized in France. It could be interpreted either as a warning to women not to pursue erotic love or as a critique of French society and its Catholic prudence.

The way Séverine in Belle de Jour uses sex work to escape her powerless life is very similar to how Ovidie explains her origin story as a porn star in her book Porn Manifesto. She recounts that as a teenager, she would go to a porn DVD shop expecting “horrible things, girls suffering, animals, scatology, bimbo caricatures, raw images,” very similar to the fear shown in Séverine’s eyes during her first visit to the brothel, but instead Ovidie found “only beautiful covers, with beautiful women, re-edited images” (20). The actresses were showcased.What they expressed sexually made them powerful and free. (20) Inspired by the films she saw, she decided that one day there would be "such a positive and strong image of my own body and my sex" (20). Once she was old enough to work in porn, she discovered that "many actresses were more liberated than most women" (21). Just as Séverène became much freer when she started working in a brothel and was finally able to act on her desires.

The sexual liberation of Séverine and Ovidie through sex work is not commonly defended by feminist thinkers. Audre Lorde's essay, *Uses of the Erotic*, creates a dichotomy between eroticism and pornography. Eroticism, according to Lorde, is a source of power exploited and enriched by creativity, deep emotional and physical connections, political action, intellectualism, and spirituality.It is also the act of feeling something "intensely and fully" (Lorde). In her essay, she explains that when we manage to access this "inner feeling of satisfaction" that eroticism provides, then "we can aspire to feel" (Lorde) this eroticism in all aspects of our lives, our communities, our cultures, our political opinions, and so on. In contrast, pornography is characterized by "the use of the other as an object of gratification rather than

sharing our joy of gratification" and "the suppression of genuine feeling" (Lorde). According to Lorde, pornography is a force opposed to eroticism, seeking to exploit this inner power to control us and disconnect us from others. It is a misunderstanding of eroticism, perceived as merely sexual or perverse, that is used to label women and others as "disoriented, trivial, psychotic" (Lorde).

Personally, I find this view of porn incredibly narrow, reductive, and misleading. To consider pornography as the opposite of eroticism rests on a false premise: pornography is actually an art form, and Lorde herself, in her list of erotic acts, presents artistic creation and experience as an erotic action. It is the commodification and co-opting of this art form that is problematic, but this is true for all art forms, all sciences, and everything. Designating pornography as a scapegoat for much of the patriarchal violence and control exerted over women is a mistake.

Many second-wave anti-pornography feminists, like Audre Lorde, harbor a long list of reservations about pornography, all of which are directly addressed in Ovidie's Porn Manifesto. She responds directly to these second-wave feminists, saying: "We porn actresses do not wish to be defended by (anti-pornography activists). For most of us consider them enemies of our profession and its acceptance. We have freely chosen our activity, and do not consider ourselves degraded in any way" (69). She describes the working conditions of a porn actress, which run counter to almost all commonly believed stereotypes about sex work. She asserts that everyone is paid: "I have never seen anyone not get paid on a shoot or not receive the agreed sum." (22) everyone is of legal age:“Before each scene, the set photographer takes a portrait photo of each actor/actress next to two pieces of identification. You can’t act in a film if you don’t have yourself on two different forms of identification” (45). Everyone is consenting: “Women choose

to do this job. They want to… Why do we imagine that actors/actresses are victims?" (48). And these are real jobs for women, and they act accordingly. "All actors consider their activity to be a real job." (50). Reading this, we can understand that working in pornography involves exactly the same problems as any other career, and that the problems present in the porn industry are universal work problems.

Ovidie also states very clearly that illegal acts in video form, such as X-rated films with underage actors, actual abuse, rape, and other deplorable acts, are not pornography. She asserts, "The pedophilic tapes that exist are filmed in the most illegal way. They are clandestine, aimed at a marginal audience… These are two worlds that have no more connection than the fashion world and the world of tomato sellers" (46). Reading Ovidie's work, it becomes clear that the correlation between pornography and these illegal and horrific tapes is a mistake.

Another argument against pornography is that, even if women are not mistreated during the making of porn, abuse is highlighted and glorified. Ovidie also refutes this argument, stating that sexual acts involving violence or derogatory language are not necessarily degrading; they can be pleasurable: "You can enjoy having your hair pulled and being called a slut, enjoy it, and not be a submissive woman… You can enjoy being insulted, spanked, or whatever, and have it result in a healthy relationship" (62). The inclusion of violence and derogatory language in pornography is a representation of individuals' real sexual encounters and desires, where the goal is to break taboos and cross the line between what is acceptable and unacceptable.The raison d'être of kinks and BDSM is not that people enjoy these specific acts or topics, but that breaking a taboo is exhilarating and liberates from the constraints of cultural norms. While Ovidie reflects on the prevalence of fake rape scenes in pornography, stating that she doesn't respect such films, she "condemns pornography on the grounds that there are a few fringe materials that depict

violence; it's a bit like refusing to eat porcini mushrooms because there are poisonous ones" (62). Throughout Ovidie's analysis of pornography as an industry and an art form, she continually emphasizes that generalizing porn as a monolithic thing is terribly inaccurate and fallacious.

Through this refutation of the many arguments against pornography, Ovidie expresses her main point: that censorship is “an obstacle to freedom” (90). She argues that censorship “is not feminist. Those who call for censorship are not feminists” (90). If we censor acts of human expression such as pornography, we limit the material that can be used for educational and liberating purposes. This is what happens in the same way when we censor any other form of art.Ovidie argues that “representing sexual pleasure in a positive and taboo-free way can relieve sexually frustrated or disturbed people” (65). Talking about sex and eroticism in our society is still incredibly taboo today. Many people today discover the language of their sexual desires through pornography and the internet. Even in 2002, when Ovidie’s book was published, she wrote, “The internet was taking hold, opening up the possibility of a grand freedom of expression” (43).This access to information about the depths and extents of human sexual desire and physical capabilities through online archives is a resource for people who would otherwise be humiliated in their real lives by their communities for speaking about such topics. Furthermore, the stronger the censorship of this dissemination of information, the greater the frustrations. Therefore, more crimes. (64) She mentions that historically, rape is much older than modern mainstream pornography, stating: "Rape didn't wait for Marc Dorcel films to be frequently committed." (63)

The second-wave feminist movement overlooked a central aspect of true women's liberation: sexual liberation. Ovidie criticizes this wave of feminism, stating, "I don't believe that the feminism of the sixties and seventies was the result of a liberating awakening." (37) Rather,

she believes it was a symptom of capitalism, that there was a need for more workers, that women gained rights, and that their role in society changed. Ovidie goes on to assert that the rights women acquired amounted to nothing more than "the right to make the same mistakes as men. The right for a woman to become CEO, minister, to exploit people, to claim a right to power over others." (36)Instead of being controlled by the specific men in their lives, women were “transformed into workers and consumers,” and by gaining the right to work and buy freely, women found themselves “in the same situation of subjugation as men.” (38) Ovidie describes the shift in women’s subjugation from submission to men to submission to the boss or to capitalism as a “pseudo-liberation that, moreover, only occurred on the sole condition that they accept this ‘change of pre-ownership.’” (38) Through all these ideas, Ovidie tells us that the liberation brought about by the second wave of feminism—the material and legal gains promised to women—did not truly liberate them. As long as men are subject to the yoke of capitalist growth, women will not achieve freedom by obtaining the same status as them. Furthermore, the material and legal gains resulting from the feminist movement do not liberate women spiritually or sexually.

For me, true eroticism would be the result of this spiritual and sexual liberation. Erotic liberation for women would mean that Séverine could bring her sexual fantasies to life without having to work in the capitalist system as a sex worker (and therefore exploited like any other worker), or that Ovidie could see her body valued through video art without the constraints of paid employment in the porn industry. For this to happen, it is necessary to destigmatize sex work and the porn industry. We must understand that these two activities are professions just like any other, and finally, that pornography is an art form like any other, and that censoring it amounts to censoring human creative expression.

The taboo surrounding pornography and sex work was broken for me after I moved to the San Francisco Bay Area and started performing in the local music scene. Through this community, I met and befriended many sex workers and porn actors. I realized that this phenomenon, so stigmatized and terrifying to me as a child, was ubiquitous, and that the people working in these industries were human beings too. I saw the many pros and cons of their work, but most of their struggles stemmed from the fact that sex work wasn't considered legitimate employment. Many of my sex worker friends are trans women, and as trans women, it can be incredibly difficult to get and hold almost any job because of the appalling transphobia, even in the San Francisco Bay Area.Yet, these friends were far more financially stable and happier in their jobs than most people I knew who held traditional employment. The problems related to their work stem from the stigma our culture assigns them as illegitimate, and also from the near impossibility for them to unite as workers to gain more rights.

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