Harbord Street Histories: Feminism's Articulations of Porn

On Good for Her and the Ground of Toronto's Feminist Porn Awards[1]

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Introduction

It might be argued that this narrative is itself far too easy to write this way, but it is time to work through (Canadian) feminist porn imaginaries with the following assertion: what we imagine to be feminist porn in its most recent life was located with a very precise feminist genealogy on a strip of Harbord Street in Toronto, Canada. It begins with a bang. Literally. A very much *for real* explosion, something referenced in all of the interviews presented here. This bang puts the southwest strip of Harbord at Spadina east of Bathurst securely on feminist and historical maps. On July 29, 1983, the Henry Morgentaler abortion clinic, located at 85 Harbord Street, was bombed by someone presumed to be troubled by reproductive choice and the clinic's services—and the building was all but destroyed. One of Canada's largest feminist bookstores, the Toronto Women's Bookstore, was located at that time at 87 Harbord Street, directly next to the clinic. The force of the explosion and the ensuing fire damaged a great deal of the bookstore's stock, later resulting in a "Fire Sale" that generated enough revenue to allow the store to reopen across the street at its longest-serving and most recent home: 73 Harbord.

Such proximities, as we discovered while working on the Canadian Feminist Porn Archive and Research project, have produced the need for us to generate more collaborative and complex methodologies for how we study feminist porn in general—indeed, how we begin to study the locales which we agree cannot be dismissed. Originally, we had not intended to do interviews, but they actually proved to be very productive. We interviewed the owner and a number of employees of the Toronto Women's Bookstore, workers who also originated, organized, developed, and then ran the very first Feminist Porn Awards (FPAs), who developed the original criteria and who also put hearts, bodies, souls, and spirits into cultivating feminist porn cultures. All were actively involved in developing, curating, organizing and staffing the first few years of the FPAs; all were privy to *insider narratives* about the events even as almost all of them were actively engaged in promotional activities (so, were interviewed by the press of record in Toronto, across Canada, and in some parts of the US and Australia). All but one of my interviews were conducted in public spaces such as coffee shops in Toronto and all agreed to be identified by name especially given their already high public profile in both feminist and mainstream media as representatives and organizers of the FPAs.

Carlyle Jansen, queer feminist sex educator, owner of Good for Her, a feminist sex shop, and one of the original organizers of the Pussy Palace, Women and Trans People bathhouses in Toronto (sex spaces themselves raided in 2000) and of the Feminist Porn Awards, recalls that her sex store opened its doors at 175 Harbord Street in the late 1990s and has remained on this south block of Harbord Street, what we both identify as *a feminist strip*, for over 17 years now. The energies of this strip eventually merge with those of the University of Toronto but between the Morgentaler clinic, the beloved Toronto Women's Bookstore (TWB), and Good For Her (GFH), there has been a solid feminist presence on this block of what is now called the Harbord Street Village for the first two decades of the twenty-first century and close to the last three of the 20th century. This is a long history. The Feminist Porn Awards emerge out of this context as the brainchild of Jansen and GFH employees beginning as a very small event, but clearly reaching critical mass and credibility since.

What can be posited for certain is that the most recent incarnation, feminist porn, cross-cuts this very unusual street in Toronto, Harbord Street, and its feminist histories. Harbord Street is an east-west small street running parallel to Bloor between Bloor and College and intersecting across the city from Queen's Park circle through University of Toronto westbound to Ossington. Initially not much bigger than a laneway, it runs parallel but south of the very busy Bloor Street, north of the equally busy College Street, and passes right through the heart of the University of Toronto beginning at Queen's Park (University Avenue), ending as it intersects Ossington. Widened twice, this tree-lined street has become associated with university culture. Wikipedia, for instance, lists the street's primary demographic as University of Toronto students, professors, and University of Toronto fraternities. Such listings are, as always, dated and are no longer accurate. One local Toronto newspaper, *Now Magazine*, detailed the 2016 neighbourhood as an eclectic mix of off-leash dog parks, restaurants, bookstores, upper-class homes, and those of local University of Toronto and Harbord Collegiate (high school) students (*NOW* Staff 2016). So too does *blogTO*, detailing the neighbourhood as a lazy and quiet thoroughfare between the historically-then burgeoning University of Toronto downtown campus, several elite high schools, and the remainder of Toronto similarly undergoing development (Flack 2012). *Toronto Life* also notes the high regarded University of Toronto library, Robarts Library, and details the drastic changes made to this once-sleepy stretch of Harbord street, allowing for the construction of the library in 1973 (Aronovitch 2010).

Because of this proximity to the university and students, as well as its centralized location as noted above, this strip was chosen as the location of the Henry Morgentaler feminist abortion clinic (Dunphy 1998). The first iteration of the clinic opened in 1983 and faced both legal and political scrutiny from the beginning, raided by police in July of that year. They seized some equipment and charged Dr. Morgentaler and two colleagues, Robert Scott and Leslie Smoling, with inducing illegal miscarriages. On November 8, 1984, an Ontario jury, following its Québec predecessors, acquitted the two. This is the same clinic that was protested repeatedly and, eventually, bombed on June 15, 1983 (Kaihla 1992).

This pattern of harassment spread to the Toronto Women's Bookstore, primarily because of their address. Prior to the emergence of new obscenity legislation in 1992 and for a time after, TWB was regularly scrutinized, and packages destined for TWB were regularly seized and censored by Canada Customs, meaning that mostly queer and/or lesbian porn coming to the store was subject to constant search and seizure by the state. The larger impact meant that almost anything associated with that address was subject to holding, search, and eventual, although not always, later release (the further implication being that other bookstores not targeted could often get this material onto their shelves much faster than TWB). To our knowledge, and in the working memory of store owner Carlyle Jansen, GFH was not subject to these state regulatory practices. Again, to reiterate: the significance here is not that such stores, scholarship or litigation occur, but that they occur in what is specifically a Canadian and not American context. Too much of what constitutes "Porn Studies" is American. There's nothing essentially wrong with that—settler colonialism notwithstanding. But such nationalisms do begin to matter when American scholarship, geographies, or legalities, for instance, come to stand in as *all* scholarship, geographies or legalities. What gets unfolded here is uniquely Canadian—in terms of Canadian Porn Studies, Canadian geographies, Canadian legalities. Such nationalisms are as problematic as any and I do not offer them as remedy to their American counterparts. But they most certainly do offer examples of uniquely Canadian studies. For better or for worse, Canada is not just another American state but a settler colonial nation with its own structure, histories, and texture (despite sharing much with the US including a very long border). What follows is a discussion of feminist porn, Canadian feminist porn, and then a series of interviews that place the Feminist Porn Awards *on the scholarly map,* as it were.

Feminist Porn Wars Canadian Style

This work takes as its immediate object those Feminist Porn Awards organized by feminist sex store Good for Her, located strategically close to and with intent near the (former) Toronto Women's Bookstore on Harbord Street, a strip of feminist businesses running between Spadina and Bathurst in Toronto, Canada—space now gone even as Good for Her remains. Such proximities are important for a number of reasons. First, the SSHRC-funded Feminist Porn Archive and Research Project champions feminist porn and also the scholarship of feminist porn academics. Still, at the most recent (circa 2014) Feminist Porn Conference held at the University of Toronto (literally around the corner from the strip this project seeks to put back on discursive and feminist maps), we find ourselves exceedingly vexed to witness the many bright, engaged, articulate, and self-reflective feminist (and in some cases, self-avowedly non-feminist) porn workers, activists, and academics from the United States cross over the complex national and still-colonial border between the United States and Canada to tell stories about the American porn wars *to each other* without seeming to even realize that they'd indeed, crossed a border and were, by consequence, in the empire north of empire.[3] By necessity, this work argues with other Canadian feminist and queer

scholars that the sex wars in a Canadian context were different from those and their timing in an American context (see, for instance, Kiss n' Tell 1990, 1994; Bell 1994; Ross 1995, 2009; Cossman et al. 1997; Khan 2004; Noble 2004, 2006, 2009). As part of different legal contexts for categories like obscenity, in Canada in particular (recent obscenity legislation is known as the *Butler* decision), the fact of feminist porn emerging within a Canadian context is significant—all the more so given this is a practice which calls for, at the very least, radical contextualization as methodology.[4] This paper (and larger FPARP project) attempts such contextualization: that is, the writing of radical contextualization as both its aim and intention. In many cases radical remembering is as significant as it is vital in the face of the radical forgetting that can happen when countercultural publics are no longer remembered as part of "official" or hegemonic lived narratives.

Finally, as noted by many recent Canadian scholars theorizing the emergence of lesbian identities in the mid to late twentieth century, like the work of Becki Ross (1995; 2009), the production of such identities is related to the establishment of precise neighbourhood spaces in other locales.[5] Liz Millward, for instance, in her *Making a Scene: Lesbians and Community Across Canada*, 1964–84 (2015); Rebecca Jennings in her *Unnamed Desires: A Sydney Lesbian History* (2015); and indeed, as Davis and Kennedy do in their American-centric *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold* (1993)—so many of these works theorize the emergence of lesbian identities as unique in the twentieth century even as such practices existed prior to this century. One can extend this context beyond the formation of lesbian nations to butch-femme communities, drag king subcultures, etc.—these are all, at one time, also *urban neighbourhoods* in the making. Lynn Comella asserts as much in *Vibrator Nation* (2017), something corroborated by Kristen Hogan in *The Feminist Bookstore Movement: Lesbian Antiracism and Feminist Accountability* (2016).

To date, not one study that I know of tracks the specific thriving histories lived along Harbord Street in Toronto, Canada from Good For Her (nearer to Bathurst) to the Toronto Women's Bookstore (closer to Spadina). This work and these interviews map the proximities and historiographies of this feminist strip, which through its politics and in-person activities, often as a consequence of the *Butler* decision, resulted in both GFH and the FPAs and Feminist Porn Conference in the first place. That feminist strip is one which allows the feminist sex store proximity to its very important precursor and sister, the feminist bookstore and only a slightly removed feminist cousin, the Morgentaler Abortion Clinic, which was closed after being bombed in the 1980s.[6] These are exceedingly intimate and uniquely Canadian historiographies of feminist porn that require not only radical contextualization as method but also a fierce commitment to cognizance and convergence on so many levels.[7] One of the dangers of digital cultures and their methodologies is the danger of collapsing all historical time, nations (Canada as unique and separate from the United States of America), and capitalist time into a rabid and overdetermined *now*, one that cannot think with or through the very important histories which have produced that. Good for Her is located near what was the radical feminist bookstore to the east and it can certainly be argued that Toronto Women's Bookstore had a profound influence on the development of most

sex cultures in Toronto and in Canada too. The complex labours of self-making involving various kinds of transitions are the heartbeat of this neighbourhood, speaking both to its object but also to its own complicated rememberings, bereavements, and subjectivities in feminist porn.

There certainly has been more scholarship emerging in the last fifteen years which does look at those rememberings between the Canadian state and queer sexual practices, for instance. Cossman, Bell, Gotell and Ross in *Bad Attitude/s On Trial: Pornography, Feminism and the* Butler *Decision* (1997), also document a historically significant and rich Canadian moment where artists and activists alike were subject to state regulation and surveillance vis-à-vis both the raids of the women and trans persons bathhouse (known as the Pussy Palace) but also by the bizarre legalized crackdowns on the artistic work of Eli Langer by Toronto's Project P police (Kinsman and Gentile 2010; Cossman, Bell, Gotell and Ross 1997). Such Canadian events were accompanied by "sex scandals," for instance, around the artistic work *Drawing the Line* (1990) by Kiss n' Tell and also by the much earlier controversies in the Vancouver queer newspaper, *Angles*, around the Lesbian Sex Poster (Noble 1993). The Pussy Palace bathhouse raids are just one historical event which flag this contemporary zeitgeist and which overlap in significant ways with the later emergence of the FPAs and the feminist porn movement, a Canadian zeitgeist anticipated by the much earlier tolerance, then crackdown and closure of entire neighbourhoods of men's bathhouses in Toronto. Chanelle Gallant, one of the subjects interviewed here as a long-time employee of Good for Her and curator of much about sex and Toronto, notes these nationalized proximities. None of these proximities are overdetermined by the other but they do provide something of a context for the emergence of GFH, the ground of which was the same fertility for a thriving "market" of sex cultures in Toronto.

GFH's owner, Carlyle Jansen, made repeated references to watching niche "lesbian porn" only to be met with images of conventionally feminine women having sex with each other sporting "impossibly long and dangerous fingernails," something that seems to work against constructions of lesbian sex at that time.[8] There was much at stake, as it were, in terms of sexual representation, and on the (urban) ground practices and uses of sexuality. We do not intend that these referents and/or historicities are comprehensive at all; but what is interesting is: one, the assumed relation between urbanity and queer cultures; and two, that there are no larger studies of female and eventually, trans-positive (where these don't always go together) sex cultures (including the explosion of feminist porn) of neighbourhoods in Toronto at the time of this writing despite the fact that much "everyday-ness" exists to be studied in a Canadian context.[9]

Harbord Street Histories was born out of a determination to un-map and re-orient the sex-porn contexts even as it must be acknowledged such un-mappings will remain incomplete. Still, this project is thick with the presence of vexation itself. Online orientations allow us very easily to potentially circumvent or ignore or forget such in-person and/or nationalist presences. No theorist can make absolute truth claims about objects or origins or losses even as the porn cultures written about here constitute indexable feminist presences and proximities, echoes and *carnal*

resonances (Paasonen 2011), with what Avery Gordon characterizes as hauntings—thick with both memory and forgettings, voice and silence, desire, longing and loss.[10] However, most scholars in the field of Canadian feminist porn studies agree that sex stores, like the feminist bookstore, these proximities and *cases,* as it were, contribute to and provide physical space for complex understandings of pleasure and sexuality and of feminist sex cultures like those of the Feminist Porn Awards and attendant cultures, identities, and subjectivities.[11]

The Interviews

We asked a series of fairly standard questions of those who organized the FPAs and were especially interested (for this part of the project) in hearing GHF folks talk about their memories and experiences about the political stakes of the matter. Our interview conversations ranged far and wide from the early days of the FPAs to the controversies in recent years as well as the ever-changing criteria of what even counted as "feminist" and/or "porn." While this work is nowhere near social science data collection *per se*, the interviews were subject to a university's Ethical Review Process. It was not our intention to interview for the purposes of *gathering objective data*. Rather, these interviews were conducted in order to get voices *on the Canadian scholarly record*; in other words, what was intended was to create opportunities for some of those directly involved to speak to their own experiences as GFH workers but also as the folks directly responsible for conceptualizing and organizing the FPAs. To those with allegiances to traditional disciplines and methodologies, such an approach to interviews will otherwise seem very odd, queer even. Eventually, it was decided that given that, the approach would be less that of an "objective" social scientist and more that of an *insider ethnographer*—seeking to write a complex and triangulated history of the present of feminist porn as it itself grew, changed, morphed, took shape in its current historical articulation at the time of this writing.

Four key people that were directly involved in organizing, staffing, and so also conceptualizing, feminist porn and the Feminist Porn Awards, were approached. Chanelle Gallant, Carlyle Jansen (owner), Alison Lee, Lorraine Hewitt (performer), were all folks that were extremely instrumental in organizing the first and all subsequent Feminist Porn Award events. Each agreed very openly to the interview. Each insisted on using their legal names, and each interview occurred either at the store itself (Jansen) or in coffee shops (Lee, Hewitt). One took place in a domestic setting (Gallant). All interviews were recorded and all transcribed and, as noted below, all interviewees were asked at one point to stop the recording in order to discuss, *off the record*, the same event which took place that remained controversial and, as it were, unresolved, perhaps even unresolvable. Our intention was quite straightforward: to get *on record* the accounts of the Feminist Porn Awards by the Toronto-based folks actually involved in their production and who, literally, laboured to make them happen. Without these folks, *feminist porn* as a countercultural movement or public would not be on anyone's map in the same way.

Three main themes emerge from the interviews and conversations. First, of course, is the importance of feminist narratives and stories, both of the store and also about feminist porn. All of the folks involved in the actual organizing noted the deep ironies of the "success story"—noting, for instance, how much their truly deep labours were overlooked or diminished as the success of the FPAs took off. Admittedly, this emergence of feminist porn is a historical and cultural event. Linda Williams notes as much in both her 1989 monograph and in her edited collection *Porn Studies* that "a field that might be called pornography studies has emerged" (1989, ix). The pathway of the FPAs as narrated by the employees and owner of GFH and by the success of the event itself also speaks truth to this emergence as a feminist one. The history of GFH in proximity to the feminist booksellers, Toronto Women's Bookstore, and to TWB's histories fraught with customs conflicts, remains vital to the work that "porn" was accomplishing. The feminism of "feminist porn" sought to insert sexuality back into the feminist agenda despite feminist contentions on some fronts as well as those from the state. Facing down both (Canada) customs and *feminist sex war customs* remained integral to this narrative of porn.

These are also deeply nationalized narratives. The main source (but not at all the only source) of both porn workers and porn thinkers came up from the United States. None of my interviewees were Canadian nationalists; in fact, CG, AL, LH especially emphatically expressed the nationalist terms of Canada vs. the United States of America as being those of settler colonialism. It certainly is racist and colonialist to overlook this border as an effect of settler colonialism and the nations it created.[12] However, the FPAs and ensuing Feminist Porn Conference both attracted massive numbers of workers, activists, and thinkers from the USA who crossed a very complex border without seeming to notice such a crossing. The much-touted keynote address at the first Feminist Porn Conference, delivered by American scholar Dr. Lisa Duggan, made no mention anywhere in a very astute address of what it meant to not just cross such a settler colonial border but to inhabit for the duration of the conference, the Harbord Street strip, with its profoundly significant feminist histories, without a consciousness of being so located.

Moreover, all of these interviewees expressed a deep concern, deep cognizance even, about Harbord Street's "Canadian" feminist histories (Frankenberg 2001, 91). These were registered by all as of significance and extreme importance to the origins of GFH and subsequently, of the FPAs. For instance, Lorraine Hewitt noted that even though the histories of feminism and porn were already vast, Toronto was going to be central, and this fact remained very significant.

> **LH:** Yeah yeah, we did... and it wasn't originally called the FPAs either... and um... but I would say it was instantly successful, everybody really connected with the event, um, what was really interesting too was that while we did get people visiting, which is amazing too for a first event, to have people come out, um, to Toronto, it was, there was also this huge local interest, and that is pretty incredible and, um, it remained that way throughout, that there was always a large local audience that was really

connecting with what was happening, um, kind of like spun through, kind of grew a porn industry here.

Chanelle Gallant and GFH owner, Carlyle Janson note this significance of location too:

CJ: ...Well if I'm going to do a store where am I going to do it? Where makes the most sense? And I was trying to think of neighbourhoods and my sister was like well you know there's the woman's bookstore. Which I had never been to, because again I was not like in that feminist world. There's the woman's bookstore, there's Parent Books, there's Wonderworks, and it felt like kind of a feminist strip. I knew of Morgentaler, but I don't know if I knew that's where this old building was that would have, the destruction of it. I'm not sure if I knew that at the time. But it just, it was like okay that makes sense. And I was looking for somewhere that was close to transit and close to the subway but not on a main street....

CJ: We used to be known as the feminist strip, I think now it's more known as restaurant row, but Parent Books is still here, and so, it just is what it is.

CG: The whole organizing I think honestly took two months. Like it was way, we had no idea that it would blow up. Um, you know I had a budget to bring people into town. Um, and that's about it. Uh, and so we knew we were gonna bring some, uh, pornographers together who identified as feminist. We knew that we were going to celebrate them. We thought it would be a small local thing. And then, and then it wasn't [laughs]. And then it blew up, and then we were on, you know MTV Canada, and, uh, interviewed by every single newspaper, picked up by the, you know, the wires, and when it went over AFP, that, you know AFP speaks to about a billion people. I mean I did that interview literally over the phone while I was running around all day doing errands, getting ready for the performances. Or for the awards. Um, and I, none of us knew that this would uh, would have such a cultural impact.

Relatedly, cognizance of feminist history and of intergenerationalities was profoundly present in the narratives and clearly, in the minds of those who organized the FPAs from GFH.

AL: Yeah, I think as a long-time feminist I had a kind of particular relation to porn, when I first came to feminism, the dominant narrative when I first started learning about feminism was anti-porn. I read Andrea Dworkin, and I did all the stuff, and you know I had arguments with my dad about porn.

Over and over again, these interviews were *thick with many presences;* they grappled with and reached for a vocabulary with which to talk about something that, back in the day, was not articulatable—feminists and a positive relation to porn, both in its making *and* consuming never mind in its organizing as a feminist movement in and of itself.[13] The biweekly newspaper *Xtra!* published a feature interview in May 2006, on the eve of the first ever Feminist Porn Awards, with GFH manager,

Chanelle Gallant, who noted her own surprise in 2006 that this hadn't been done before:

> As far as I know we're the first ones, says *Good for Her* manager Chanelle Gallant. "I couldn't believe it.... When I first thought it up I thought, 'I'll Google this and see 'cause someone else must have thought of this." Nobody ever. We're it. And I thought, "wow, 'cause there's a lot of feminist-oriented sex culture out there." So we're very proud that Good for Her is the first one to do it. (Garro 2006, 14)

Included with the interview is a timeline called "The Evolution of Feminist Porn" which, according to *Xtra!* could only be tracked to 1972, back to the controversy around the film *Deep Throat*, whose infamous star, Linda Lovelace, became an antipornography spokesperson (14). Predictably, this is a fairly standard pairing of feminist porn with anti-porn feminisms even as the article itself notes that the next generation of what were then called "baby dykes" might have trouble believing anti-porn feminism existed: "How do you explain to the baby dykes why porn was once considered so problematic?" (14). In this example, it seems very possible and important to assert that feminist porn functions to articulate and *speak back* to a history of feminist censorship inside its own communities as well as those histories of censorship from Canadian customs. Such views of relational and overlapping feminist histories were present in these interviews as well.

> **CG:** ...I remember at the 2000—I think it was the 2006, maybe it was the 2007 awards, saying something like you know "women take over the means of production" and just really wanting to see more women actively engaged in presenting their own sexual representation. Whether it was authentic or not, because like I said since then I think I've you know shifted to an understanding of feminism as being more about self-determination than specifically about authentic pleasure.
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> **AL:** Right? Like that's what I mean. I think more than that though... it's...the porn that I was watching at the review place, it didn't treat anybody like a person. Very few exceptions. And I don't think that applies to all mainstream porn, to all non-feminist porn, but the specific stuff I was looking at, it was usually stuff that, I don't even know what they call regular internet porn anymore. There'd be this big site that had 30/40/50/100 micro sites, so you know, micro micro micro, girls with glasses, girls with pigtails, every category you could think of. So, this was before tube sites, I think tube sites really changed porn as well. But that's a different story...

Those recent controversies which, in the past number of years of the FPAs, various kinds of boycotts and internal tensions about who received what award, for what work, and why; something, that can only and always already be identified as "Sex Wars, Continued." That is to say, new incarnations of the Sex Wars emerged, which these labouring subjects identified as hellish, nightmarish, and devastating critiques mostly from "inside" American scholars and porn/industry workers. What we might call "off-the-record" or "turn-off-the-recorder" moments occurred in each conversation. To be sure, these are complicated moments and complicated conversations that suggest perhaps that the worst part of the sex

wars, the internal and as yet unresolved conflicts *inside* of feminism, remain alive and well, especially in a site like *Feminist Porn*.

> **AL:**...The first year, the first event I thought was great, I have no criticisms of it all. But I also thought this is still on the table, the idea here is so much bigger than what this event was and we have to grow it every year. From the beginning, from my job interview probably, I was like "this is too good" to stay like that. So, the first year I was involved we introduced a screening, so we weren't just having—and we moved the panel to the screening. Because I wanted the awards to be more of a party and a celebration, and the worst way to start a party is to listen to four people talking on a stage. So again, no criticisms, I think for the first year it was exactly perfect. But I wanted to put my own mark on it, to change it, to make it as big as it could be. So, the second year we still had it at the Gladstone, but we added the screening....
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> **AL:** Yeah, it was really hard. So, we did, with media, I think we did have to work on how we framed it. And so, at first we...it was called Feminist Porn Awards...we never entertained changing the name, for lots of reasons, also because people would be like "what?" but when we were talking to people, we spent a lot of time talking people off the ledge. Like of really softening it and trying to represent a range of things but also at the same time trying to make it really normal, which was a really hard line to walk.

To locate these conversations inside of our ongoing public histories and those of sites like the *Toronto Women's Bookstore* and the Morgentaler Abortion Clinic puts flesh to metaphorical "bombs" and bodies injured on or around this block. They will continue to occur and as the time is right for these conversations to be public ones, they will become more public. For now, part of their potency happens precisely because they are not yet more public. The obviousness of the social and, relatedly, physical locales of it all—the store on Harbord Street relative to the neighbourhood (which includes *TWB*, access on a non-commercial mainly residential street, across from a massive Toronto high school, between two major intersections at Bathurst on one end and Spadina/University of Toronto on the other and for a long time, just down the way from *TWB* and its struggles) as well as the constant debates—remain absolutely vital to un-packing those sex wars as they continue to be ongoing albeit *differently*.

> **LH:** Yes, as opposed to this, this whole interactive series of websites, and stuff, so yeah, a literal physical movie, um...and um...you know, it was fantastic to talk to the folks behind Comstock films. They were doing something that was so different from anybody else, and it...I found...had... such a great...impact on a lot of people, there was a lot of people who really like customers who wouldn't watch anything other than their movies, right? Specifically because it was real couples and because they had—they gave that background of the couples talking about their relationship before any sex happened, including just all of those—it was really well edited, but it, included all of those things that really, um, showed the connection

> between the people, right, and the authenticity of the relationship, um, and, it was amazing that again, that wasn't happening anywhere right, and it was something that people connected to really uniquely, and that fact that they marketed themselves in such a way, that they were able to be carried in mainstream stores like Blockbuster was really something (laughs). And uh, so, I found that, I found that really fascinating. At a certain point…too…Candida Royalle…uh…was attempting to expand her brand to be in more inclusive of women of color, and um, released a movie called Aphrodite Superstar that again was just really amazing and different and getting to—uh—interview the person that she brought on to create that movie, um Abiola Adams I believe, yeah, she was so fantastic to talk to, I mean, again, um, for me that movie was just amazing because I had not seen, specifically as a black woman, a movie that was meant for me, right. I feel like that was the first time that I saw a movie that was, you know, it had black women in it, but, where there was a black woman narrative perspective, that was my first time with that and I was just blown away.

It is clear that such histories are indeed the Canadian histories of physical neighbourhoods both in proximity to carnal cities like Toronto but also the queer and feminist spaces produced in the mid-twentieth century and beyond. Rubin certainly made the argument very clear back in the brilliant and potent "Thinking Sex" essay, reminding us that urban sites were (and remain) vital to the production and maintenance of "new sexual systems" (1989, 286). Extremely important and insightful critiques of urban-centric imaginaries notwithstanding (Tongson's especially), Rubin suggests that industrialization and its need for labourers increased migration to cities, which increased opportunities for the development of "places" and "areas" of cruising, sex work and other such "occupations" (288). So too does Miller-Young when she argues that, in conjunction with obscenity laws (a long set of histories and conversations itself), other laws impinging on sexual commerce, including anti-prostitution laws, alcoholic beverage regulations, and ordinances governing the location and operation of "adult" businesses, were most certainly productive of porn cultures (Miller-Young 2014). Rubin notes these factors all "render…sex workers more vulnerable to exploitation and bad working conditions" (Rubin 1989, 289). These realities have not changed. Sex remains, as Rubin noted in 1989, a vector of oppression (293), although one with now dramatically uneven patterns both within and beyond porn, within and beyond intersectional experiences of oppression.

In the conservative feminist context, then, as noted previously by Jane Juffer, "to be a feminist [was] to be against pornography" (1998). With the FPAs and the feminist porn movement spawned by or around such affective dis-orientations,[14] this has clearly changed. One of the things all four of these interviewees agreed upon was the fact that a great deal of feminist work (especially around sexuality but not only) can be, in fact, might need to be, accomplished in porn. Depictions of sexuality are neither removed from cultural influences nor are problematic in and of themselves. They often constitute the stuff of fantasy in a productive

way—perhaps even, as suggested here, in a uniquely *feminist way*. Gallant in particular is extremely committed to the idea that for white women, changing the nature of those feminist fantasies can directly impact notions of race and settler colonialism, including those of whiteness. Her questions linger as extremely profound for the way that porn and feminism articulate each other in very precise ways: not so much only in the FPA criteria per se but through its own evolution historically at the store and perhaps in the larger networks that the store and the FPA criteria drew on. In other words, this articulation of feminist porn seems to challenge the notion that identity and gender-based authenticity is vital in any feminist representation of "women's" sexuality.

> **CG:** And so, there was this, you know, it's not a critique, it's more just like a second thought about it. Is that it, um, it puts an expectation of authenticity and sincerity and genuineness on people who are performers.... And so, I don't know that, I still think it's a great idea, but I don't know that it entirely makes sense to apply that to porn.... And, but porn is entertainment. And um, so um, I think there's an argument to be made that good feminist porn does not need to depict, uh, the performers' own authentic sexuality.... You know, activist cultural production. So, I don't want to discount the importance of authenticity, um, but I don't feel like it's fair that sex work as a work place is seen as being, um, like having, being socially harmful if it doesn't represent authentic sexual desire. And yes, of course, then you know the post-modernists are going to go deep into this about what the fuck does authenticity even mean, I mean I can't even answer that question for myself. What does it mean for me to express authentic sexual desire? Like, uh, that's kinda up to me.... You know, maybe, I don't know, honestly, I'll leave it to the philosophers to think about this. But maybe the question is really more about autonomy than authenticity.... I feel like there's a couple things happening in the first, the idea of the Feminist Porn Awards. One, I think I was trying to slip two things into feminism. One was sex workers' rights and respect for sex work, recognition for sex work as being a part of feminism.... And two, anti-racism as being a part of feminism. Um, and I wanted to claim both. And I think that's what was a little bit audacious about it, and a little bit provocative, was making no apologies, no explanation for either of those things.

This argument—*that feminist porn is not reducible to identity*—is from workers who have been trying to meet the demand for better feminist porn for nearly three decades as well as its changing technologies (so, the engine of the matter: cameras, lighting, sets, but also distribution, from virtually no internet to now, in some cases, almost exclusive online distribution and what that change in form means to content). So, to "out" the evolution and changing nature of what is identified as a feminist porn, or a feminist porn movement, means exploring how either of these differentiate themselves (or not) from mainstream industries. That is, what are the differences between mainstream porn and feminist porn when sometimes the same workers are involved in both?

Conclusions

By way of conclusions, then, let me reiterate what I have intended in this paper from the start—to conduct interviews with folks who have been and remain the ground of feminist porn in Toronto. This was not intended to be systematic nor wide-spread in terms of coverage. Instead, it intended to record and document the stories of those organizers and workers at one Canadian sex store, Good For Her, who put together and hosted a very early event that morphed into a much bigger cultural event and one with a life that no one could have imagined. The Canadian organizers of the feminist porn awards all note, even at the time of the interviews in early 2015, that the FPAs have now morphed into something else and are already a thing of the past. All of the subjects interviewed here talked about the special significance of place, echoing Hogan's argument for the feminist bookstores that place became strategy (2016, 7), making the *feminist case* very self-evident. Such configurations of a feminist neighbourhood—feminist spaces—Harbord Street in Toronto, as it came to shape and literally, ground, in its most recent reiterations, what has constituted feminist porn. There are long feminist histories on the east end of Harbord Street, near Spadina, and these histories as locals and *habitas*, have been the place from which the Feminist Porn Awards first emerged closer to the west of Harbord, near Bathurst. Feminist porn not only comes from these urban queer-feminist neighbourhoods and their struggle for articulation and self-definition, but from the very physical lives that shaped the product, the process, and the pornographic object in different ways.

Getting on the scholarly map literally and figuratively remain a vital enterprise. As we transition from brick-and-mortar locations like bookstores and sex shops to online and mobile technologies, we risk losing the very things that defined what we did, who we were, and what we became—ironically as a consequence in part of insisting on public and/or counter-public space.[15] Hogan for instance notes how absolutely vital the bricks and mortar feminist bookstore has been (and perhaps continues to be), functioning not only as a place to buy feminist books and, back in the day, queer books with happy endings, but also as a site of discourse, as a structure, a legacy of a movement, a hub of mobility and conversation and theories and stories, a destination for way more than books. It is a complex web of emotional political alliances (Hogan 2016, xix). So too, then, is this feminist sex store reminding us that "place is strategy" as well as destination (Hogan 2016, 3–7). And indeed, so too is feminist porn. These are representations of social movements, literacy, legibility, countercultural grammars, accountabilities, and emerging vocabularies deeply embedded in capitalism (as we all are) and in the ongoing practices of colonization (xix). We need to be reminded by these interviews that place and physical (vs. digital) locales are also training grounds, destinations, physical sites of being, gathering, interconnectivity—vital ways of knowing and being *differently* even as *being differently* meant—and continues to mean—very different things. Social networking sites, hubs, platforms, and practices clearly offer a great deal more than what a brick-and-mortar physicality cannot. There can be no disputing these realities. And yet we at FPARP still add worry to vexation at what we are just beginning to index—and it's always already

past tense. Works like Hogan's and others remind us of the very significant question that underwrites this project: *how do we listen for complex material and on-the-ground histories that we not only don't know yet but ones we do not yet know how to hear?*

To sum up, here are two anecdotes: At the risk of invoking the wrath of Toronto-based (and nasty) newspaper columnists who shall remain nameless, as an assignment in my first-year Introduction to Sexuality Studies course completed at York University, as professor I sent my one hundred first-year Sexuality Studies students on individual field trips to earn 10% of their coursework grade by visiting GFH as an example of that most important feminist accomplishment—the feminist sex store. All of the students undertook the project, some with trepidation (generated in part by just having to leave the quaintness of York's off-site Glendon campus—a fair distance from Harbord Street). Over half of my students wrote very astutely in their essays that they recall being very confused when their smart phone GPS apps directed them to a small, otherwise anonymous-seeming "store" across from a high school on Harbord Street, walking past *GFH* several times because they presumed it was a coffee shop and not the infamous sex store they were mandated to visit. Such dis-orientations between smartphone GPS instructions and students' physical presence in front of their incoherent destination are precisely the queer potentialities of transforming phenomenologies. Many were able to catalogue their own incoherence, disbelief, and dis-orientation once they mustered the courage to step into the nondescript store—something a few did, in part to ask for directions to the supposed "real" sex store to which they were sent. If Hogan is right about the *feminist shelf*, then this work presents us with the performative shelf, case, table and perhaps, house (the lesbian herstory archive famously sits in a similar lesbian house), built to literally put the relations of desire and/or sexuality fully on display in a public albeit countercultural context right out there in the open (xiii).

Second concluding anecdote: anyone reading lesbian poetry in the 1980s about the joys of countercultural spaces and sex is likely somewhat weary of "lesbian poetry." But in the research done to date on this project, I came across a gem of a piece on longing and remembering, written by feminist archive theorist and cultural studies professor T. L Cowan, called, appropriately, "Harbord St." (2005). This is a poem about a young girl who, protesting the abortion clinic with her fundamentalist mother on one side of the street, chooses, when she gets old enough, to cross the street and visit both the bookstore and eventually, the sex store opposite the clinic (not the same one bombed). I won't recite the poem by an extremely bright and astute theorist of media and of the feminist theorist and cultural worker here, but its historical reference point, the 1979 abortion clinic on Harbord Street and the feminist sex cultures held by both TWB and GFH, is extremely telling of the value of embodied genealogies and effects, affects, and echoes, *the not always evident but thick presences* of Toronto feminist sex cultures past, present, and hopefully future. These are not to be forgotten as we become more sophisticated with our devices.

This paper ends with these very brief anecdotes as a way to posit—indeed, argue—that we lose if we go completely digital even as we've already gone there: productive disorientations for young queer bodies and minds in progress—indeed perhaps an entirely new generation lost—and perhaps all the better for being productively lost in a city that has imagined itself as having had already done and seen it all already. *Thick with presence young people* finding themselves literally at the feminist doorstep of, and, indeed, beyond the *feminist shelf*—one step closer to the *feminist case*. To be able to get lost in such spaces—with or without the phones and GPS—can be, as we know, a very good thing.

Notes

1. This paper acknowledges an unpayable debt to the feminist sex store, Good for Her, as well as to the SSHRC Insight Grant program, which funded the Feminist Porn Archive and Research Project (FPARP), without which this work would not have occurred. Collaborator Lisa Sloniowski (Faculty Librarian, Scott Library, York University) and I both acknowledge and are grateful to the York University Research office and staff as well as to the administrators of the Scott Library for their support of FPARP and their labour actively accumulating sexual representations across their libraries and holdings.
2. Since 2000, Harbord Street has come to be known as the "Harbord Street Village," earlier known as "the Annex" because of its annexation as the city of Toronto grew. This more recent name was chosen and speaks to the changing vocabularies as a consequence of the increasingly layered gentrifications and, indeed, rebrandings, which occur in a major city like Toronto.
3. Obviously here I am reminded of Jody Berland's extremely important book *North of Empire*, in which she argues that Canada is both "in 'America' and yet not" (2009, 3). Of course this is a complex conversation about settler colonialism fundamentally, but it is also about the hegemonic dominance of the USA. Berland's collection of essays is vital to understanding the way these "empires" function relative to each other as settler colonial empires.
4. The Canadian obscenity legislation known as the *Butler* decision, was put in place in 1992, after many conversations and consultations with anti-pornography feminists. See Becki Ross's account of this process in Cossman et al., 1997. Ross's account is important as one of the feminist academics who testified in front of the commission implementing this legislation and by whose own account after the fact claims to have failed to convince the judiciary of the limitations and indeed, errors of the *Butler* decision, limitations that played out on anything shipping to the Toronto Women's Bookstore address in particular. This lead to a very public and controversial trial over lesbian porn, in particular, the American magazine *Bad Attitude*. We argue here that such judiciary histories are vital to understanding the deployment of feminist porn in a Canadian context (Cossman et al., 1997).
5. Amber Dean argues the same is true about perceptions of the Downtown Eastside Vancouver. While I do not claim equivalencies—these are important actually to separate as the murder and disappearances of Indigenous women

cannot at all be considered comparable to the formation of what Ross identifies as a Lesbian Nation—the veracities of Dean's book and argument most certainly verify the way that neighbourhoods come to have a perceived identity, all the more true for racialized, impoverished, or colonized subjects. While no one can claim that "lesbian" as a signifier is associated with any of those three things, Ross does document the way that lesbian subjects in the 1970s and 1980s lived a very different reality than those of the 2010s. The same is decidedly not true for Indigenous women, who continue to be murdered, disappeared, and impoverished in extremely alarming numbers.

6. The first incarnation of the TWB (what I call TWB 1.0) was a literal neighbour to the Morgentaler Clinic, so much so that a great deal of its stock and indeed, its structural home were both destroyed by the ensuing fire as a result of the bombing. The building itself was demolished and TWB 2.0 was built in the same location but in the new building that was erected.
7. The idea of "deep cognizance" comes from the life and work of Ruth Frankenberg and her explorations of whiteness in feminism. See Frankenberg's *White Women, Race Matters: On the Social Construction of Whiteness* (1993), as well as her essay, "The Mirage of Unmarked Whiteness" (2000).
8. While no one can dispute the paucity of porn for lesbians pre-the sex wars, this assertion (that long finger-nails and lesbian sex do not go together) will come to be contested by feminist sex workers and queer femmes, who posit that, despite the reasoning behind this statement that 1: to be lesbian means to be masculine with short finger nails; and 2: that having long finger-nails means not being lesbian, something that invisibilizes not just femme-identified lesbians but bisexual women and many other women for whom penetrative sex (digits or otherwise) is not practiced. Finally, this is disputed by women who have penetrative sex with long fingernails and who are, as they say, very skilled at safe play so that long or short nails are neither the point nor the problem.
9. Such a construction of an everyday is not new. Here I draw also on the work of Jane Juffer's *At Home with Pornography: Women, Sex and Everyday Life*, in which she argues that the notion of the everyday, or what she calls "the reconciliation of the everyday with the erotic" (1998, 3)—something she calls domesticated porn (7)—is what makes the everyday different in the late twentieth century. It's also what genders that domestication: "domestication involves an oscillation between public and private spheres…understanding [such] agency means situating women as consumers in a constant movement between public and private spheres" (8). This is also what it means to consume feminist porn after the time when "you [were] not a feminist unless you [were] against pornography" (1).
10. Some of those hauntings became extremely visible as I also conducted a series of interviews with workers and organizers affiliated with the store Good for Her, a feminist store on a strip of a street in Toronto haunted by its own thick feminist histories. The *to and fro* motion of that strip and its various destinations are neither incidental nor accidental; they are very much one of

the things I seek to detail, document, analyze. See my 2009, "Trans-Culture in the (White) City," in which I theorize the experiences of the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) bus that travels along Harbord Street and through the "gay neighbourhood." This was especially important because a queer organization had purchased advertising space on the Harbord Street bus transfer, a fairly standard practice for the TTC at that time. The organization was denied. They launched a human rights complaint and won, in part forcing the Toronto Transit Commission to run the queer advertising on the bus route transfer long after said practice had ended. I still possess the bus transfer and write, in the essay, about the near riots which ensued.

11. That there is a link between brick-and-mortar sex stores and thriving sex cultures in urban settings is assumed as *apriori* axiomatic in this work. Jane Juffer also notes as much in her *At Home with Pornography: Women, Sex and Everyday Life* (1998).
12. Ever mindful of the fact that in so many cases, this border-making practice drove itself right down the middle of tribal lands, communities, and nations, I reference here, at the very least, one short story by Thomas King, entitled "Borders." In this story, the American-Canadian border cuts right through the heart of a small town Indigenous family (2003).
13. Lots of folks, activists, academics, scholars, cultural workers, and porn workers themselves do not agree on whether feminist porn constitutes an event in feminism or a feminism, as in feminist movement, in and of itself. FPARP makes no interventions in these debates except to note that the having and consuming (and indeed, making and defining) feminist porn is a remarkable historical event in and of itself. See, for instance, not only *The Feminist Porn Book* but also the *Closing Address* (2006) by Courtney Trouble, the brilliant production work of Shine Louise Houston who, with Jiz Lee, coined the phrase *ethical porn*, the work of Madison Young, Tristan Taormino, Annie Sprinkle, Mureille Miller-Young, the feminist five (cf., Linda Williams)—all of whom indicate collectively and historically that indeed this might be far more than a singular *moment* or *event*.
14. While no one can account for the simultaneity of the feminist porn movement and the Feminist Porn Awards, it is certainly clear that in their simultaneity something occurred around one to, potentially at least, launch or sustain, the other. As noted in all interviews, the question of whether this was a feminist porn moment or a feminist porn movement remains to be determined by history. But the deep frustration with a lack of feminist porn initiated the appearance of—and continuation of—the Feminist Porn Awards and their huge success. That these take place, with the accompanying Feminist Porn Conference for at least two years, in Canada remains a very interesting feminist fact.
15. I risk the "we"-case very deliberately here even as I acknowledge that for many complex reasons—settler colonialism being one of them—such a "we" is never, ever straightforward or simple and it always already is settler colonial unless otherwise articulated.

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