Do We Know It When We See It? Ecopornography, Feminist Theory, and Ecopedagogy

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Abstract
Ecopornography remains undertheorized and retains its original meaning as a synonym for greenwashing. This paper conceptualizes ecopornography to enhance its pedagogical and analytic usefulness in ecocriticism. After a review of the literature on ecopornography, the paper adopts an ecofeminist frame and draws on feminist conceptualizations of pornography to clarify and develop ecopornography as a tool for critical analysis. In addition to clarifying what qualities make an environmental message ecoporn, different types of ecoporn messages are identified via an analogy to "hardcore" and "softcore" human pornography, expanding the concept's range and conceptual coherence.
Keywords: Ecopornography, ecofeminism, feminist theory, ecocriticism, ecopedagogy

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He watched the news. Same as yesterday.... Nothing new except the commercials full of sly art and eco-porn. Scenes of the Louisiana bayous, strange birds in slow-motion flight, cypress trees bearded with Spanish moss. Above the primeval scene the voice of Power spoke, reeking with sincerity, in praise of itself, the Exxon Oil Company—its tidiness, its fastidious care for all things wild, its concern for human needs.
–The Monkey Wrench Gang, Edward Abbey (1975, p. 217)

Greenpeace and Audubon calendar photos, advertisements for fossil fuel companies featuring pleasing images of nature, Sierra Club coffee table books, and "green" product marketing are some of the commonly referenced examples of ecopornography, a vague but nevertheless evocative and memorable label for misleading representations of wildlife, landscapes, and ecosystems seemingly unaffected by industrialization's exploitation and degradation of the natural world. While these and other examples are usefully understood as ecoporn, the genre has been defined more by example than conceptually, and in most cases has been used without a foundation in its source domain—human pornography—and without grounding in some of the most developed critical understandings of human pornography: feminist theory.

This paper advances the conceptualization of ecopornography with the primary purpose of enhancing its pedagogical and analytic usefulness in ecocriticism. Despite its over 50-year history and its intuitive usefulness for describing and criticizing a range of environmental messages, the concept remains

undertheorized and retains its original meaning as a synonym for greenwashing. After a critical review of the literature on ecopornography, the paper adopts an ecofeminist frame and draws on feminist conceptualizations of pornography in order to develop and clarify ecopornography as a tool for critical analysis, with particular attention to pedagogical applications. In addition to clarifying what qualities make an environmental message ecoporn (or not), different forms of ecoporn are identified via an analogy to "softcore" versus "hardcore" human pornography.

Ecopornography: A Critical Literature Review

The term ecopornography appears to have been coined shortly before the first Earth Day in 1970, though by whom is unclear[1]. Among academics who have researched the concept of ecoporn in order to develop and apply it (D'Amico, 2013; Lindholt, 2009; Welling, 2009), the consensus is that one of the term's early and most influential appearances was adman-turned-activist Jerry Mander's 1972 essay "EcoPornography: One Year and Nearly a Billion Dollars Later Advertising Owns Ecology" in the professional magazine *Communication Arts*. Regardless of its origin, use of the term began to spread, including in Ed Abbey's (1975) *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, where it is applied to a television advertisement for Exxon (see epigraph).

Mander's 1972 essay argues that corporations have co-opted ecology, redefining it to help promote the endless pursuit of profit, whatever the human and environmental costs. Focusing exclusively on print advertisements by the energy industry, particularly electric utilities, Mander finds them to mislead, even lie, ultimately diverting attention from fundamental problems with technology toward the belief that technology can solve environmental problems. The term "ecopornography" is only mentioned once in the essay beyond the title (Mander, p. 47); Mander's definition seems to be image-promoting texts by environmentally destructive corporations that are composed of "diversionary, false and deadening information" (p. 47) used to claim that corporations, their industries, and their technologies are environmentally friendly. Based on Mander's portfolio of examples, a frequent trait is the use of photographs or other images of clean, healthy nature. The inclusion of ads that use pictures of nature's beauty have led to a view of ecoporn (like porn) as a masking of "sordid agendas with illusions of beauty and perfection" (Welling, 2009, pp. 54-55). Overall, given Mander's largely implicit definition of ecopornography, characterizing it as a synonym of "greenwashing" seems legitimate (though that term was coined over a decade later), and that is still its most common definition in public discourse (see, e.g., Anon., 2021; Turner, 2008). In short, "ecoporn" often functions more as a clever adman's tagline than as a conceptual linkage between human pornography and certain kinds of representations of nature.

A second essay on ecopornography is novelist Lydia Millet's (2004) "Die, Baby Harp Seal!" Millet's focus is not on corporate greenwashing, but images circulated by environmental organizations such as Audubon and the Nature Conservancy featuring beautiful, unspoiled landscapes and cute, cuddly animals, which she calls "pinups." As that linguistic choice signals, Millet's take on ecopornography is distinguished from Mander's less by the switch from energy companies to mainstream environmental organizations and more by direct comparisons between human pornography and ecopornography. Drawing from her time as a copy editor for Hustler magazine, Millet makes direct parallels between the environmental organizations' pictures of cuddly mother-and-baby pairs of hugging animals and Hustler's photographs of two intertwined naked women, arguing that both are pornographic: "They offer to the viewer the illusions of control, ownership, and subjugation; they tell us to take comfort: they will always be there, ideal, unblemished, available. They offer gratification without social cost, satiate by providing objects for fantasy" (p. 147). Of the "scenic and sublime" landscape photographs Millet writes, "Tarted up into perfectly circumscribed simulations of the wild, these props of mainstream environmentalism serve as surrogates for real engagement with wilderness the way porn models serve as surrogates for real women" (p. 147). Millet's overall critique is that these idealized images of nature convince people that there is a nature apart from humans that is whole and healthy, thereby promoting disengagement from efforts to address environmental crises (Welling, 2009). As D'Amico (2013) characterizes Millet's argument, "the landscapes, the animals, and the models are equally objects of desire for the viewer: submissive, subjugated, gratifying—a voyeur's delight" (p. 171). Millet's proposed alternative is "a hardball-playing, fast-moving engagement with the realities of anthropogenic devastation that doesn't shrink from the rude, the vicious, or the unsightly" (p. 149).

A third non-academic essay is by environmental communication scholar Mark Meisner. The shortest of the three, Meisner's (2010) "Blinded by Ecoporn" parallels Millet in focusing on "beautiful scenes of pristine landscapes, robust ecosystems, and healthy wildlife" such as those found in calendars and coffee table books from Greenpeace and the Sierra Club. Also like Millet, Meisner makes direct (if less detailed) parallels between these images and

conventional pornography: "Like photos in an 'adult' magazine, they stimulate desire but misrepresent reality and fail to reflect real-world relationships" (p. 7). Ecoporn is deceptive and helps us deceive ourselves: "The natural world is not pristine. Landscapes are not devoid of human influence. Animals are not all healthy and fit" (Meisner, p. 7). Not only is Meisner's take on ecoporn similar to Millet's, so is his proposed alternative for pro-environmental messages: honest and explicit depictions of what humans have done to animals and ecosystems.

The authors of these three essays written for educated but general audiences primarily conceptualized ecoporn through definition by example: identifying specific instances of ecoporn and explaining their problematic function. While both Millet (2004) and Meisner (2010) move beyond Mander (1972) by drawing parallels between the negative functions of human pornography and those of ecoporn, they do not provide precise conceptual definitions and systematic identifications of what exactly makes pretty images of nature function as ecoporn. While that is understandable given their genres and audiences, they nevertheless leave students and ecocritics with something akin to Justice Potter Stewart's "definition" of hardcore pornography in his concurring opinion for the 1964 Supreme Court case Jacobellis v. Ohio: "I know it when I see it."

2009 offered two in-depth academic investigations of ecopornography as an ecocritical concept, and they remain the only in-depth, scholarly publications that treat ecopornography as more than a synonym for greenwashing and that take the parallels to human pornography seriously. Paul Lindholt's (2009) analysis of the Bureau of Reclamation's commissioned paintings featuring dams and reservoirs as a form of ecopornography was the opening essay in the inaugural issue of the *Journal of Ecocriticism* and drew substantially from a book chapter by Bart Welling (2009) titled "Ecoporn: On the Limits of Visualizing the Nonhuman."

Lindholt's (2009) analysis of the Bureau of Reclamation paintings offers two characteristics of ecopornography based on the analogy to human pornography. First, objectification: "straight porn and ecoporn both tend to objectify for aesthetic pleasure, for audience approval, or for commercial gain" (Lindholt, p. 15). Second, staging: "like human porn, ecoporn traffics in staged intimacies or ecstasies. In the visual media, it may deploy provocative lighting, tricks with perspective, and close-up shots to enhance and tantalize" (p. 15). Negative uses of the label "porn" (including ecoporn and the pornographies of meat, poverty, and war) "imply

degrees of titillation and exploitation" (Lindholt, p. 15).

Welling's (2009) chapter begins by encapsulating my motivation for writing this paper: "Ecoporn (as trope, as mode of representation, and as ethical problem) has received surprisingly little sustained theoretical attention" (pp. 53–54). Welling's work addresses this paucity in a way that is grounded in what was lacking in other musings on ecoporn: feminist conceptualizations and critiques of pornography. Ecopornographic images, writes Welling, "work to conceal both the material circumstances of their creation by humans and whatever impact humans may have had on the landforms and animals they depict" (p. 57). Welling focuses on the invisible, implied male viewer of a passive and exploitable female object, leading to a critical definition of pornography as "voyeuristic representations of sexual violence against women" (p. 59). "Ecoporn places the viewer in the role of the 'male surveyor,' the all-seeing male subject to Nature's unseeing, aestheticized female object," thereby "denying…agency…to nonhuman life forms" (Welling, p. 58). Just as porn objectifies its female subjects to provide pleasure and, even more importantly, support for the master identify of the hetero-patriarchal viewer, ecoporn objectifies its nonhuman subjects to provide pleasure to and support for the master identify of the supranatural human (cf. Adams, 2004; Gaard, 1997; Plumwood, 1993; Rogers & Schutten, 2004).

While Welling's work offers a significant advancement in the conceptualization of ecoporn, and did so from (eco)feminist perspectives, it is still somewhat lacking for practical pedagogical, analytical, and ecocritical purposes. Before finding Lindholt's (2009) and Welling's (2009) work, I had begun teaching a course focused on ecocriticism of environmental arts/media. I found Meisner's (2010) essay, then Millet's (2004), both of which are readily digestible by the first and second year undergraduates who populate the course, but as I continued to teach the course I realized that those essays, while effective in conveying a sense of what ecoporn is and why it is problematic, did not offer a lot more than Potter's "I know it when I see it" standard.

Conceptualizing Ecoporn as an Analytic Tool

Over the course of five iterations of the ecocriticism class, I developed a systematic conceptualization of ecoporn in order to provide students a workable critical framework to determine whether and, if so, how a particular photograph, ad, painting, poem, song, music video, or the like operated as ecoporn. The feminist literature on pornography (e.g., Adams,

2004; Dworkin & MacKinnon, 1988; Griffin, 1981) informed what I developed, as did the general ecofeminist literature (e.g., Adams, 2003; Gaard, 1997; Griffin, 1978; Merchant, 1980; Plumwood, 1993; Warren, 2000). My approach was not to start with the typical examples of ecoporn (greenwashing corporate ads and photographs from environmental organizations) and then conceptualize inductively, but to start with ecofeminism generally and feminist understandings of pornography specifically, conceptualize ecoporn with that basis, then look at examples of both "classic" ecoporn as well as other types suggested by the (eco)feminist development of the concept. I present this material here in a similar order and manner as I do in my classes.

Ecofeminism
I begin with the overarching framework of ecofeminism, starting with two core propositions. First, women have been equated with nature in Western thought and representation. Nature as a whole is described as female (e.g., mother earth), and women are conceived as more "natural" (e.g., more body than mind) than men. Both women and nature are fertile, the source of life, nurturing, and unpredictable. Both women and nature are portrayed in dualistic and essentialist terms, as inherently nurturing and inherently chaotic if not outright dangerous. To illustrate both the woman/nature linkage and its dualistic qualities, I use examples such as Raphael's painting *Madonna and Child* contrasted to Ursula the Sea Witch from Disney's The Little Mermaid, and Giorgione's painting Sleeping Venus contrasted to how weather reporting discusses hurricanes and tornados: "mother nature" as destructive and uncontrollable (a list of the visual and audiovisual examples referenced in this and subsequent paragraphs, along with URLs where they can be accessed, is provided in the Appendix).

Second, and most critically, ecofeminism holds that the oppression of women and the exploitation of nature are deeply interconnected. One example I use is how in many dominant Christian traditions, Eve is blamed for the Fall and the expulsion from the Garden of Eden. This "original sin" has often been portrayed as Eve giving into temptation, frequently framed in terms of the body, carnal desire, and sex (despite a lack of support for this view in Genesis 3), and this weakness has been used to justify women's subordination to men (which is directly articulated in Genesis 3). Eve is out of control, as is nature, with both in need of a male authority to keep them in line, as illustrated in Rogers and Schutten's (2004) analysis of the Bureau of Reclamation's presentation of Hoover Dam and the Colorado River, which I assign to my students as both a general introduction to academic ecofeminism and an example of ecofeminist analysis. Griffin's (1978) juxtaposition of manuals for managing female secretarial pools and those for training horses for dressage offers another example of the interconnections between the patriarchal treatment of women and nature, as does Merchant's (1980) discussion of early European science.

The two foundational propositions of ecofeminism and its intersectional approach to all forms of oppression and exploitation sets up an introduction to the role of dualisms in dominant forms of Western thought and representation as well as ecofeminism's approach to dualisms (Plumwood, 1993). Dualisms are unified oppositions that posit each set of paired terms as exclusive (not inclusive), oppositional (not complementary), and hierarchical (unequal). A critical part of ecofeminism is not only a critique of the oppressive nature of dualistic structures, but of Western culture's foundation in an interrelated set of dualisms, including Male/Female, Culture/Nature, Mind/Body, Reason/Emotion, Order/Chaos, Civilized/Primitive, Spirit/Matter, Human/Animal, and Self/Other. I use Jan van der Straet's 16th century drawing *America* depicting Amerigo Vespucci's landing in the "new world." "Primitive" indigenous peoples and their closer connection to nature are represented through the figure of an unclothed, reclining woman, whereas "civilized" Europeans are represented as a standing, clothed man equipped with technology. I illustrate the ongoing interrelationships of these dualisms by the equation of women (particularly of color) with animals in advertising, Carol Adams's (2003) *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, and PETA's "All Animals Have the Same Parts" graphic featuring Pamela Anderson's body parts labeled as different cuts of meat (see the Appendix for links to van der Straet's drawing and PETA's graphic).

Another important concept for ecofeminism (and environmental ethics in general) that is helpful in the subsequent discussion of pornography and ecopornography is the distinction between intrinsic or immanent value versus instrumental value. Entities that occupy the negative side of a dualism are often highly valued, not due to their intrinsic value (which is denied through objectification, discussed below), but due to their instrumental value as a resource for the master identity (male, civilized, human, etc.).

Pornography
With the foundation of ecofeminism, I turn to pornography, primarily grounded in feminist theory. I begin by reviewing legal and general definitions of pornography in order to clarify

the major differences between those definitions and feminist perspectives on pornography. In both legal and general terms, pornography typically refers to sexually explicit portrayals designed for sexual arousal, with "sexually explicit portrayals" including both sexual acts such as intercourse and oral sex as well as depictions of sexually-coded body parts such as genitalia and female breasts. The first distinction I make in rejecting these definitions is between pornography and erotica. Whereas for some "erotica" implies an artistic impulse in contrast to porn's "crass" nature, I make the distinction in terms of the types of relationships involved, specifically that erotica involves depictions of sexual relationships between subjects (autonomous and intrinsically valuable agents), be that between people within an erotic representation or between the viewer/reader and the subject of the erotic representation, as opposed to pornography's subject–object relationships. The distinction I draw between pornography and erotica is therefore not about what sexual acts or body parts are explicitly depicted but how they are depicted.

To further clarify this distinction and to set up the conceptualization of ecoporn, I introduce critical, feminist definitions of pornography, such as (1) sexual depictions that involve sexual objectification (most typically, of women) and (2) sexual depictions that eroticize the domination, humiliation, and coercion of women (and possibly others as well). By these definitions, depictions need not be "explicit" (showing genitalia or sexual acts) to be pornographic; indeed, by many of these definitions much advertising (among other genres) featuring women could be considered pornographic. However, these definitions are partially consistent with Dworkin and MacKinnon's (1988), which stipulates that "pornography is the graphic sexually explicit subordination of women through pictures and/or words" and also adds that "the use of men, children, or transsexuals in the place of women…is also pornography" (Appendix D; emphasis added). For Dworkin and MacKinnon, in other words, sexually explicit is a criterion for pornography, but so is the subordination of women (or other Others).

To clarify the operation and implications of these critical definitions, I introduce the concept of objectification with a focus on sexual objectification. Objectification involves two conditions. The first is separation: a necessary condition of turning a subject (i.e., a person) into an object (i.e., a thing) is clearly differentiating the person or entity being objectified from the objectifying party. This is one of many aspects of pornography where the role of dualisms is critical. Most obviously, the dualism male/

female clearly separates women depicted in pornography from the (mostly male, but that can be conceived of as a subject position as opposed to a biologically sexed body) producers and consumers of pornography, as dualisms posit their two categories as exclusive and opposed.

The second condition of objectification is devaluation. While devaluation is also implicit in dualistic structures of thought and representation, objectification can involve two different forms of devaluation. The first is demonization, whereby the Other (women, nonwhite people, LGBTQIA people, "aliens," and the like) is portrayed as having negative value or as responsible for negative effects. This could include women's irrationality/unpredictability, nonwhite people's inherently violent nature, or the presumed moral threat of LGBTQIA people. The second form of devaluation, instrumentalization, can be more difficult to identify because the Other can be portrayed in a way that clearly assigns positive value to them. However, in instrumentalization, the Other is valued only for what they can provide to the self. This reflects the distinction between intrinsic and instrumental value: women may be highly valued, but not due to their status as a subject (intrinsic value) but due to their value as an object, a resource to serve the needs, interest, or desires of the objectifying subject (Adams, 2004). So, while women may in some cases be "put on a pedestal" or "worshipped," they are nevertheless positioned as objects that provide pleasure or other benefits to the objectifying self. Sexual objectification involves turning a person into a sexual object, a thing that exists only to provide sexual pleasure/gratification to the self (Griffin, 1981).

A key dynamic in sexual objectification is the male gaze (Mulvey 1975). Under the power-laden operation of the gaze, the viewer (the possessor of the gaze, e.g., the videographer and, by extension, the viewer) is separated from and positioned "above" while the object of the gaze is positioned as passive and "below." In patriarchy, males possess the gaze: men look and women are looked at; "men act, women appear" (Berger, 1972, p. 47). In the age of photography, film, and video, the camera often adopts an implicitly or explicitly "male" (heterosexual, dominant) position, operating as an active subject, gazing at the object (women). This is sometimes made explicit, as when the camera shows a man looking (even, perhaps, lowering his glasses), then switches to a shot of a woman who, by implication, is being watched by the man. In other cases, the camera's gaze mimics a patriarchal heterosexual male, panning up and down a woman's body, lingering on breasts, butt, legs, lips, or other sexually-charged body parts.

Music videos offer a ready supply of examples of the objectifying operation of the male gaze, such as the 2014 music video for Shakira's "Can't Remember to Forget You," featuring Rihanna. There are no men in the video, only Shakira and Rihanna, who are often shown in bed together but not in terms of a relationship (sexual or otherwise) between them. The camera pans over various parts of each woman's body, visually fragmenting whole persons (subjects) into discrete objects. When the women are shown in bed together, they look not at each other, but at the camera (the presumed male viewer) and smoke cigars to cue their role in providing men pleasure, not each other (cf. Griffin, 1981, p. 38). The video in some ways parallels the "woman-on-woman" genre of pornography, which is in no way about lesbian relationships, as the women engage in sexually-charged acts with each other solely to provide pleasure for the heterosexual male viewer. Stopping short of "graphic sexually explicit" (Dworkin & MacKinnon 1988), Shakira's video is sexually objectifying and arguably pornographic. Although it does not explicitly link pleasure to women's humiliation or coercion, it does link pleasure to a gendered and sexualized subjugation: the women act to please the male gaze, not themselves or each other (see the Appendix for a URL for Shakira's video).

The work of objectification—its costs to the persons being gazed at—is often obscured, creating the illusion that objectification or its negative effects are not in operation. This can ease the objectifying party's potential cognitive dissonance at objectifying other persons. I illustrate this through a discussion of what goes on "behind the scenes" of sexually objectifying, male gaze dominated, and/or pornographic depictions of women. Albrecht Durer's 1538 woodcut *Man Drawing a Reclining Woman* illustrates the objectifying dynamics of the male gaze. The male artist is shown drawing a woman on a canvas with a grid on it while viewing the woman through a grid positioned in between him and the female model (the grid manifesting separation). The male artist is the active party, fully clothed, sitting upright, looking at the woman, and drawing her. The female is passive, reclining, largely naked, and looking away from the artist and the viewer, reducing her subjectivity. The striking similarities between Durer's woodcut and Jan van der Straet's *America* (discussed above) offer additional opportunities to illustrate ecofeminism's approach to the intersectional nature of systems of oppression (see the Appendix for links to both van der Straet's and Durer's images).

Moving to photography, I show posed and carefully lit studio photographs of Jayne Mansfield, an actress, singer, Playboy playmate, and fairly typical 1950s-1960s sex symbol (see the Appendix). Showing Mansfield from the waist up, the photographs highlight her blond hair, face, lips, and prominent breasts. I follow that with the photograph from John Berger's (1972) *Ways of Seeing* that shows a photo shoot of a similar model in a similar pose from the same general era (p. 43). This photograph, however, was taken from behind the model, showing her back as she sits on the arm of a chair, looking toward a host of male photographers taking pictures of her. What this photo clearly shows is what is necessary to achieve the kind of photos that depict Mansfield: the model is precariously perched on one arm of a chair, her arms extending behind her in an awkward and uncomfortable pose—a pose necessary to accentuate her breasts and present herself for consumption by the male gaze. This photo shows, unlike the photos of Jayne Mansfield, the costs of objectification: in this case, a disregard for the woman's comfort or how she normally sits—that is, her subjectivity.

One characteristic that distinguishes a variety of forms of sexual objectification of women from pornography as I specifically define that here is the linking of pleasure to the domination, coercion, and/or humiliation of women. One clear example is the popular Bang Bus internet porn site (Kimmel, 2008, p. 176; Wikiporno, 2011). Bang Bus videos and those from similarly-themed sites share the same basic plot: a woman is picked up by a group of men in a van and offered money to participate in a documentary video, then more money to strip, and yet more money to have sex with the men while being filmed. Each video ends with the woman being dropped off in a random location without the promised money, clearly linking male heterosexual pleasure to women's humiliation and exploitation.

To summarize, my interpretation of a critical, feminist conceptualization of pornography includes sexual objectification in support of a hetero-patriarchal masculine master identity, an obscuring (in some cases) of the processes of objectification and subjugation, patriarchally idealized portrayals of human sexual relationships, and the linking of desire and pleasure to domination and subjugation.

Ecopornography

Like feminist views of pornography, an ecofeminist understanding of ecoporn is not the same as will be discovered by googling the term. Ecoporn's analytic potential is not as a synonym for greenwashing, although it is used by many in that way. Instead, ecoporn refers to representations of nature that (1) stimulate desire but misrepresent reality and fail to reflect actual human-nature relationships

(Meisner, 2010), (2) foster subject–object relationships between human viewers and the natural world, (3) offer viewers the identity of "nature's master," and/or (4) link the domination/exploitation of nature to pleasure. In ecoporn, objectification is based on the human/nature dualism. Humans possess the gaze and nature is its object, but, following ecofeminism, the human/nature dualism is also gendered. Particularly in terms of pleasing pictures of natural landscapes, cuddly animals, and charismatic megafauna, the devaluation part of objectification is achieved through instrumentalization: nature's value is what it does for the viewer, be that aesthetic pleasure, fostering denial about anthropogenic violence against the nonhuman world, and/or the pleasure of dominating nature. Some ecoporn, however, is more sanitized (the pleasing pictures that are the focus of most prior work on ecoporn) while other forms of ecoporn are more overt in linking pleasure to domination. To clarify this distinction, and thereby expand the range of representations considered ecoporn, I utilize an analogy to softcore versus hardcore pornography.

The distinctions drawn between softcore and hardcore porn are varied, and in some cases parallel the diverse distinctions between erotica and pornography. For some, erotica is different from pornography in being less explicit or graphic (e.g., avoiding depicting genitalia), where for others erotica is defined by being "artistic" as opposed to porn being solely for prurient interests. For others still, erotica implies nonobjectifying and nondegrading sexual depictions (the distinction I used above). Similarly, for many, softcore porn is less explicit, avoiding genitalia, anuses, and sexual activity beyond kissing and petting but often still implying genitally-involved activities such as oral sex and intercourse, with hardcore porn defined by explicit depictions of genitalia, anuses, intercourse, and oral sex. I rework what "implicit" versus "explicit" references based on the distinction between erotica as depicting subject–subject sexual relations and pornography as depicting subject–object sexual relations. Softcore porn, in my use, is still porn, and therefore objectifying, but the objectification is more subtle, muted, or disguised. In softcore porn, women are objectified through the male gaze and other dynamics, but the portrayal may be contextualized as romantic, mutually satisfying, fully consensual, nondegrading, or the like. Hardcore porn, in my use, is more explicit, but "explicit" is not about graphic depictions of body parts and sex acts, but explicit subordinations of women, such as actions and storylines that overtly link the humiliation of women to men's pleasure, or that explicitly depict a lack of mutual pleasure and/or consent.

As with porn versus erotica, this variation of the softcore/hardcore distinction is not about which body parts or sexual acts are depicted, or how explicitly they are depicted, but about how those acts are portrayed in the context of the relationships between persons in the pornographic depiction and/or between the viewer and the persons in that depiction.

Softcore Ecoporn: Softcore ecoporn presents its objectification of nature for human pleasure in the guise of an appreciation of and desire to protect nature, objectify nature while denying or obscuring that it is doing so. This includes the kind of "greenwashing" ads labeled by Mander (1972) as ecoporn, such as energy companies using images of unspoiled nature and healthy wildlife to claim that they are actually protecting, or at least mitigating their negative impacts on, animals and ecosystems. Softcore ecoporn also includes the images of unspoiled landscapes and healthy animals used by environmental organizations that Millet (2004) and Meisner (2010) critique. These types of images, especially those used by environmental organizations, often present landscapes and animals in the same way as pictures of "wilderness"—typically without humans and without signs of human impacts—which maintains the human/nature dualism that is central to objectifying the natural world (Cronon, 1996; DeLuca & Demo, 2000). Paralleling many forms of softcore porn, they present an idealized and sanitized image of nature (and humans' relationship to it), erasing the realities of anthropogenic degradations of nature.

To illustrate softcore ecoporn, I use the trailer for the BBC's *Planet Earth*, a series many students have watched and enjoyed (see the Appendix). With the context of my lecture on softcore ecoporn and the readings from Millet (2004) and Meisner (2010), students are able to readily identify the general lack of human beings and the absence of signs of human impact on animals and ecosystems. The series promises in its tagline to present nature "like you've never seen it before," using the camera to pleasurably present the unseen, the unfamiliar, and the exotic by means of careful editing and cinematographic techniques, not unlike some pornography. The series' visual and verbal reverence for the natural world disguises its objectifying gaze, fostering in viewers the feeling that they are not participating in something exploitative.

A question raised by this conceptualization of softcore ecoporn is whether such idealized depictions of untouched nature could be efficacious in increasing people's appreciation of, commitment to, and support of conservation efforts. While such a possibility cannot be ruled

out, there are several reasons to suspect claims of relatively positive effects of these kinds of images. First, these are the kinds of images identified not only as ecoporn, but as corporate greenwashing. Do oil companies' advertisements featuring healthy natural animals and ecosystems have the effect of increasing people's conservationist impulses, do they mislead people as to the reality of anthropogenic environmental degradation, or could they do both? Even if they increase conservationist commitments, they would likely do so through the anthropocentrism embedded in contemporary conservationist and preservationist ideologies and practices. By presenting healthy natural environments as those without marks of human influence, they rely on conceptions of wilderness grounded in the human/nature dualism and thereby perpetuate anthropocentric environmental ideologies and, presumably, practices. They divert attention away from preserving or rehabilitating the "impure," "imperfect" nature that exists in industrial sites, urban areas, and contaminated ecosystems (Cronon, 1996). Just as mainstream pornography presents only images of women that match patriarchal ideals in order to offer the pleasures of domination to male viewers, softcore ecoporn and related forms of greenwashing also present images of nature that match anthropocentric ideals of nature—specifically, variations of "wilderness"—in order to offer the distractions and pleasures made possible by denying the extent of human-caused environmental degradation. Both softcore pornography and softcore ecoporn idealize their objects of affection to make people feel better in the context of objectifying structures, be they gendered and/or environmental.

The issue here is not decontextualized pictures of pretty nature and their effects, but the structures and contexts characterizing the presentation of those pictures. DeLuca and Demo's (2000) analysis of Carleton Watkins's photographs of Yosemite, for example, demonstrates how images of the sublime were altered by inclusions of the beautiful in order to offer not only feelings of awe and insignificance, but also a sense of safety and comfort while viewing sublime nature, thereby creating what they term the tourist gaze. While Watkins's photographs demonstrably supported efforts to protect Yosemite and eventually make it a national park, they did so through anthropocentric frameworks (e.g., preservationism) as well as systems of both economic and racial/ethnic privilege. In a different context, Dickinson's (2013) analysis of environmental education programs based on the idea of Nature Deficit Disorder challenged the premise that exposure to nature automatically leads to a connection with nature because it overlooks the form of that exposure, the set and setting of children's experiences in nature, and the frameworks taught to children that mediate their exposure and subsequent connections to nature and their appreciations thereof.

Hardcore Ecoporn: Based on my categories and definitions, almost everything that has heretofore been discussed as ecoporn is softcore ecoporn (Lindholt, 2009; Mander, 1972; Meisner, 2010; Millet, 2004; an exception is Welling, 2009). Using the analogy to softcore/hardcore pornography reveals additional forms of ecopornography that explicitly show human domination and exploitation of nonhuman nature and in many cases clearly link desire and pleasure to such subjugations and exploitations. Hardcore ecoporn is by all means pornographic, but is not a form of greenwashing. Vicariously obtaining the master identity is a relatively overt appeal. The MAGA mantra "drill, baby, drill"—often performed as a collective chant at rallies—can be understood as gendered, sexualized, objectifying, and violent. The pleasures taken in degrading and dominating nature are on full display, not unlike the Bang Bus porn videos described above.

Easy-to-find, common examples of hardcore ecoporn are advertisements for four-wheel drive, off-highway vehicles such as SUVs and pickup trucks. For example, a 2017 ad for the Chevrolet Colorado titled "The Ultimate Off Road Adventure" begins with two of the pickups driving on dirt roads in a dry, rocky environment (see the Appendix). The portrayed value of the pickup is neither its ability to get one from point A to point B via whatever roads are available nor to carry cargo. The truck's value is its destructive capacities, the apparent aim of an "ultimate off road adventure." The trucks are driven as fast as possible, maximizing any opportunity to unnecessarily spin their wheels, drift, and spew as much dirt into the air and across the landscape as possible. The trucks are then shown in a forested environment, where they drive across a stream at high speed, splashing water and spewing mud as they maximize their damage to the rich riparian setting. Next, one truck is shown going up a steep, rock-strewn slope; as the truck "gets air" at the top (i.e., climaxes), the video temporarily switches to slow motion, followed by a close-up of large rocks tumbling down the hill in the aftermath. The ad hails viewers with the identity of nature's master, an identity performed by needless destruction of natural environments, consistent with Millet's (2004) characterization of ecoporn as offering "illusions of control, ownership, and subjugation" (p. 147). The ad also demonstrates how such identities and pleasures are promoted by what Lindholt (2009) describes as "staged intimacies or ecstasies. In the visual media, [ecoporn] may deploy provocative lighting, tricks with perspective, and close-up shots to

enhance and tantalize" (p. 15), but in this ad, it is to enhance and tantalize through showcasing subordination rather than obscuring it.

Many of the popular reality TV shows from the late 2000s into the 2010s focusing on homosocial, blue-collar groups engaged in extractive practices, such as *Gold Rush* and *Ax Men*, could also be interpreted as hardcore ecoporn. Currently in its 15th season, the Discovery Channel's highly popular *Gold Rush* (see the Appendix), for example, rarely if ever raises environmental concerns over the miners' actions, and offers viewers vicarious pleasures in manifesting hegemonic masculinity by making a living (and maybe getting rich) through physically and mechanically pillaging earth's resources—not only extracting gold, but in doing so creating large scars and piles of tailings on the landscape and diverting streams for use in their large wash plants. Restoration efforts are never shown or mentioned, but on rare occasions disruptions are created by regulators shutting down an operation because of illegal water diversions or safety violations.

Each *Gold Rush* episode ends with the "money shot": the leader of each group is shown pouring the most recent cleanout cycle's bounty of gold onto a scale while the rest of their group looks on in anticipation as someone announces the rising count of ounces of gold. In hardcore human porn, the "money shot" is a man ejaculating on a woman, often marking the end ("climax") of the video. The analogy is not perfect; failures in ejaculation would not find their way into a typical porn video, while in *Gold Rush* it is not uncommon that a group's "take" is severely disappointing, demonstrating their symbolic impotence, and sometimes leading the group to give up and look for gold elsewhere. In sexual terms, erectile dysfunction and/or coitus interruptus plague some of the groups' efforts. Portraying actual or feared failure is, of course, effective in driving the narrative forward and maintaining viewer engagement. However, typically at least one of the multiple groups that are followed in each episode achieve at least acceptable, if not dramatic, success, and for any of the groups a failure in one episode may be followed by success in a later one.

Is it stretching the analogy too far to characterize *Gold Rush's* narrative structure as ecoporn based on similarities to human pornography? From an ecofeminist perspective, the series represents groups of almost entirely men, manifesting contemporary blue collar masculinity, working to extract "resources" from the landscape to achieve their own ends. The show evidences no concern for the natural entities thereby affected, entities which have a very long history of being represented as female. Each episode's

narrative culminates in the "money shot" described above, which involves each group of men collectively watching that week's take being tallied, followed by disappointment or success. Masculinity and threats to it are the fulcrum of the show, albeit a largely implicit one, and the gold count is the measure of their success as men. The homosocial nature of these men's exploitative efforts not only mirrors some forms of hardcore pornography, such as the Bang Bus-style narratives discussed above that are based on groups of men achieving pleasure through the humiliation of women, but also some porn viewing practices, such as collective viewing in homosocial groups (Kimmel, 2008). Some examples of representations around extractive masculinity, however, are more easily identified as pornographic due to being more explicit not only about their extractive relationship to natural environments, but also about the gendered foundation of that relationship.

An example of hardcore ecoporn that was judged by many to have gone "too far" due to its explicit articulation of not only gendered but outright misogynist bases for resource extraction comes from the context of petromasculinity, specifically the Alberta oil fields in Canada. In 2020, the fracking company X-Site Energy Services placed a sexually violent image and the company logo on a sticker that could be put on workers' helmets or the like. Subsequently distributed on social media, the image inspired outrage on social media and in mainstream media outlets (Fowks 2021). The image is a "POV shot" of the type commonly used in pornography—that is, the drawing shows viewers what the male actor sees, much like a first-person shooter video game, thereby obscuring the male actor, positioning the viewer of the image as the male actor, and highlighting the object of the gaze. The drawing shows a woman's bare back and the back of her head, complete with Greta Thunberg-style braids and the name "Greta" on the woman's lower back, the location of a tattoo commonly known as a "tramp stamp." The only parts of the male actor that viewers see are his wrists and hands, each holding one of the braids. The image clearly implies via cultural codes a man having intercourse with a woman from behind—a position often coded as dehumanizing ("doggie style"), with the man's hold on the woman's braids symbolizing subjugation and control (holding the "reins" as it were; cf. Griffin 1981, p. 39). Given the explicitly marked identity of the woman, what is being depicted is Greta Thunberg being raped—child rape, Thunberg being 17 years old at the time (Fowks). At the bottom of the image, positioned where the woman's butt would otherwise be seen, is the name of the company, with "X-Site" being larger, bicolored, and stylized; while

perhaps coincidental in this context, "X-Site" is a homonym of "excite," furthering the sexualization not only of the image, but of the petroleum extraction industry, explicitly linking pleasure with domination and violence (see the Appendix for a link to the image).

Effects and Theoretical Bases

Empirical support for the negative effects of consuming ecoporn is limited, mostly due to a lack of relevant research[2]. One body of relevant research on media effects on attitudes toward environmental issues that grounded in empirical research is that guided by cultivation theory (Good, 2007). While traditionally focused on television, the underlying mechanism for cultivation theory's take on media effects is the shaping of viewers' understandings of the world by the repetition of similar values, images, and/or narrative structures. In the context of violence, for example, cultivation theory does not argue that viewing violent media causes violent behavior, but instead cultivates a view of the world as a violent, dangerous place. In this light, the effects of ecoporn through cultivation is not causing people to objectify and exploit aspects of the natural world, but to normalize objectifying human-nature relations through the repetition of the structures and dynamics of ecoporn, as described throughout this paper, possibly to the point of such structures being uncritically and even unconsciously accepted as "common sense." Studies of media consumption and environmental attitudes through the lens of cultivation theory are limited, but do show a correlation between heavy television viewing and a lower concern about environmental issues, possibly mediated by the pervasiveness of materialism in television content, as well as between heavy television viewing and lower levels of environmental activism (Good, 2007). However, in the case of ecoporn as I have conceptualized it here (and especially hardcore ecoporn), cultivation theory's explanatory mechanisms do not provide a role for the appeal of occupying the position of the master identity and the pleasures linked to environmental exploitation (or the parallel pleasures linked to the domination and humiliation of women in hardcore pornography).

A closer parallel to the psychodynamics of (eco) pornography may be found in Althusser's (1971) theory of interpellation, specifically the role of messages in "hailing" certain identities. Messages offer viewers a subject position from which the message "makes sense"; only those who occupy a relevant subject position will recognize that it is they who are being addressed by the message, thereby (re)constituting that identity. Hardcore (eco)porn more explicitly "hails" a dominating subject position, whereas softcore (eco)porn may be understood as hailing a subject position that is less overtly framed as dominating. The pleasures of domination experienced by a viewer in response to hardcore (eco)porn can be understood as an acceptance of its hail—as proof of one's successful occupation of the subject position of the master identity, be it over the earth or over women. This link to Althusser can be further tailored to the role of pleasure in (eco)porn consumption through Scholes's (1989) conceptualization of textual economies: "The rhetoric of textual economy… will take the form of an investigation into the flow of pleasure and power that is organized by any text" (p. 108).

The Relevance and Value of Gender and Pornography in Ecocriticism

Dualistic structures and objectification— the dynamics of which are central to my conceptualization of ecoporn—are widely used in diverse critical approaches to environmental communication and are tackled by approaches other than ecofeminism generally or ecoporn specifically. Examples include approaches that focus on commodification of nature (a form of objectification), the instrumental versus intrinsic value of other-than-human entities and ecosystems (instrumental value being based on objectification), efforts to deconstruct dualisms such as human/animal and associated anthropomorphisms, developments of "posthuman" environmental theory, and more (e.g., Abram, 1996; Börebäck & Schwieler, 2018; Burford & Schutten, 2017; Day, 2018; Dickinson, 2013; Schutten, 2008), all without a direct focus on gender or use of ecofeminist theory. Given this state of affairs, why gender, why ecofeminism, and why ecoporn? Put another way, what do ecofeminist approaches contribute to ecocriticism that other conceptualizations and critical tools do not?

Ecofeminism focuses attention on intersectional dynamics in ways that not all approaches to environmentally-related dualisms and objectification would necessarily do. That focus both directs the attention to potentially different kinds of environmentally-themed messages compared to other approaches (e.g., Griffin, 1978; Rogers, 2008) and helps reveal other aspects of the dynamics of dualistic logics and objectifications of various forms. For example, the concept of the master identity within ecofeminist theory helps identify not just what objectification is, but how it works, part of which is by providing those who identify with/as the master the pleasures of domination (Plumwood, 1993; Rogers & Schutten, 2004). The pornography analogy specifically not only highlights the gendered structures underlying the objectification of the other-than-human

world, but helps foreground, dissect, and challenge the role not only of pleasure in promoting adherence to the dominant ideology, but the articulation of domination and pleasure and the profound distortions required to attain such pleasures (e.g., alienation from the natural world, our bodies, and other "feminine" entities and experiences). In addition to focusing on potentially different kinds of environmental messages, ecofeminism can provide additional tools to assist in moving beyond identifying such structures—naming the what—toward deeper understandings of how such structures work, a potential that this essay works to nurture and cultivate.

Conclusion

This paper has three goals. The first is to move the conceptualization of ecoporn beyond an inductive process that begins with "I know it when I see it." Instead, grounded in (eco)feminist theory, I have endeavored to develop the concept, then explore what kinds of texts manifest its core traits. Through this process, the analogy to softcore versus hardcore pornography revealed a range of common texts that manifest a type of ecoporn that is by no means greenwashing, thereby further questioning the common equation of ecoporn with greenwashing. The second goal is to develop the concept in a way that lends itself to the systematic critical analysis of environmental texts as opposed to a clever, memorable, and (appropriately) pejorative catch phrase. Finally, my overriding goal has been to present the concept in a manner that lends itself to pedagogical uses, from explaining and illustrating the concept to challenging students to find their own examples and analyze them to determine whether and how they function as ecoporn. As with many other concepts (like culture and communication), a more useful approach is often driven not by the question "what is it?" but "what does it do?" Like human pornography, the key issue is not what ecoporn depicts, but how it depicts and the consequences and implications of those textual structures.

Notes

1. The earliest confirmed appearance in print is Tom Turner's (1970) essay "Ecopornography, or How to Spot an Ecological Phony" in *The Environmental Handbook*, published for the first National Environmental Teach-In (Turner, n.d., 2008), which later became known as Earth Day.

2. While several empirical studies have examined the effect of corporate greenwashing (some even specifically focusing on pretty pictures of nature), those are limited to the effects of those

messages on corporate images, reputations, sales, and profits (e.g., Schmuck et al., 2018) as opposed to the effects on people's environmental attitudes or actions. On the pornography side, much research has been done on various factors affecting attitudes towards sexual assault, including viewing pornography. For example, a recent meta-analysis of previous studies found that viewing pornography had significant but relatively small effects on the acceptance of rape myths, with the more specific factor of viewing violent pornography having greater, albeit still modest, effects (Hedrick, 2021) However, a substantial problem with applying such research to my conceptualization of ecoporn is the definitions of pornography used by these studies, which are consistent with the legal and everyday definitions of pornography as explicit depictions of sexual acts and sexually coded body parts, not the underlying structure of objectification that is at the core of many feminist definitions of pornography. While the definition of violent pornography may overlap more with my definition of hardcore ecoporn, that is also a much narrower category, as pornography can be nonviolent and still meet my definition of hardcore pornography.

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Appendix

Sources for Images and Videos Discussed in the Paper

Image/Video	URL
Raphael's painting *Madonna and Child* (the Tempi Madonna)	https://www.wga.hu/art/r/raphael/2firenze/2/40tempi.jpg
Ursula the Sea Witch from Disney's *The Little Mermaid*	https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0097757/mediaindex/?ref_=tt_mi_sm
Giorgione's painting *Sleeping Venus*	https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sleeping_Venus_(Giorgione)
Jan van der Straet's drawing *America*	https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/343845
PETA's "All Animals Have the Same Parts" graphic featuring Pamela Anderson	https://www.peta.org/features/pamela-anderson-shows-animals-same-parts
Shakira's music video "Can't Remember to Forget You" (featuring Rihanna)	http://youtu.be/o3mP3mJDL2k
Albrecht Durer's woodcut *Man Drawing a Reclining Woman*	https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/366555
Studio photograph of Jayne Mansfield	http://media.baselineresearch.com/images/99988/99988_full.jpg
Photograph of photo shoot with female subject	Berger, 1972, p. 43 (see references section)
Trailer for the BBC's *Planet Earth*	https://youtu.be/tiVNk6_0GdY
Chevrolet Colorado "The Ultimate Off Road Adventure" ad	https://youtu.be/4aOccxX2j_s
The Discovery Channel's *Gold Rush* website	https://www.discovery.com/shows/gold-rush
Greta Thunberg X-Site Energy Services rape graphic	https://www.thejakartapost.com/life/2020/03/04/canada-oil-firm-apologizes-for-sexualized-greta-image.html