Community, Space and Online Censorship. Regulating Pornotopia.

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Description

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Community, Space and Online Censorship. Regulating Pornotopia.

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Review by Jeffrey Barlow


Dr. Scott Beattie’s work, Community, Space and Online Censorship. Regulating Pornotopia., almost defies categorization [1]. It is meant to be a close analysis of the Australian Internet regulation regime, particularly the controversial Broadcasting Services Amendment (Online Services) Act of 1999. This act gave Australia what many have felt to be the most oppressive Internet control mechanism around, at least in the so-called Western world.

This focus might make Beattie’s work of intense interest to Australians and comparative legal analysts, and perhaps to those interested in an understanding of Internet control regimes in general. But the fact that the subject of the Act was on-line pornography immediately makes it interesting to a far broader audience, as the issue of digital pornography is a vexing one to almost the entire English-speaking world.

However, this is not, unfortunately, a book for the entire English speaking world. It is written in the dense vocabulary of cultural studies, a post-modernist discipline which is both elusive and intellectually demanding, in part, of course, because of its relative unfamiliarity. The author does have persuasive reasons for adopting this analytical approach. In his words:

As the pornography debate has developed over time, the critical terrain has shifted from primarily social science oriented approaches, focussing on issues of causation and harm, to critical perspectives informed by cultural studies, exploring issues of representation and reception....In part, this trend has been generated by the deadlock in the debate and the failure of social science to provide convincing empirical evidence one way or another regarding causation. Studies informed by critical theory have promoted an understanding of
the multiplicity of meanings in pornography and the relationship with social space that is shared with other discourses, including regulatory and cyberspace discourses [2].

The intellectual rationality of the choice of approach aside, however, it is inherently distancing. Many of those interested in the topics, even in the approach itself, are going to find the book a very heavy read. This is unfortunate because it has a great deal to offer a variety of audiences.

Dr. Beattie is broadly trained, both in censorship law and media regulation and has authored a number of books and reports. He is also highly versed in cultural studies. His quick surveys of the relevant literature in a number of difficult areas important to the debates over law and censorship are extremely impressive. In some parts of the book he introduces and succinctly summarizes the works of as many as ten authorities in one or two paragraphs [3]. This awareness of the broad areas of the many fields alone makes the work useful to anyone wishing to better understand Internet censorship and the regulatory frameworks, as well as the intellectual underpinnings of such regimes.

And, as elusive as the book’s central focus—the Australian Broadcasting Services Amendment (Online Services) Act—might occasionally seem to the reader, the Act is an important one. It attempts to bring together approaches from Australia’s two major cultural influences, England and the United States, and weld them together around a supposed Australian definition of community. This means that as Beattie analyzes the Act, he simultaneously analyzes both American and English culture and law.

The Act also combines government regulation with privatized enforcement. Anybody can bring offensive Internet content to the attention of what must be called a censorship board—though the Board prefers to think of itself as classificatory. By issuing classifications for such content, it then puts Internet Provider firms in the position of enforcing the law by refusing certain classifications or unclassified content audience access. The IPs must also make available to their users commercial filtering programs keyed to the government’s categories. Most citizens, as might be expected, simply ignore these, although their incorporation into the regime has made filtering software a major Australian industry. Perhaps the major virtue of such an approach is its apparent simplicity and its claim to embody local community values.

Beattie, however, brings out the failure of the Australian law to deal with a wide variety of controversies familiar to any attempt to rationalize legal efforts at regulating adult materials, whether called erotica or pornography. These include a close analysis of the various parties involved in the debate. For example, feminist critics of such material who attempt to approach it in the language of the oppression of women as opposed to the suppression of speech, producers and distributors of adult materials who apparently are quite happy with the law and wish only to understand the rules so as to expand their businesses, and legal scholars who hope to determine the best ways of regulating cyberspace—assuming it’s possible. In particular, the works of the influential American legal scholar Lawrence Lessig come in for frequent close analysis by Beattie.
Beattie also pays due and fascinating attention to various genres of pornography, while wheeling quickly through the history of various social movements attempting to regulate it. A recurring theme is the “moral panic,” in which various historical societies—Victorian England is particularly scrutinized—cry wolf not about the content itself, with which they are more than familiar, but about its spread to rising middle or lower classes with their unfortunate pedestrian tastes. As L. O’Toole (a scholar quoted by Beattie and the author of a very influential work) puts it: “Art is not porn because it sublimates desire. Erotica is not porn ‘because they drink wine and the women have smaller breasts’” [4].

The book is also, unfortunately, extremely expensive [5]. However, because of its wide coverage, it should certainly be in every institutional academic library, as well as in the hands of the audiences noted above.

Endnotes

[1] See the author’s faculty page at the Victoria University, Au, at: http://www.businessandlaw.vu.edu.au/About_Faculty/profile_Display_Staff_Profile.asp?person=253&dept=6


[3] The bibliography runs thirty-three pages long and includes legal cases as well as written materials and useful web sites.


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5 THOUGHTS ON “COMMUNITY, SPACE AND ONLINE CENSORSHIP. REGULATING PORNOTOPIA.”

Bialystok

on January 30, 2014 at 7:10 AM said:

Hmm it appears like your web site ate my very first comment (it was quite long) so I guess I will just sum it up what I had written and say, I’m thoroughly enjoying your blog. I too am an aspiring blog writer but I’m nevertheless new to everything. Do you have any recommendations for novice blog writers? I’d definitely appreciate it. Woah! I’m really
loving the template/theme of this blog. It’s simple, yet effective. A lot of times it’s difficult for getting that “perfect balance” among user friendliness and visual appearance. I have to say you’ve done a superb work with this. Also, the blog loads very fast for me on Safari. Outstanding Blog!|Do you mind if I quote a couple of your content articles as extended as I provide credit and sources back for ones site? My blog site is in the exact same area of interest as yours and my targeted traffic would actually benefit from plenty of the information you offer here. Please enable me know if this alright with you. Thank you!|Hi would you mind letting me know which webhost you will be using? I’ve loaded your blog in 3 numerous net browsers and I must say this blog loads much faster then most. Can you recommend a good internet hosting provider at a trustworthy price? Thanks, I enjoy it!|Fantastic website you’ve right here but I was wanting to know if you knew of any discussion boards that cover the exact same topics talked about here? I’d quite love to be a part of community exactly where I can get advice from other experienced folks that share the exact same interest. If you have any suggestions, please permit me know. Quite a few thanks!|Hi! This really is my first comment here so I just wanted to give a quick shout out and say I actually enjoy reading your blog posts. Can you recommend any other blogs/websites/forums that go over the same topics? Enjoy it!|Do you’ve a spam difficulty on this website; I also am a blogger, and I was curious about your situation; we now have created some nice practices and we are looking to exchange techniques with other folks, please shoot me an email if interested. |nigeria

on January 30, 2014 at 11:33 AM said:

These days the world wide web technologies provide us with a really specific possibility to pick what exactly one requires

| plotka

on February 1, 2014 at 1:48 AM said:

One far more issue I need to talk about is that as an choice to trying to accommodate all your on the net degree lessons on times which you end work (since the majority individuals are tired when they get home), try to have most of your instructional classes on a week-ends and only a couple courses in weekdays, even if it methods a small time away from your saturday and sunday. This really is beneficial simply because on the saturdays and sundays, you happen to be more rested along with concentrated in school work. Thanks much to your numerous elements I have figured out from the site.
gwiazdy  
on February 1, 2014 at 3:39 AM said:

This is my first time pay a visit at right here and i am really impressed to read everthing at alone place.

Nigeria social network  
on February 5, 2014 at 12:17 AM said:

Thanks a lot for providing individuals with such a remarkable opportunity to read crucial reviews from here. It is often so superb plus packed having a good deal of fun for me personally and my office peers to visit your web site minimum 3 times every week to study the new items you have. And indeed, I’m also definitely satisfied as part of your astonishing tips served by you. Some A couple of data in this posting are totally the simplest we’ve ever had.