'Oh, yeah! Harder! Yeah! Faster! Yeah! Faster!'  

For six years, most mornings, I would eat my breakfast to the cadence of noisy (and if I was lucky, sculptured) sighs punctuated by mechanical thrusts of bodies. My eyes would be glued to the television screen while I would sip my coffee and chew my delicious muffin; until, all of a sudden, laborious screams from the television accompanied by a triumphant 'Esculation!' yelled by one member of the working panel would startle me.
Everyone would have to abandon breakfast to scribble the ten-sentence sheet of what they had just witnessed as the ultimate, tepidly successful accomplishment of a sexual act performed by a superman over-whelming a reviving woman with gallons of semen. While she is poised with the button-like privilege of rubbing the stuff all over herself, she seems to have an unquenched caress of semen near silently and slightly snores around. In the middle of this frantic agitation, a panelist's shrieking voice would claim to have seen the semen hit the woman's eye or mouth or chin. The video would be immediately stopped and an intense discussion would start.

The object of the argument would be to determine whether the sexual partner received the semen on the face and whether ejaculation was accomplished in a degrading way. In some contentious instances, especially when the semen landed in or on the mouth, in the region between the neck and the chin, on the hair or on the temples, the members of the viewing panel would discuss whether or not these gray areas were parts of the face. One member would argue that if the semen entered the mouth, it is not on the face; another would debate that a drop accidentally appearing on the corner of the lips means nothing; but somebody else would question whether the semen really got on the chin or on the neck. The leader of the pack (that is, the vice-chairperson of the panel) would take the initiative to rewind the tape so that we could all see the scene again in slow motion, frame by frame. The pre-censorship members would call for an elimination of the scenes, the others would refuse to give in to that ranting of visuals. A vote would be taken, and the majority would win.

A few months earlier, in September 1960, the 'repressive' majority had won. Fifteen members, out of roughly twenty-five who then comprised the Ontario Film Review Board, had gathered in Barrie on a two-day retreat. Their job was to label sexual activities, as well as clarity, define and draft criteria for guidelines aimed at 'adult' sex films. With the help of facilitators, the meeting, initiated by Robert Payne (then Chairperson of the Board), resulted in

the categorizing of seven items weighted according to members' standards of tolerance. 'Ejaculation on face' was listed as an example under the category 'Degradation-Indignities', which was defined as an 'obscene act that injures or debases a victim, especially if it has no degree of detumescence on the part of the victim, which could be a living being or a corpse.' (OFRB, Adult Sex Film Rating Guidelines—September 1960). Other examples recorded under the same category were 'defecation, urination, forced penetration.' On a scale of one to four, 'ejaculation on face' was weighted three, reflecting a high degree of intolerance, topped only by 'representation of a man (or person intended to represent a person under the age of 18) appearing nude, in a scene which is sexually suggestive or explicit.' In February of 1961, the whole Board met again to finalize the weighting and the guidelines. The majority was overruled on some of the definitions, blurring the facilitators, the relaxed atmosphere of the retreat and the six in Barrie for their earlier attitude.

In 1986, the year I was appointed to the Ontario Film Review Board, no one dared dream of such debates. The Board had entered a transitional era. In December 1984, the Censor Board officially shed its infamous name to be rebaptized the Ontario Film Review Board. The reign of Mary Brown as Chairperson and champion of censorship ended with the appointment of Ann Jones in August 1986 as her successor. Regardless, little changed. The porn films sent to Ontario rarely showed explicit sexual activities. At the time we were operating in panels of five members (now only three because of budget cuts) led by a vice-chairperson supposedly in charge of eliciting relevant remarks, sometimes amusing discussions that would culminate in the classification of films and videos. The inquiry came from the amended (1975) Theatres Act, a blue booklet now replaced by the amended (1983) Theatres Act, a red booklet. This table contained a section (Section 14) that was the basis for two working documents.

One of the basic documents is a set of guidelines which are reviewed yearly. At a glance, the neophyte can see four columns of classifications, in turn defined by such criteria as language, violence,
The use of the verb "may" ensures the reviewer does not make any claims or promises that cannot be substantiated. The review focuses on the film's "graphic portrayal of violence, torture, abuse, horrors, extreme blacklighting, extreme violence integral to the film's theme." It criticizes the film for its "graphic portrayal of violence, torture, abuse, horrors, extreme blacklighting, extreme violence integral to the film's theme." The film is described as "frighteningly" and "gore-filled," and its "violent" and "dark" imagery is emphasized. The review concludes with a recommendation that "those not interested in gore and violence should avoid this film."
the classifications had grown so unpredictable. During his tenure, Robert Payne was an intelligent mediator and listener who treated everybody with deference. In the summer of 1982, a distinct rift between the Minister and the Chairperson involved on unexplainable isolation of the latter. In September 1992, he was promptly replaced by Dorothy Christian as the new Chairperson. Ms. Christian had served on the Board with the old school members.

As a film addict and a celibate consumer, I relished in glory between the summers of 1980 and 1982. I screened as many films and videos as I could, besides attending the Floating Film Festivals, the yearly Montreal Film Festival, the Toronto Festivals of Festivals, and going to see films in cities like Paris where I gorged on French films, or in Hong Kong where I saw The Lover in its integral form before it opened in North America.

As an art activist, I was given the concrete opportunity to fight for the freedom of expression of filmmakers in all genres of film and video, including pornography. I was screening hundreds, if not thousands, of porn flics. I certainly gathered a wealth of information about myself, about the attitudes of my colleagues and of society regarding sex.

Some members had to leave the Board to protect themselves: they had become casualties of the insufferable violence and vulgarity to which they had been subjected as censors. When video operators were arrested on charges of obscenity (around 1990), when Project P disagreed with the members' classifications and attempted to stigmatize them publicly, all the layers of accumulated experience exploded. We became warriors in an open zone where the pro-censorship and the anti-censorship camps tussled. Memories of long, dogged, passionate debates tearing us apart and turning us against one another still linger in our lives. An alumni, profoundly marked by her experience at the Board, found artistic expression writing erotic poems. I, with two other alumni, wrote a script on pornography and its effects. In this attempt, we felt a need to share our knowledge and experiences with the public. At the same time, in a cathartic movement, the writing enabled us to “cleanse our brains,” to expurgate the dirt, the violence, the on-screen degradation we had to witness day after day.

My experience on the Board broadened my horizons, and I feel that I served the institution with honour and integrity. I donated my time and energy writing reports, preparing arguments, often speaking to various groups. Those of us who enjoyed working hard and devoting ourselves to cinema were frowned upon by other members and people in general. For the public at large we were censors, a hated breed. To this day, my friends, acquaintances and others will not let me forget that I was part of a “Censoring Machine” that was too lenient, a contradiction no one can escape or reconcile in spite of my protest that I was there to defend the creator’s right of expression. Ironically, the Board had been the only place that made my addiction gratifying and somewhat lucrative, where else would I have been paid one hundred dollars per diem and how else would I have satisfied an insatiable appetite for celibacy? I will not deny that I have experienced painful symptoms of withdrawal since my termination, in spite of my hauntings, movie theatres and video stores. The fix is expensive, but at least I can pick and choose what I want to see.

Or is it that I pick and choose what the new CBBB members want me to see?

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