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Book review: People's Pornography: Sex and Surveillance on the Chinese Internet

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China and the rest of the world. If Hong Kong had not already become an entrepôt under British rule in 1842, would so many Chinese have been able to participate in the Gold Rush after 1848?

Sinn is skilful with telling details, such as illuminating thumbnail sketches of vivid personalities such as the trans-Pacific operator, trader, investor, and activist Norman Assing, and Madam Ah Toy. Sinn's explication of the business and welfare practice of repatriating bones is particularly effective in capturing the cultural and social values and dynamics of a Chinese community in diaspora, and the moral bonds of obligation that compelled this expensive practice as well as the complex communications infrastructure that made possible its implementation. Through vivid stories embedded in complicated and evolving global interconnections, Sinn has produced a generous and abundantly researched account of Hong Kong that will be necessary reading not only for students of that city, but also urban, world, imperial, Asian American, migration, and business historians as well.

Katrien Jacobs, *People's Pornography: Sex and Surveillance on the Chinese Internet*. Bristol and Chicago: Intellect, 2012; 203 pp. with notes, references, bibliography, index, tables and images: 9781841504933, US\$25.00 (pbk)

Reviewed by: Lucetta Yip Lo Kam, *Hong Kong Baptist University, China*

Despite the ban and the unpredictable nature of state censorship of sexually explicit materials on the Internet, a booming underground culture of pornography, erotic art and writings has developed in China. Katrien Jacobs's book is a comprehensive documentation of the various forms of pornography and creative resistance to state censorship and social control in China. The author has also conducted research in Hong Kong in order to understand university students' response to sexually explicit materials, Internet sex networks and DIY pornography, and the different selves and social networks of costume players.

Jacobs conducted fieldwork in Hong Kong, Taiwan and China with the help of research assistants who spoke Cantonese and Mandarin. The book situates the study of Chinese pornography in the discussions of Chinese young adults' and netizens' voices and their 'aesthetics, taste and pleasure' (p. 13). It covers a wide range of creative production and use of pornographic texts such as artistic and erotic self-expressions on the Internet, DIY pornography, sex blogs, and queer fantasies and sexual identities practised by sub-cultural communities. The book discusses notable debates on sex as well as dissent in response to Internet censorship in China. Contrary to the stereotypical view of pornography and erotic expression in China as unimaginative and bland, Jacobs reveals a completely different picture of active participation in the production and consumption of erotic materials.

The term 'people's pornography' refers to user-generated Internet content of erotic expression and consumption, and subversive sexual practices in the actual world. Cyber porn producers are enthusiastically engaging in the creation of new sexual selves. Among them, a number of female sex bloggers in China have found their way to express

unconventional sexual selves, desires and practices. Some of them have attracted a large number of followers and have hence become targets of government censorship. While interviewees from China considered sexual freedom and pornography to be different from political freedom, the author argues that sexuality and pornography have a role in 'testing the boundaries of government policing' (p. 51).

The book under review provides rich ethnographic details of ordinary people's production and use of pornography in China and Hong Kong. It is especially adept at presenting and explaining Chinese porn and subcultures to Western readers. It provides a fresh perspective to existing local understandings of popular sexual texts and subcultures of queer desires and self-expressions. The contribution of the book also lies in its comprehensive documentation of forms of cyber porn culture and cases of cyber activism against censorship in China.

The research makes experimental use of participatory methods to investigate online and subcultural communities. One of them includes the author's use of an invented cyber persona to participate in a community of online sex-finders. According to Jacobs, the use of auto-ethnography allows her 'to explore the website and make use of my sexual body while attracting people who would help me along in my intellectual pursuit. I also used it as a tool to reflect on my own boundary-crossing experiment and to test out collective self-objectifying impulses within Internet sex culture' (p. 136). Personal participation in the sex-finders website also allowed the author to carry out a 'personalized and emotionally engaged analysis of cross-racial encounters' taking place on the Hong Kong-based website. The chapter vividly describes the strategies members used to construct their sexual selves with the help of recognizable racial and gender stereotypes or through the subversion of those predictable models. A more in-depth discussion that includes more reflection on the ethical issues encountered during the process of personal participation in the field would have been useful and even necessary for readers to obtain a fuller understanding of the auto-ethnographic study.

The major research fields of the book are China and Hong Kong, even though Taiwan is mentioned in the Introduction. The entire book does not make a conscious effort to address the differences between China and Hong Kong, in spite of the significant political and cultural differences and the different models of Internet censorship used in the two societies. For example, in the chapter on university students in Hong Kong, the author could have taken into consideration the origin of the students. The book does not include a discussion of lesbian and gay pornographic cultures in China, Hong Kong or Taiwan, which played an important role in the crackdown of pornographic websites and debates about what is considered obscene in the three societies. However, the book in general is an ambitious project that documents the vibrant sex cultures and activism in China and Hong Kong.

Caizhen Lu, *Poverty and Development in China: Alternative Approaches to Poverty Assessment*. London and New York: Routledge, 2012; xxviii + 274 pp. with notes, index, references, appendices, tables and figures: 9780415618229, US\$140.00 (hbk)

Reviewed by: Eva P. W. Hung, *Centennial College, Hong Kong, China*

Review

Katrien Jacobs, *People's Pornography: Sex and Surveillance on the Chinese Internet*, Bristol, Chicago: Intellect, 2012. ISBN 978-1-84150-493-3. 203 pp.

The World Wide Web and pornography have much in common but perhaps the most obvious is their status as symbolic oxymoron - alternatively condemned and praised by different cultural groups, and according to diverse political agendas. While some hail the Internet as a powerful means of democratization and self-expression, others fear it could easily become just an efficient and pervasive tool for controlling the masses. Pornography is subject to similar ambivalence, being considered an empowering/liberating force or an objectifying/degrading agent of both women and men. This "inner dichotomy" characterizing both porn and netizenship seems to be taken to an extreme level in the context of Chinese society, and is the subject of Katrien Jacobs' latest book, *People's Pornography: Sex and Surveillance on the Chinese Internet*.

Through this innovative research project, Jacobs (an Associate Professor in Cultural Studies at the Chinese University of Hong Kong) continues the in-depth analysis of Internet sexual cultures initiated in her earlier book, *Netporn: DIY Web Culture and Sexual Politics* (2007) which examined the aesthetics and politics of DIY pornographies. This time she focuses attention on the circumscribed and relatively unexplored geo-political context of Hong Kong and Mainland China.

In *People's Pornography*, Jacobs investigates various aspects of the continuing processes of constructing sexual identities (as well as general redefinitions of sex, sexuality and personal freedom) in China at the beginning of the 21st century. To do so, she primarily focuses on recent developments in the production and consumption of DIY pornography in China rather than the circulation of "imported" images and models. In addition, she describes the most common "survival" practices enabling Chinese netizens to access (and exchange) censored materials and to express independent thinking, alongside consideration of the popular influence of dissident artists like Ai Wei Wei or nonconformist "celebrity bloggers" such as Han Han. Insight into actual (sexual) behaviours and (sexual) identity building processes is offered through the analysis of two distinct case studies: the race and gender dynamics operating among Hong Kong members of the sex dating website Adult Friend Finder, and the system of collective and individual identity strategies within Chinese cosplayers' communities.

As this brief summary of the book's contents indicates, many issues are at stake here, and an even broader range of topics and examples are developed in Jacobs' analysis. For me there are two recurring leitmotifs: first, the "inner dichotomy" concerning netizenship and porn. In Chapter 1, for instance, Jacobs outlines the specific controversies over consumption of pornography within Mainland China. According to two recent academic surveys and data collections (Wu et al. 2010; Parish et al. 2007), the recreational use of pornographic videos and writings is an established fact for Chinese men and (in much lower numbers) women, notwithstanding the strict policy of control and total censorship enacted by the Chinese Government against obscene images and adult content in general. The self-liberating potentials of this consumption seems to be partially tempered by the strongly normative nature of the materials chosen by Chinese consumers (most frequently illegal Japanese AV bootlegs and Chinese DIY videos). In fact, as Jacobs states: 'Even if sexually-explicit media are used and shared by netizens to defend civil liberties, the products themselves mostly reveal patriarchal fantasies, taboos, and frustrations' (p. 41). At the same time, as she demonstrates in Chapter 2, even Chinese people's net etiquette could reveal itself as extremely problematic and contradictory: together with a generalized claim for civil rights and freedom of speech (and also despite the tireless work of activist bloggers and sex bloggers), Chinese web users sometimes seem to have completely internalized a sort of "surveillance gaze". The Human Flesh Search Engine, for example, is a typically Chinese web phenomenon through which anonymous netizens 'work together, investigating people's personal details, stalking and spying on them, harassing them both in the virtual and physical world' (p. 79) to publicly "punish" suspected (sex) criminals. According to Jacobs' description, then, contemporary Chinese networked society seems to be characterized by a permanent (and quite inextricable) negotiation process between a widespread genuine struggle for "modernity" and (sexual) freedom, and a deeply rooted bond to a patriarchal and sex-phobic tradition of control over people's bodies and (sexual) behaviours.

This ambivalence is somehow emphasized by the (apparently) closed nature of the Chinese Internet, a sort of walled fortress, sometimes referred to as the "Innernet" (p. 46), in which access to different typologies of contents (from pornography to global social networks like Twitter) is strictly regulated by advanced surveillance systems, such as the infamous Great Fire Wall. It's no surprise, then, that Chinese netizens persistently look to foreign cultures to create their objects of desire and to build operational counterparts for self-definition. The constant gaze toward "the Other" is the second leitmotiv of the book. Western and (above all) Japanese cultural forms, models and representations are often invoked to shape Chinese tastes and identities. As described in Chapter 2, for instance, Chinese pornography fans worship Japanese AV stars (particularly Sola Aoi) as the perfect embodiment of the sexual object ("the pure girl") while often disdaining Chinese (sexy) digital celebrities, such as Sister Lotus and Sister Phoenix, even defining them as 'opportunistic media whores' (p. 74). Other examples can be seen in the sexualisation of race in the cybersex interplay between Asian women and Caucasian males (and, vice versa,

between Chinese males and Western women) on the Hong Kong version of Adult Friend Finder (Chapter 4); or in the “queer” (and sometimes problematic) re-appropriation of Japanese cosplay culture by the Chinese ACG fans, analysed in Chapter 5. In opposition to this trend, the work of Chinese female sex bloggers is determined to counter the Japanese sexual “colonialism”, as well as the Communist Party’s criminalization of non-standardized (sexual) lifestyles, as for example demonstrated by the work of February Girl, who has devoted her writing efforts to the rediscovery of Chinese erotic traditions (pp. 70-71).

These dynamics of control and freedom, as well as the reference to “external” (especially Japanese) modes of sexual representations, are also discussed in Jacobs’ analysis of the “gender variations” among Chinese porn audiences. In Chapter 3, she investigates the differences between fe/male uses of pornography and different (physical and emotional) responses to sexually explicit materials. Through a three stage interview process (anonymous fixed response internet questionnaire; 45-minutes interviews with sixty university students from Hong Kong and Mainland China; in-depth conversations with fifteen volunteers in front of their computers), Jacobs is able to deepen our knowledge of the rituals and modes of consumption of (Internet) porn in China, framing Chinese young adults’ relationship with explicit images in a context of ‘social rebellion and will to knowledge’ (p. 125). Moreover, in line with other audience research (Kipnis 1996, Chivers et al. 2004, Smith 2007), Jacobs corrects the ‘historical misconception that women have problems with sexual appetite and are uninterested in pornography’ (ibid) and demonstrates the ways in which Chinese young women interact with pornography as a means of constructing sexual subjectivity.

Throughout the book, Jacobs addresses and clarifies these (and other) issues and controversies, thanks to a remarkably deep knowledge of the cultural dynamics operating within Chinese society. Her research is based on a synergy of different methodologies drawn from the field of social sciences: content analysis of written, photographic and audio-visual texts; interviews with various individuals (other scholars, bloggers and artists); media ethnography, participant observation and auto-ethnography (intended as ‘an ethnography that can accommodate a deeper immersion and engaged performativity within different media environments’, as she states at p. 134). In particular, what I found extremely interesting methodologically is Jacobs’ emotionally charged scholarly approach: her deep personal involvement in the issues discussed, as well as her “immersive” participation with the target groups analysed, have certainly contributed to overcoming her racial and cultural “otherness” to Chinese culture, providing us with a ground-breaking insight into this quite “unfamiliar territory”.

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Biographical note:

Giovanna Maina obtained her Ph.D. in Visual Arts and Film Studies at the University of Pisa. She is author of several essays in anthologies as well as in national and international journals (*Cinéma & Cie: International Film Studies Journal*, *Comunicazioni Sociali*, *Bianco e Nero*). A member of the editorial staff of *Cinéma & Cie: International Film Studies Journal*, she has also edited *I film in tasca. Videofonino, cinema e televisione* (Felici 2009, with Maurizio Ambrosini and Elena Marcheschi) and *Il porno espanso. Dal cinema ai nuovi media* (Mimesis 2011, with Enrico Biasin and Federico Zecca). Since 2009 she is an organiser of the Porn Studies section of the Gorizia International Film Studies Spring School (University of Udine, Italy).

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People's Pornography: Sex and Surveillance on the Chinese Internet, by Katrien Jacobs. Bristol: Intellect, 2012. 203 pp. US\$25.00 (Paper). ISBN 9781841504933.

The last decades of the 20th century saw a series of debates around sex and sexual expression: in the 1980s there was the feminism versus pornography debate; in the early 1990s there was the attack on the National Endowment for the Arts; and in the mid-1990s there were the public panic attacks over sex on the Internet. Accounts of these struggles were largely in English and entirely centered on the United States and Europe. Katrien Jacobs has done a great service in her new book in the contribution it makes to understanding the struggles for sexual freedoms and expression on the Internet in China and Hong Kong, within the sociopolitical and cultural contexts of Chinese-speaking Asia.

Many might dismiss cybersex as a frivolous topic, given other social and political challenges Chinese face in daily life. But that very dismissal is one of the issues that scholar/activists like Katrien Jacobs call into question. Sexuality in all its complexities, contradictions, compulsions, and creativity is a fundamental aspect of human life, and its modes of expression are necessarily political and resonant with other sites of contestation.

Indeed, the entrenchment of sexuality within larger questions of civil and political freedoms has a very specific configuration in China, one that Jacobs illuminates as one of the rationales for her study. She writes,

Sex and pornography have become central forces in China's twenty-first-century politics, in its technology and cultural policies and in its blueprints for Internet governance.... The Chinese Communist Party aspires to control activism and political movements, yet it also promotes a specific type of netizen activity through commodity fetishism and/or consumerism. (pp. 13–14)

Jacobs's aims in the book are courageous and ambitious. Because of the highly sensitive nature of the investigation, a good deal of the book necessarily focuses on her research methods and the constraints that the focus itself imposes upon the endeavor. Furthermore, because the Internet is so vast and the modes of expression not only various but also at times elusive or quixotic, Jacobs was careful to map the individual aspects of her topic across clearly defined subfoci in five chapters. Not only does she spell out the aims of each chapter in the introduction, but each chapter itself occurs between an introduction and summation of what

happens in it. So that this review can proceed with a similar clarity, I begin by following Jacobs's own blueprint.

The first three chapters maintain the typical academic distance from the subject they cover: (1) "the changes in sex industries and commercial porn sites that affect consumption in mainland China," and "the work of artists and netizens who uncover China's burgeoning sex/porn industries"; (2) sex blogging; (3) interviews to determine the "potential of pornography as a politically transgressive force and educational tool" (pp. 20–21). Chapter 4, however, documents Jacobs's own experiences as a "participant observer" and interviewer of other members of a "massive sex-and-dating website." While chapter 4 is perhaps the most controversial in both topic and methodology of research, Chapter 5 is the most eclectic, covering Japanese-inspired costume play, female fans of male same-sex romances, and transgendered and gay and lesbian alternative digital venues (p. 161).

The first two chapters are extremely successful in making the book's major arguments overall. It demonstrates the importance of sexual expression on the Internet from a variety of angles, particularly in terms of who figures in these struggles and the strategies they adopt—particularly important as these struggles are intimately (no pun intended) related to the struggles for more broad-based civil and political rights. Prominent in this chapter is the figure of artist Ai Wei-wei, whose international reputation has not included his championing of sexual expression online. His strategically staged seminude self-portraits are clearly modes of political activism consonant with those actions he is better known for abroad (pp. 82–84).

Another celebrity featured here is the Japanese porn star Aoi Sora 蒼井そら (spelled "Sola" in the Romanization in the book). The name "Sora" is also rendered with the Kanji 空, which, while acceptable, is not usually the spelling in Japan. Clearly her initial impetus for entering the Chinese Internet is commercial and entrepreneurial, but the effects of her appearance there both on the Chinese market and on her are very compelling. Aoi's popularity in China and her urging Chinese fans to access her Twitter account are credited with "having brought down China's Great Firewall" (p. 38). Therefore even her specifically commercial and nearly exclusively sexual entry into Chinese cyberspace clearly had a liberating effect beyond the sexual. It is in Chapter 2, however, where we see the effects of her blog. There she shares impressions of life in Japan but also of her visits to China. She also used her blog to

raise money to aid the victims of the 2010 Qinghai Earthquake (p. 73).

Space prohibits as full an account of this book as it deserves, but I believe the seriousness and conviction Jacobs demonstrates in this work also deserves not only praise but a willingness to critique it and to address the questions that some of her choices raise—although I hasten to add that I raise these questions within my overall support and admiration for the project and in a sense of alliance. The two examples I have given above clearly are sex-positive interpretations of these modes of Internet activity, and they make a clear case for that attitude. My unease, however, comes from “sex-positive” being the generalized default attitude to any and all incidents and expressions discussed. Virtually any instance of a woman posting nude self-photos, for example, is characterized as “destabilizing” the status quo.

While many such expressions may very well be, I think it is important to recognize that sexuality and its representation are always multivalent, and especially the image of a woman placing herself on sexual display—no matter what her motivations or political intentions are—remains necessarily fraught and ambivalent. For example, the pictures of a very young naked girl playing with stuffed toys posted on Renren in 2009 (p. 28), while perhaps shocking to some prudes and encouraging to some progressives, are not in themselves transgressive of a politically repressive apparatus, and do not form a gesture on the same level as creation of the imaginary animals such as the “Grass Mud Horse” that plays with Chinese homonyms to undermine verbal censorship (pp. 52–56).

The treatment of the Edison Chen sex scandal, moreover, I believe, suffers from this attitude as well. I think it is possible to defend the women involved for their right to sexual experimentation in private, without denying that they were “victimized” by the photos and videos ending up in the public. Furthermore, including drawings to reconstruct a couple of the photographs serves no academic purpose and indeed unnecessarily subjects those women to further public exposure that they did not seek.

On the other hand, it is simply not possible to make an extensive intervention into questions of sexual expression without controversy. Although I do recommend a more nuanced and variable assessment of sexual expression across differing contexts, I also commend Jacobs for a valuable pioneering effort into this realm of technosexual contestation.

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THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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Sex 2.0



Universal Pictures

In "Videodrome," a 1983 movie, sex in society takes an unexpected turn.

By Randy Malamud | JUNE 25, 2012

LONDON

The orgasmatron from Woody Allen's *Sleeper* (1973) seemed like one of those futuristic devices, like the flying cars from *The Jetsons*, that was destined to be actually invented someday. A cylindrical machine the size of a phone booth, it ensured perfection for people's couplings (or solo pleasures when Allen's character stumbled

into the machine on his own).

In *Sleeper's* dystopian parody, the orgasmatron suggests a warning that sex might in the future become mechanical and soulless: Everyone (except for males of Italian descent) in Allen's imagined 2173 is frigid or impotent, dependent on the machine's artificial stimulation. But if *Sleeper* reveals those cultural fears, it may also embody some of our desires. Orgasmatronic sex is quick and easy, uncomplicated by all the intricacies that books like *The Joy of Sex*, published a year earlier, were bringing into the mainstream.

Certainly the movie confirmed, early in our modern technological revolution, that cutting-edge inventions will inevitably be applied to one of our most compelling drives. Forty years on, sexperts are still trying to figure out what the future holds, and to actualize at least some of those concepts in the immediate moment.

"FutureSex," more familiar from the title track of Justin Timberlake's steamy 2006 album, also describes a concept in the field of sexuality, where scholars are assessing and predicting what comes next. Those who sweat these matters converged at Brunel University's "Sexual Cultures" conference here this spring. I'm not a certified sex

specialist, just a committed amateur, though when I'm in London I do find that my first name—"Hi, I'm Randy!"—suggests a more eager interest. I was there as a voyeur.

What I found was an engaging overview of Sex 2.0, involving a range of tools, practices, ideas, and other cyberstuff that may demarcate a new frontier in sexual consciousness, both academic and popular. The digital realm offers more pornography than ever before, and other digilibidinous activities like sexting and camsex. Computer dating, chat rooms, and online sex work remain the permeable membranes between virtual interactions and face-to-face experiences. Web portals provide ever more clinical information on sex and health. And virtual communities, AI pioneers, and Second Life gamers continue to stoke and satiate, not to mention monetize, people's sexual appetites.

While cynics may wonder if all this is merely an overly technophilic and perhaps superfluous reinvention of the wheel, many believe these phenomena constitute not just random gimmicks and fetishes but also a fundamentally changing consciousness—a paradigm shift in the way we conceptualize and practice sex.

New technologies generate new experiences. Kenneth Maxwell, a professor emeritus of biology at California State University at Long Beach, predicts that psychologists, chemists, pharmacologists, and computer programmers will collaborate to supplement the sensations that produce sexual pleasure. We've already seen how technology provides vastly increased visual stimulation, and Maxwell thinks all our other senses are similarly ripe for enhancement. "Sensations still untapped electronically are odors, tastes, touch, pressure, and kinaesthetic sensations," he writes. "In the case of odors, we can expect that research will unravel the presently unsolved mystery of human sex pheromones." Other researchers are exploring a "sex chip" that intensifies desire by sending shocks to relevant regions of the brain.

But while cyborgian science promises to have a keen impact at some point in the future, porn is the most obvious indication of changing sexual culture today. Readers of a certain age will recall skeezy porn palaces and rumpled magazines hidden beneath mattresses. Now the greater challenge is not to stumble upon Internet smut: It's as profuse as it once was secretive.

It has become a commonplace that the porn industry drives Internet innovation. From the printing press, photography, and film to cable television, VHS, DVD's, and camcorders, new technologies have always counted porn aficionados as early adopters. Finding dial-up access inadequate, porn consumers led the migration to broadband. The profusion, popularity, and niche orientation of pornographic Web sites serve as models for many other commercial Web enterprises.

Pornography may seem a banal portal to futuresex, but scholars value the entree into people's most intense, otherwise inaccessible psychological and emotional experiences: desire, fantasy, transgression, disgust. It brings private experience into the public realm. Pornography extends people's sexual portfolios beyond their own personal activities, potentially expanding sexual consciousness and dispelling prejudices and hang-ups.

It's a vital societal barometer: Some social groups respond with moral panic, characterizing porn as a trigger of deviance and inveighing against escalation, desensitization, and addiction. Those who are more open—cleverly self-designating as sex-positive, implicitly relegating the opposition to the unenviable sex-negative camp—believe that audiences learn from porn. Viewers pick up new techniques and styles, but more broadly, said Martin Barker, a professor of film and television studies at the University of East Anglia and a keynoter at the London conference, consumers see porn "as a very functional way to open conversations with their partners, and to think about their own sexuality: sexual desires and boundaries and experimentation."

Today's porn is more properly considered as "porns." A new breed of pornographers has democratized the medium with alt-porn of various types: DIY (do it yourself) porn (also known as homecore or realcore), fan porn, indie porn, zombie porn, etc. You name it, someone's excited by it. While the genre has always featured a range of variations (threesomes, French maids, foot fetishists), alt-porn more pointedly spotlights nonnormative bodies and sexualities.

Consider "fat sex," a growth industry, if you'll pardon the expression, in both pornographic and real-world constituencies. It is futuresex not only in some abstract academic meta sense, but also because people are clearly getting larger. Fat activists offer advice and information on topics like sexual positions and fertility, enabling a

supportive and self-defined community to supplant a tradition of mockery and marginalization. Like many other emerging sex niches, this one empowers sexually those who were once supposed to be undesirable and without desire themselves.

Futuresex promises such pluralism. One size no longer fits all, not that it really ever did. The formulaic instructions and rote templates ("When two people love each other, the man puts his ...") that once composed our sexual consciousness are anachronistic. The discourse is full of striking new vocabulary: mononormativity, skingays, homospaces, technosexuality, Facebonking, ladyblogs, self-pornification; not once in three days at the conference did I hear anybody say "sexual intercourse."

Another example of new twists and decentered conventions involves the "money shot" (male ejaculation), which has traditionally been the pornographic *pièce de résistance*. Lucy van de Wiel, of the University of Amsterdam, asked "why the female climax has traditionally been granted minimal visibility" and proposed that "the emergence of the visible female orgasm introduces a new moment in which the economy of fluids is no longer the only primary visual confession of pleasure."

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Pornography studies has global facets, too. Katrien Jacobs, a conference speaker from the Chinese University of Hong Kong, studies what she calls porn activism. In *People's Pornography: Sex and Surveillance on the Chinese Internet* (Intellect, 2012), she discusses the recent flourishing of that culture's pent-up desire for porn manifesting itself in a range of new outlets, and she sees in this phenomenon the seeds of popular counterauthoritarianism.

A complete ban on pornography dates back to the formation of the Communist state in 1949, so there is officially no pornography in China. But, in fact, Jacobs has found a burgeoning industry. A common motif features "hidden camera" scenes of people in places like parks and libraries, perhaps co-opting and subverting the profuse trope of government surveillance. These scenes are titled and archived by location—"amateur sex in Beijing"; "Chengdu college students"—which Jacobs characterizes as "sexualizing China, or, perhaps, resexualizing it after an era of suppression. The films are very rough

and amateur, very 'authentic,' as if to say, sex is going on all over the country."

Jacobs posits crosscurrents between pornography and political activism: For example, the Chinese government accused the artist/activist Ai Weiwei of spreading pornography after he appeared with four women in a nude photograph called "One Tiger, Eight Breasts." And Internet porn-distribution networks also feature subversive memes like the "Grass Mud Horse," a made-up animal whose name resembles a Chinese profanity for a taboo activity involving one's mother.

The liberating aspects of sexuality represented by China's growing porn culture have a spillover effect that fosters other incipient freedoms, Jacobs argues. The appeal of cybersex creates a keen impetus for developing new Web outlets and overcoming censorship and firewalls.

Beyond pornography, futuresex promises emancipation from constraints and scripts. Judith (Jack) Halberstam, who teaches English and gender studies at the University of Southern California, predicted that "the tyranny of the biological family" will dissipate with changing sexual and emotional configurations. As divorce rates rise above 50 percent, she sees a new openness to alternative arrangements. "Marriage might have been OK back when people died at the age of 45," she said, "but nowadays, 'till death do us part' is a lot harder." The future of sex will see the subversion of dysfunctional and crumbling institutions, Halberstam asserted, in favor of potentially fresher and stronger kinship structures like queer families and community parenting.

The University of Washington sociologist Pepper Schwartz believes the future will bring a range of ethical and intellectual global advances in sexuality as significant as the technological and cyberspatial breakthroughs. In the future, "sex will be more of an appetite and less of a moral crisis," she predicts in an essay titled "Creating Sexual Pleasure and Sexual Justice in the Twenty-First Century." And once that liberation is achieved, she hopes the franchise of basic human rights will be expanded to include the realm of sexuality. The right to choose one's sexual partner and one's sexual practices, she envisions, will bring sexual equality for all.

Such macro visions can be approached in microcosmic ways, speakers suggested, like

the circuitry of our smartphones. Via "personalized technopractices," mobile technology mobilizes sexual activities, said Sharif Mowlabocus, a lecturer at the University of Sussex and author of *Gaydar Culture: Gay Men, Technology, and Embodiment in the Digital Age* (Ashgate, 2010).

"App cruising" epitomizes the double-edged sword of new media in sexual consciousness. Grindr is a gay hook-up app, an "all-male location-based social network," as its Web site describes it: "quick, convenient, and discreet. And it's as anonymous as you want it to be." It has generally been enthusiastically received in gay communities, Mowlabocus said, and "not just for sex. It's for the three F's: friendship, flirting, and [the third one]." If public spaces have traditionally proscribed gay desire, relegating courtship and sex to such liminal locations as bathhouses and lavatories, apps can inscribe a gay presence over this proscription, carving out a space and a process for fulfilling desire.

But another geolocational app has evoked a much more negative reception: *Girls Around Me*, which was recently pulled out of circulation, used Facebook and Foursquare data to reveal who's nearby, what she looks like, and lots of other personal information (which the "girl" won't realize is being harvested from her profiles). One blog called it a "stalker's dream come true," and another said it "takes creepy to a new level."

While Woody Allen's *orgasmatron* has never made it into production, many sexcessories are gushing onto the market. Japanese sexbots feature soft, pliant human features, touch sensors, mechanical pulsation for tactile arousal, and sound systems to provide love talk when certain parts of the doll's body are squeezed.

Other new gizmos include body suits, programmable vibrators, and teledildonics. That's a kind of simulated and stimulated reality involving interactive sex toys. Devices like dildos and *Fleshlights* (male vibrators) connect to computer hookups enabling friends and lovers, or even strangers, to activate wireless erotic play from another room or another country. An interactive *Fleshlight* might record and transmit the specific speed and force of one user's thrusts, and then translate them into pulses and vibrations on the other end. Webcam users, eat your hearts out.

For those seeking new thrills, obviously, this is a doozy, though some will lament the loss of what used to be the fundamental intimacy of human touch. Futuresex is replete with virtual content and commodified products, and the standard dilemma is whether such mediation enriches or alienates.

In *Alone Together* (Basic Books, 2011), Sherry Turkle argues that increasing dependence on technology leads to a consequent diminution in personal connections. "Technology is seductive when what it offers meets our human vulnerabilities," she writes. "And as it turns out, we are very vulnerable indeed. We are lonely but fearful of intimacy. Digital connections ... may offer the illusion of companionship without the demands of friendship."

And accompanying that arguably lost intimacy is a loss of privacy wrought by the digital revolution, just as privacy has been sacrificed in other realms of entertainment, work, and communication. Privacy and secrecy have traditionally been fundamental to sexual culture. To digital immigrants like myself, their loss is unnerving. But to digital natives, perhaps it will be liberating.

Freud, Kinsey, Masters and Johnson, Dr. Ruth, and so many other 20th-century sexuality mavens worked to liberate sexual consciousness from the psychological and social isolation of an earlier era, in which the watchword (not just for LGBT soldiers, but for everyone) might have been, "Don't ask, don't tell." For better and worse, sexual images, discussions, and communities are now indelibly part of an open-access civic realm. Futuresex is commodified, archived. Sex has at once become technologically advanced and technologically tainted.

Prognostications come with the futuresex turf. The artificial-intelligence visionary David Levy: In 30 years, sex with robots will be commonplace. The journalist Liza Mundy: Women are going to want sex more than men do. The political activist Peter Tatchell: In a future nonhomophobic society, as taboos recede, more people are likely to have gay sex.

I won't add my prophecies to the many already out there. I'll just buckle up and try to keep an open mind—come what may.

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