

G'CLICKME



A NETPORN STUDIES READER

Edited by Katrien Jacobs, Marije Janssen, Matteo Pasquinelli

C'CLICKME



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institute of
network cultures

COLOPHON

C'CLICK ME: A NETPORN STUDIES READER

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|-----|
| Introduction | 1 |
| SECTION 1: THE RISE OF THE NETPORN SOCIETY | |
| Regina Lynn Sex Drive: Where Sex and Tech Come Together | 7 |
| Mark Dery Naked Lunch: Talking Realcore with Sergio Messina | 17 |
| Nishant Shah PlayBlog: Pornography, Performance and Cyberspace | 31 |
| Audacia Ray Sex on the Open Market: Sex Workers Harness the Power of the Internet | 45 |
| Adam Arvidsson Netporn: the Work of Fantasy in the Information Society | 69 |
| Manuel Bonik and Andreas Schaale The Naked Truth: Internet Eroticism and the Search | 77 |
| Tim Noonan Netporn, Sexuality and the Politics of Disability: A Catalyst for Access, Inclusion and Acceptance? | 89 |
| Matthew Zook Report on the Location of the Internet Adult Industry | 103 |
| SECTION 2: DIGITAL DESIRE BEYOND PORNOGRAPHY | |
| Mark Dery Paradise Lust: Pornotopia Meets the Culture Wars | 125 |
| Matteo Pasquinelli Warporn! Warpunk: Autonomous Videopoiesis in Wartime | 149 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Florian Cramer and Stewart Home Pornographic Coding | 159 |
| Florian Cramer Sodom Blogging: Alternative Porn and Aesthetic Sensibility | 171 |
| Mikita Brottman Nightmares in Cyberspace: Urban Legends, Moral Panics and the Dark Side of the Net | 177 |
| Michael Goddard BBW: Techno-archaism, Excessive Corporeality and Network Sexuality | 187 |
| Franco 'Bifo' Berardi The Obsession of the (Vanishing) Body | 197 |
| SECTION 3: NETPORN AFTER THE QUEER BOOM | |
| Mireille Miller-Young Sexy and Smart: Black Women and the Politics of Self-Authorship in Netporn | 205 |
| Katrien Jacobs Porn Arousal and Gender Morphing in the Twilight Zone | 217 |
| Barbara DeGenevieve Ssspread.com: The Hot Bods of <u>Q</u> ueer Porn | 233 |
| Julie Levin Russo 'The Real Thing': Reframing <u>Q</u> ueer Pornography for Virtual Spaces | 239 |
| Samantha Culp First Porn Son: Asian-man.com and the Golden Porn Revolution | 253 |
| Francesco Macarone Palmieri aka Warbear 21st Century Schizoid Bear: Masculine transitions Through Net Pornography | 261 |
| Tim Stüttgen Ten Fragments on a Cartography of Post-Pornographic Politics | 277 |
| BIOGRAPHIES | 285 |
| WEBOGRAPHY | 291 |

INTRODUCTION

The conferences ‘The Art and Politics of Netporn’ (2005) and ‘C’Lick Me’ (2007), are novel zones for academics, activists and artists to discuss and experience new phenomena around web-based sex and pornography. We are part of a porn-friendly, yet critical digital generation, bothered by a cultural climate of narrow-mindedness and porn hysteria. Critical studies about pornography and queer activism have been carried out in previous decades, but we are looking to discuss our tactile immersion in pornographic networks. The Institute of Network Cultures agreed to launch such a space on an international level, providing an uncensored environment for exhibiting and analysing various kinds of netporn through conferences, a mailinglist and tagging area, a festival page on Myspace.com, and now a book publication. There is a sense of intellectual and social urgency around netporn, a need to awaken media activism and intellectual sharing to process these pornographic realms. It is indeed difficult to get public funding to support our events, but it is also a matter of challenging the now palpable mentality of fear of the other and the stuffiness that followed supposedly moral conflicts and geo-political warfare.

As we have witnessed in recent porn controversies in cultures as diverse as China and the Netherlands, the authorities are wary of courting pornography research as a valid contribution to open or activist media culture. It remains a risky endeavour to examine pornography, even though the last two years have seen a wider range of porn studies initiatives. Perhaps our objectives are now able to enter mainstream society and become more acceptable again, but global anti-porn movements are also on the rise. We can surely keep developing porn discourses, but what about our initial desire to break open a new kind of public zone of consumption and debate? We see netporn as a site where all our major political tensions and gender wars come to light, but our impetus to air tensions and support a post-utopian quest for pleasure and media awareness will remain controversial.

Our two conferences propose to expand the definition of pornography. A similar revision of the narrow articulation of porn has been carried out by the participants of the Post-Porn Politics conference in Berlin in October 2006. Our contribution started out as a similar search for innovative bodily aesthetics and queer or feminist expressions, but has been mainly centered on an analysis of new technologies. Pornography is not seen as a fatally beckoning commodity, nor as queer counter-culture, but as accessible electronic data that can be modified by social actions, communications and relationships. Netporn’s agency can contain a critique of commercial work ethics and gender roles,

it also actively seeks out circuits of DIY online eroticism. What we emphasise in porn culture is alternative body type tolerance and amorphous queer sexuality, interesting art works and the writerly blogosphere, visions of grotesque sex and warpunk activism; all agencies relying on robust sex energies for their different purposes. These netporn players also breed abundant or obsessive behaviours—lurking, seducing, up/downloading, chatting, mutual masturbation, dating and orgy-swinging. But the general economy of their actions only mimics the exchange economy and people get hooked as they engage in free trading and act out their specific sexual desires. As Bataille said, general economies are based on the notion of excess where a surplus of data and information can only be channelled in a performative manner. Hence, we see modes of mimicry and play as a self-aware and ritualised enactment of a culture's high point of exuberance, ecstasy and intensity. Hence we focus on a society of excess and atomised small players rather than giant industries or singular porn stars.

It is also about the participation of women and feminists and the transformation of queer identities. Minority groups such as (post) feminists, queers and ethnic minorities use porn as a contribution to their social networks. By doing so they create a stance against the industries that have been influencing the porn experience until now. We investigate the role of 'gender fluid' entrepreneurship and web communities, and ask ourselves if gender queerness represents a new marketing devices or an actual sexual behaviour and sensibility. The ability of women and sexual minorities to participate in the porn industry without the intervention of a (typically male) third hand has had profound implications for the industry as a whole. But what is the next step after this kind of liberation? We have witnessed a transformation of the notion of queer agency, not only because straight, lesbian and transgendered producers try to cater to the masses, but because consumerism now involves acts of gender morphing and cross-voyeurism. A cross-voyeur is a person of a peculiar sexual taste or subculture who is tempted to try out an odd or incompatible taste or subculture. Why do we see a rise of these kinds of disorderly tastes and desires? Rather than seeing queer culture as driven by a search for bonding and community activism, it could also be seen as the continuation of the philosophical traditions of Bataille and de Sade, both of whom meticulously evoked sex scenes that would have uneasy effects on potential partners. In *Eroticism* and *Tears of Eros*, Bataille shows that erotic sensibilities have an undercurrent of attraction to scenes and rituals of sacrifice and death. In the writings of de Sade, we witness detailed descriptions of hyperbolic actions which simply bewilder sex partners, or simply undercut the known positions of fearful psychology. Alfonso Lingis describes these reactions to seductions as "deadly pleasures" or voluptuous emotions.¹ They are the kind of indescribable convulsive needling that arguably also underlies adventurous pornographic browsing. For instance, in his essay "21st Century Schizoid Bear," Francesco Palmieri depicts a similar voluptuous pleasure as both a gay man and bear when he is turned on by somebody that he would normally reject. He describes an encounter with a fat and hairy person who turns him on yet upon closer investigation, turns out to be a female-born person or trans-bear. He describes this encounter as a sublime moment in which the trans-bear's complex appearance lifts him

into a heightened state of terror and pleasure. Palmieri wonders if and how this process of finding others ever comes to an end? Or how does it reach a limit?

Alongside developments of cross-voyeurism, FTM porn stars such as Buck Angel, have taken an active part in appropriating porn stardom and making seductive appearances for uninitiated persons. Buck's growing success is not only a new networking of porn zones, but a call for average straight viewers to question and design their own genders and sexual tastes. As Barbara DeGenevieve writes in "The Hot Bods of Queer Porn," these sex acts engage viewers with performative mutations or multilayered parodies of gender.

These are examples of netporn producers and consumers who trade services while developing novel chemistries. But one of the biggest stumbling blocks is the new anti-porn tide that implies a climate of global crime and punishment. Regardless of waves of democratisation within the Internet porn industry, the porn boom is also causing an enormous backlash to autonomous sex communities. The Chinese government is setting an example by actively banning the most fertile web cultures; the youthful sex bloggers and politicised admins of bulletin boards, or occasionally shutting down all traffic taking place in cyber cafés. We should also be critical of the legalese anti-porn terms and conditions underlying the extremely popular western digital networks such as Myspace.com. For instance, for the C'Lick Me conference we opened a page on Myspace.com to gather online friends and momentum for the event. This turned out to be a success, as many people linked to our page. However, it also became clear that the legal parameters of Myspace.com are profoundly anti-porn. Any time one uploads a photo, one receives the following warning message: "Photos may not contain nudity, violent or offensive material, or copyrighted images. If you violate these terms your account will be deleted." When uploading a video, the anti-porn warning is even more blatant, as the message reads: "If you upload porn or unauthorized copyrighted material, your MySpace.com account will be deleted."

Again, netporn is cornered by a legalistic paranoid or reactionary puritanical mindset. This threat closes the definition of pornography — as if we already exactly understand the definition of pornography. It is a bit of a contradiction to carry out open porn activism within these kind of networks. How do we as the "myspace generation" see the exchange zone between virtual eroticism and a material-public display of porn? Our sense has always been that we needed to break out of the Internet for reasons that were not always clear: porn excess, media exhaustion, death of radical media culture. Does Myspace announce the moment where we desire an Internet without porn? Do we need to bring porn back to the movie theatres so we can start relaxing and masturbating again? What can we do with netporn in this play zone of our conferences and festivals? The modes of reply to these questions are further developed by our participants and authors, and have shown that porn networks do not yet belong to one or two giant corporations.

NOTE

1 Alfonso Lingis, "Deadly Pleasures", in Deepak Sawhney (ed.) *Must we Burn Sade?* New York, Prometheus Books, p. 32.

SECTION 1

THE RISE OF THE NETPORN SOCIETY

SEX DRIVE:
WHERE SEX AND TECH COME TOGETHER

Regina Lynn

Every week I expose myself to a hundred thousand people online and invite them to discuss it in a public forum.

They don't love me for my body. Hell, some of them don't love me at all. But they come back each week because they know they'll find a geek's-eye view of sex. If nothing else, I give them something to think about over the weekend.

It's a challenge, and I love it.

I started writing Sex Drive in early 2003 as a companion to TechTV's documentary series *Wired for Sex*. TechTV was reaching out to a more mainstream audience, and the web team wanted to develop some strong Internet personalities distinct from the on-air talent. The producer of TechTV.com knew me well — I had hired him into a good job, once upon a time — and what's more, he knew about my explorations into areas of the Internet that everyone visits but no one talks about in polite company.

Our initial conversation went something like this:

Producer: So we're doing this doc series about sex and technology, and we need some web content to go with it.

Me: You need me to write a weekly sex-tech column!

Producer: Can you start Monday?

When I tell people I write about sex and technology, they often look puzzled, cock their heads to one side, furrow their brows and say something like, "Sex and tech? You mean like ... online dating?"

Except in place of “online dating,” some people say “Internet porn.” And some say “cybersex.” And some say “sex toys.” Less common are “virtual reality” and “webcams.”

Given a moment to think about it, most people come up with an example of how technology infuses their own sex lives. Some send steamy text messages throughout the day, while others compose romantic emails that would do Cyrano de Bergerac proud. Sex toys are coming out of the closet, thanks to their relatively new accessibility. Now everyone in the world can visit women-friendly sexuality boutiques like Good Vibrations, Toys in Babeland or Grand Opening. (Unfortunately, not everyone can have their purchases shipped to them — it depends on local laws. But we’ll get there.)

Through chat rooms, email forums, online personals, and role-playing games, we’re finding kindred spirits, and building relationships without regard to geographical or political boundaries.

And, of course, we have an abundance of porn. Porn on the web, porn on DVD, porn on your PDA, porn on your cell phone. Technology is enabling a barrage of sexual content unlike anything the world has ever seen. It’s a crusader’s wet dream to have so much to wage moral war against.

PORN POSITIVE?

After TechTV’s demise and a three-month hiatus, I pitched *Sex Drive* to *Wired News*. I sent the senior editor several sample columns and described my mission: to chronicle, and to help drive the sexual revolution 2.0. We agreed to a four-week pilot, and if the column succeeded, I would sign an ongoing contract. I was stoked.

Prior to this moment I had only written about porn peripherally. *Sex Drive* is about sex, I thought, and not about porn. Only when *Wired for Sex* produced an episode about online pornography did I devote any serious column space to it. I had no objection to porn. It was just that I don’t watch much porn and I had so many other topics to cover.

But during those first four weeks at *Wired News*, porn dominated mainstream media headlines. Congress had invited four prohibitionists to testify in a hearing about whether we need more studies about pornography’s effect on society and perhaps a public awareness campaign, much like the ones warning us not to smoke or drink to excess.

Porn is heroin! the headlines proclaimed. *Porn is crack! Porn compels people to commit rape, to succumb to addiction, to become pedophiles!*

My new editor all but demanded I write about this.

In researching that column (“Porn Prohibitionists Miss Point,” *Wired News*, 11/27/04), I

had to examine my own feelings about porn. Was I offended? Did I fear it? Did my sexual self-image change because of it? When I did view porn, what did I do with it?

PORN IS BORING

When the web first began to boom in the mid-1990s, I bought an electronic pass-key of some kind that let me into any porn site that used the service. The idea was to keep minors out without putting too much of a burden on subscribers—you entered your pass-key, rather than your credit card number, to verify your age at each site. It was cool to be able to look at as much porn as I wanted, of any flavor, without having to leave the house.

That, and I thought it was cool to be a girl looking at porn. Not that my parents ever mentioned porn, but somehow I learned early on that it wasn't for girls. (Ha!)

I caught myself clicking through to a gallery, taking in the contents with a glance, and backing out to click through to the next gallery. I didn't need to spend much time with the pictures to feel the titillation of porn.

That's what gives me a hint about how it must feel to be obsessed with online porn—that the search, as much as (or more than) the pictures, is really what turns you on. No individual picture or video can be as novel or exciting as you hope it will be, so you keep searching and looking, looking and searching. You're never satiated because if you just masturbated to any particular picture or video, you'd miss out on all those other ones.

Never mind that they, and thousands like them, will still be there for you tomorrow.

I browsed through a lot of genres just because I could, but what appealed to me most were group scenes and triple penetration. Fantasies I had not tried, but that could be possible (although not probable) in real life. I learned that romantic, softly lit scenes of heterosexual couples did absolutely nothing for me. Neither did naked girls. But one woman with multiple men? Yes, please.

The novelty wore off and I did not renew my pass-key when it expired. Yet I was aware that I had taken advantage of an opportunity not available to women until recently. Even among the Internet generation, men far outnumbered the women working the newsgroups for porn. It took the world wide web to bring us equal access.

I liked seeing women in sexual situations who enjoyed what they were doing, and wished I could find more of it. I came to terms with my own preference for being submissive in bed (although not anywhere else). I learned that being the sub meant being in control—and that being sexual meant so much more than I had heretofore experienced.

I rarely saw anything I would call degrading or damaging to women. I'm not saying it's not out there, only that I could usually avoid it. The actresses and models on the sites I chose to patronize were paid to be there, and they knew what they were getting into.

Hell, I have a fantasy of lying across a coffee table on my back, my hands wrapped around two different men's cocks, my lips sealed around a third, while another man knelt between my thighs and yet another masturbated above my belly and breasts. If an actress in a similar scene is degraded, and represents the humiliation of all women by all men, what did it say about me that the image made me wet and achy?

Within months, I learned that most porn is boring. It's churned out without regard for quality and certainly with no thought to portraying female enjoyment. But when porn is good, it has a powerful effect on the senses. And when it's likely to appeal to women (which doesn't mean it's not explicit or "dirty"), it is often referred to as "erotica" instead.

While women like Danni Ashe and Tristan Taormino began to turn the porn world upside down, I looked elsewhere for sex.

FOR THE LOVE OF CYBERSEX

In my teens and early-twenties, my sexual actions did not live up to my sexual imagination. I was shy, inhibited, fearful and had almost no libido. I'd find any excuse not to have sex, and I deliberately gained weight to keep myself "protected" from sexual behavior.

Like most American women, I had experienced inappropriate childhood sexual incidents, although I hesitate to label them as "abuse" because on the scale of things it truly wasn't that bad. I could trace my negative responses to sex directly back to being six years old when I knew something was wrong and that I had absolutely no control or power over what was happening.

As an adult, my libido was drowned in shame and I managed to dissociate from anything more involved than a kiss. Two years of therapy during college helped me find peace and forgiveness, but I couldn't translate that mental state into a healthy and active sex life.

Enter cybersex.

One night, when porn wasn't doing it for me, I decided to try something different, something more interactive: adult chat. I picked the first HTML chat room that came up in a Yahoo search, called myself Aphrodite, and plunged in. I spent six hours in that chat room the first night, so involved in conversation and flirting that I didn't mind the clunky technology. But when another member told me about Internet Relay Chat (IRC), I

dumped the HTML chat in favor of text-based mIRC (a sort of “back door” to the same chat community). Then I went back the next day, and the next, and the next....

It was transcendent. I had written sex scenes before, but never real-time, never with a man writing back to tell me how aroused he was, or continuing the fantasy with words of his own. The immediate response to my words turned me on like nothing else.

And the challenge of keeping it interesting, unique and hot engaged my brain in ways real sex had not. It’s hard to make love to a mind that’s completely dissociated from the proceedings. But good cyber is all in the mind, even if you are also using your hands, cucumbers or other convenient household objects for physical stimulation.

In training my brain to love sex, I found myself craving it outside the computer. I overcame my fears about oral sex and developed a newfound appreciation for penetration. I was in my late-twenties, I had been in my relationship for twelve years, and for the first time I truly felt myself to be a sexual creature.

AND THE TECH SHALL SET YOU FREE

One of my childhood experiences involved being trapped against a wall while a neighborhood boy shoved a porn magazine in my face. I clearly remember a picture of two women extending their tongues on either side of a penis. “Just like licking an ice cream cone!” the boy said, and I could feel a heat radiating from him that had nothing to do with the weather.

I didn’t give much thought to the picture, even though it was my first exposure to what adult males look like naked. (This was in the 1970s, when men in porn didn’t look like they do now. Alas.)

But I instinctively knew I was trapped, vulnerable to whatever the big kid had in mind, and that I had to handle the situation very carefully if I were to escape unscathed. At this point, I didn’t have any specific knowledge of what might happen, but I did know that it would be bad.

That incident, and others more serious, imprinted on my brain one thing: penises are predators. It wasn’t the pictures that taught me this, it was the way I was exposed to them. Never a secret, private perusal of the adult world; always an image thrust in my face, and yanked away again before I had a chance to process what I was seeing.

And yet, when I hit my teens I always got along well with boys, and I could flirt with the best. Only when it came time to put all that energy into practice did I freeze. My mental warehouse door rolled down with the reverberant clang of metal on cement and that was it. My mind was safe on one side, no matter what was done to my body on the other.

Cybersex blew that door to pieces. The computer provided two things that no amount of real-world behavior modification could. I was safe, because no penises were in the room with me. And I was intimate, because co-writing sex does not leave much room for dissociation.

If you've done it, you know what I mean. If you haven't, I probably can't explain it well enough for you to understand just how powerful it is. It's something that has to be felt to be believed.

APHRODITE OFFLINE

My relationship was in trouble when I discovered cybersex, and spending all that time on the computer did not help. We eventually parted ways. (At least he benefited from my newfound sexual enthusiasm before we split up!) I found myself single for the first time in my adult life.

That year is still hazy in my memory. Too much happened in a short time. I changed jobs, moved to a new city, got a puppy. My mom was devastated about my break-up and we could hardly talk without one of us crying.

I traveled across the country to meet one of my cybersex partners in real life and we had earth-moving sex. I traveled up the coast to meet another one, and we had tide-changing sex. I met a guy at a country bar, and we had sex.

Suddenly, I was Aphrodite Offline. I kept condoms in my purse and a twinkle in my eye, and I invited a few of my male friends to have sex with me. (Individually, over time, not one big orgy.) This was not "casual sex" per se, because I don't believe sex can ever be casual, but I made it clear that it was sex without a romantic relationship to frame it. Sex based on mutual affection and chemistry.

Eventually, I knew I needed to try dating formally, not just slutting around with my friends. It's too easy for boundaries to get blurred if you let those flings go on too long. (Not all of my sexual education was fun.)

I realized I had never actually dated. I met my ex when I was fifteen, and was dating him by the time I was seventeen. Here I was almost thirty and, while I had slept with more than one person (finally!), I had never actually been on a first date. So I went after one, the only way I knew how. I created an online personal ad and dated by the database.

WHERE SEX AND TECH INTERSECT

Perhaps because my most powerful positive sexual experiences involved technology, I have incorporated tech into my sex life on a permanent basis. Or maybe it's just that I'm already a geek, with technology infusing every aspect of my life, including sex.

That's probably why my favorite sexual imagery involves tech. FuckingMachines.com and the sci-fi/fantasy sex at Pornotopia.com consistently stoke my fire.

The intersection of sex and tech happens in the communication side of things. Sure, we have all kinds of gadgets and doohickeys to use during intercourse, but it's the mental intercourse that best benefits from technology. You can have sex without any man-made tools at all; you can't whisper sweet nothings to a lover hundred miles away without some sort of technology.

Mobile phones with their video cameras and hands-free headsets are essentials for any couple who spends time apart. Webcams and instant messaging enable long-distance sex, and show us that most sex really happens in the mind. Women often tell me they had their first good orgasms in cyberspace.

Remote sex is getting closer to the real thing with products like the Simulator. The Simulator is a combination of hardware and software that connects your sex toy to the Internet for someone else to control. The control panel works with any browser, and it looks like a game console, so if you're in the airport, no one can tell at a glance what you're doing.

The system even translates between a sleeve-style vibrator for men and a rabbit-pearl vibrator for women. If he thrusts hard and fast, her toy vibrates hard and fast. If he goes slow and gentle, hers goes slow and gentle. If he gets up and walks away, her toy goes dormant. You can be thousands of miles away or in the same room, as long as both toys are connected.

Through it all, communication technologies keep you in tune. Cell phones and Internet telephony take the expense out of long distance, as does instant messaging and a webcam.

The web also offers a wealth of sexual education, and I don't just mean porn. You can read up on sexual technique, sexual health and sexual fantasy without having to hide a stack of books away every time your parents come to visit. Never before have we had access to this much information with this much privacy. It may not be as sexy to think about, but it's one of the great benefits that technology brings to our relationships and our sex lives.

And the anonymity conferred by a chat room handle gives you a comfortable arena in which to ask questions, practice flirting, and even have sex in ways you have not or will not except in a fantasy setting.

AM I ADULT?

When Carly asked me to contribute to *Naked Ambition*, my first thought was: “Wait, I’m not in the adult industry.” Then I thought: “If I’m associated with adult content, will my column be taken less seriously?”

That’s when I realized I held prejudices about porn that I didn’t know I had. I always said I had no problem with porn, regardless of whether I chose to bring it into my life. Yet by not wanting to be associated with it, wasn’t I perpetuating the stereotype that Porn Is Bad, and particularly that Porn Is Bad For Women?

“Adult” encompasses so much more than porn. And porn itself is hard to classify. I love Laurell K. Hamilton’s *Anita Blake, Vampire Hunter* novels, but each one has more sex and less serious plot than the last. Each novel puts Anita in more situations in which she must have sex with one or more of the several males in her adventurous life. Hamilton writes great sex, if you like metaphysical fantasy, which I do. It’s explicit and raw and beautiful all at once. Is it porn?

On the literary side, Jane Smiley has a beautiful lovemaking scene in her novel *Horse Heaven*. I’ve given it to several friends as an example of a beautiful piece of writing, whether about sex or anything else. It too is graphic and powerful. Is it porn? Is it adult entertainment? Or, because it is literary, is it erotica, and is that less smutty than porn, and therefore more respectable to be seen reading it?

Sex Drive is not explicit, neither pornographically nor erotically. But I don’t hold back either. If I think readers need to know where I’m coming from, why I know what I know or feel what I feel, I tell them. It’s not about exhibitionism, it’s about credibility. And I take a “we’re all adults here” stance, even though I know not everyone who reads *Wired News* is 18.

I concluded that “adult” is merely a code word for “sex,” and in that case, yes, *Sex Drive* very much falls into the adult realm. And there’s absolutely nothing wrong with that. We don’t diss food writers for writing about food, and we don’t diss fashion writers for writing about fashion. (Well, okay, sometimes we do, but not with the same scorn reserved for porn.) If food and clothing are two biological needs—and I would defend clothing as a biological, not just a social, human need—why wouldn’t we afford the same respect to sex?

I think our perception of porn and adult entertainment is built on notions about the business and its players that may not always be true, especially now that woman have moved up and revolutionized parts of the industry that used to belong solely to men.

The only way that perception will change is if the realities behind it change—and we

let people know about it. That's part of what Sex Drive can do, and it's part of what every woman in this anthology is doing.

We're rewriting "adult" into more mature content and business models, and I don't mean as in "for mature audiences only." I mean in terms of how we approach sexual content, whether in writing, in performing, in distributing, in experiencing, or in any other capacity.

YOU SAY YOU WANT A REVOLUTION

I don't know why more people aren't writing about technology and sex together in a positive light. I know of only a handful. Annalee Newitz has a wonderful column, Techploitation, syndicated through AlterNet.org. Jonno and the Fleshbot.com team look at porn through geek eyes. And sometimes you'll run across an essay by a counselor talking about how cybersex has helped clients heal sexual problems.

But when you consider just how much technology we have that centers around sex — from Viagra to Internet-enabled sex toys to portable porn for your mobile device — it's amazing to me that sex-tech is not a common phrase, or that women's magazines rarely stray beyond the safe, ubiquitous vibrator when offering advice about sexual aids.

The mainstream media seems to focus on the fear. I've seen so much written about Internet infidelity, pedophiles using chat rooms to lure kids out to piers, CEOs, and priests with porn on their hard drives. I don't ignore this, nor do I pretend it's not happening. People do bad stuff with sex-tech.

Yet we have so many ways in which technology enhances our relationships. That's where I go with Sex Drive. I like to focus on the individual even if I'm writing about society-wide implications. Here's how I use a particular technology, or here's how so-and-so uses it. And here's how you can use it too.

I like making associations that I don't see other writers making. All my life I have been told that I see things from an unusual angle, and I try to let that perspective guide me. I also feel tremendous pressure to be brilliant every single time, even though I know that's not possible. Sometimes being informative has to be enough: informative, funny, and insightful.

I am not an advice columnist. I just want to get people thinking, paying attention, talking about these things. My role is to make the connections, to start the conversation and to provide a safe community where we can have that conversation.

I don't have all the answers. But I sure as hell can raise the questions.

NAKED LUNCH:
TALKING REALCORE
WITH SERGIO MESSINA

Mark Dery



Sergio Messina has seen the future, and it's sticky.

Messina, 47, is the Margaret Mead of Alt.sex on the Internet. Imagine Mead as a shaven-headed intellectual with a drawing by Michelangelo tattooed on her back and Italian street cool to burn, and you've got an inkling of why this open-source anthropologist rocked the 2005 Netporn conference in Amsterdam with his lecture — more of a dance remix, really, with freestyle riffing and mind-curdling slides — on the online amateur porn he calls “Realcore.”

Born in Rome (“where we hate the Catholic church with great vigor”) and now based in Milan, Messina is a pirate radio DJ-turned-anti-copyright activist, electronica musician, and freelance journalist (his technology column has appeared in the Italian *Rolling Stone* since 2003). He's at work on a heavily illustrated book about his investigations of amateur sexual subcultures on the net, titled *Realcore: The Digital Porno Revolution*, which he describes as “a brief history of Realcore,” defining Realcore as “a new brand of sexual images that appeared in the late 1990s thanks to the then-new digital tools.” Realcore, says Messina, is pornography that's grittier than traditional hardcore, even, “striving to portray the reality of the (amateur) scene and the true desires of the participants.” To him, Realcore and the community of file-swappers that has congealed around it, is about “new and interactive sexual practices, extreme digital lifestyles, a true

gift economy, web personalities.” Says Messina, “The future is here...and it’s sweaty, it’s sticky, and it swallows.”

His live multimedia presentation of his travels among Realcore enthusiasts is a head-spinning fusillade of unforgettable images and hilarious one-liners. Messina’s delivery has as much in common with the staid lectures at a typical academic sexology conference as Norwegian death metal does with *American Idol*. “Realcore isn’t exactly a lecture, nor is it just a presentation of a book,” he notes. “It’s the main ‘product’: a stand-up anthropology show. The book will be like the live album of a rock band: useful to repeat the experience, to digest the songs, but nothing like the original.”

(NOTE: I conducted the following interview with Messina via e-mail, in July 2006. With his permission, I’ve debugged his English: correcting, compressing, and in a few instances rephrasing his responses for clarity and concision. He has approved every edit, and has carefully vetted this transcript for factual accuracy. MD.)

Mark Dery: Give me the historical backstory of Realcore. When and how did you first encounter it?

Sergio Messina: I got online in early 1996 and Realcore was starting to happen. Web porno was already huge; “amateurs” (regular looking folks) and “fetish” were two thriving genres. Back then, “fetish” meant anything from femdom to watersports.

The amateur fetish boom hit in 1997–98, as digital photography became widespread. (The first digital camera for the consumer market that worked with a home computer via a serial cable was the Apple QuickTake 100 camera, which came out in 1994). Also, free Internet space became available and easy to use. Yahoo/Geocities, MSN, and so on all tolerated porno. And, obviously, so did the Usenet newsgroups. The hierarchy of newsgroups, devoted to special interests, favored the division into subgenres. The first visit to the complete hierarchy makes you dizzy.

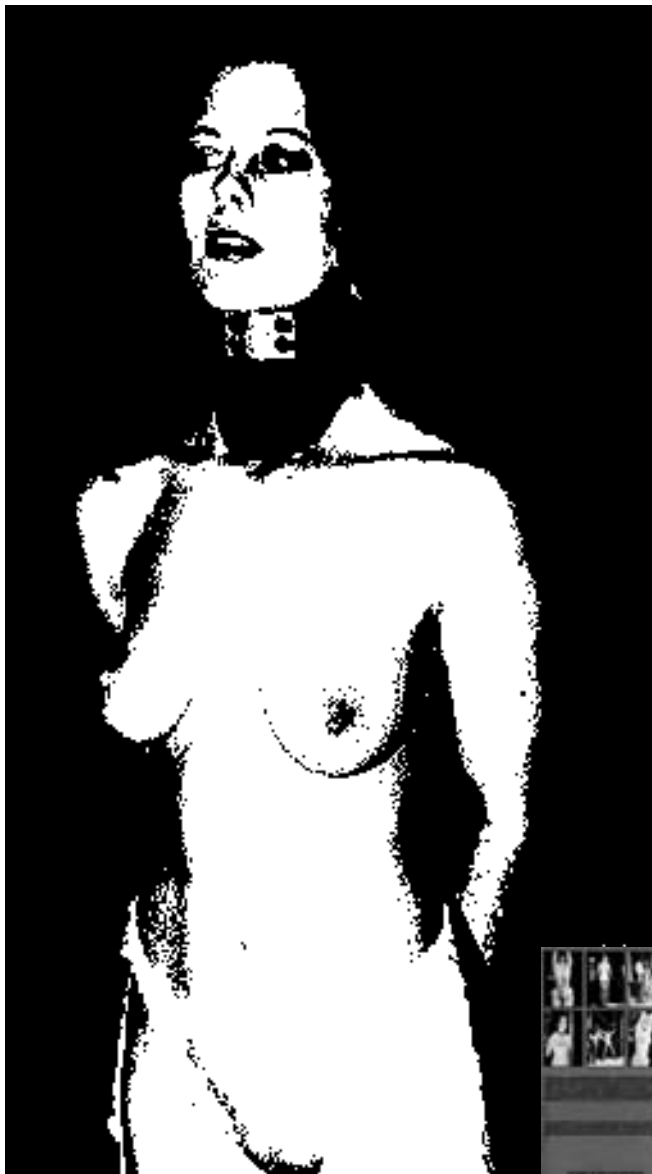
MD: What weird wormhole led you into the parallel universe of Usegroups?

SM: In the 1980s, in Europe, there was a wave of amazing BDSM movies (the early Pain and Slavesex series) that were different, and not only because of their content, which consisted of long, unedited sequences of real BDSM practitioners, in actual dungeons instead of sets. Formally, these movies were very low-res, and the overall feel of the productions was more like underground films, made by and for BDSM people. I had seen some of these movies, which were very hard to find in Italy, and I was looking for more. Usenet seemed like the right place to start.

MD: How did you hack your way into these Usenet subcultures? In my experience, gaining access to porn-related newsgroups is massively time-intensive. You have to apply



Corduroy fetishist. Realcore image found online by Sergio Messina. Used with permission: collection of Sergio Messina.



“The first 20 titles of each series, SlaveSex and Pain, were really unbelievable,” notes Messina. “About the same time there was another, more fetish-oriented series (with mostly the same ‘actors’), called Hard Games, which featured many porn-video firsts: first scat, first serious bestiality, first needle play. You can find some covers at dvids.com. The covers say ‘original ton deutsch,’ which suggests that the videos were made by Germans. The production seems to be by Scala. Martina [pictured above] was the true star of the genre. Her screen name was Martina, but her real name, apparently, is Anita Foeller or Feller; she did some stuff under this name, too. But her name was stolen by another, much weaker, pornstar. So if you look for her you’ll find the other...” Caveat emptor!



Mandingo fetishist. Fan of well-hung black men advertises her obsession. "Very often, realcore people communicate online (or advertise themselves) by writing on their bodies and then posting the pictures," says Messina. Realcore image found online by Sergio Messina. Used with permission: collection of Sergio Messina.



"Tom, thank you for the shoes." Amateur fetishist. Realcore image found online by Sergio Messina. Used with permission: collection of Sergio Messina.

to the moderator for membership, keep nudging the inevitably unresponsive moderator, and so on.

SM: First, you have to find out from your provider if you have Usenet access; it's likely you do. Then you need a newsreader. There are millions of freeware programs you can use to read newsgroups—for example, Mozilla is also a newsreader (but not Firefox). And your ISP may have a news service, with an address that goes something like news.yourprovider.xx. Once you have this set up (very simple, much easier than setting up e-mail), you configure it so you can see the full group list.

If your provider is good, you'll get a very long list. These are the upper parts of newsgroup hierarchies; think folders. You go to "alt" and open it; you'll see another immense list, the second level of the hierarchy "alt." Then you open "binaries" (images), and inside you select the folder "pictures."

I'll give you an example:

```
alt.
alt.binaries
alt.binaries.pictures
alt.binaries.pictures.erotica
alt.binaries.pictures.erotica.male
alt.binaries.pictures.erotica.male.anal
alt.binaries.pictures.erotica.male.asian
alt.binaries.pictures.erotica.male.bodybuilder
alt.binaries.pictures.erotica.male.bodybuilder.moderated
alt.binaries.pictures.erotica.male.chubby
alt.binaries.pictures.erotica.male.hardon
alt.binaries.pictures.erotica.male.oral
alt.binaries.pictures.erotica.male.oral.cumshots
alt.binaries.pictures.erotica.male.piercing
alt.binaries.pictures.erotica.male.shirt-and-tie
alt.binaries.pictures.erotica.male.tattoos
alt.binaries.pictures.erotica.male.underwear
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There are thousands of newsgroups in the "alt" hierarchy, like alt.sex.bondage (same folder as the one in the example, but not in the subfolder "binaries"; it's in "sex").

Within the hierarchy alt. binaries.pictures.erotica (which is infested with spam—spam makes up over 50% of all Usegroup posts, but you learn to spot it), I suggest you look into the .interracial, .transvestites, and .wives groups, just to get an overview of this stuff and its history (many people repost older pics and collections). Also alt.personal.bondage is sometimes quite amazing (watch out: explicit images!).

I should also say, since not many people ever visit certain newsgroups, that the chance of stumbling across objectionable material (from violence to child porn) is very high.

One way to avoid it is to subscribe to one of the many web Usenet services (such as www.pictureview.com) that remove child porn before displaying images from these groups.

In addition to Usenet, Yahoo hosts groups that archive amateur porn. For a while, Yahoo was the best source of self-produced, self-published sexual imagery. Now, it's much harder to find it since Yahoo stopped listing such groups. They're there, but they're covert; you have to know exactly where to look, and there's more moderation.

MD: How, as an accidental anthropologist, did you penetrate the perimeter defenses of these groups? Were they wary of outsiders insinuating themselves into their subcultures?

SM: If you see a set of images with a subject line like "comments please," these are new images, and often the e-mail address on the image or in the message (all images have a space for messages, although they're often empty) works. If you mail someone, they always reply. Also, images often have URLs written on them; I follow those URLs. So I didn't find many "perimeter defenses"; after all, these are exhibitionists!

MD: Let's return to the timeline you were unraveling. You said amateur fetishism first hit, online, around 1997–98, enabled by digital photography and free Web hosting. What were the cultural reverberations of the amateur fetish boom?

SM: You had the fetish people finally seeing (and making) images that weren't available before people like vomit fetishists, who turned out to be unexpectedly numerous.

MD: What was the effect, for amateur-fetish porn people, of suddenly discovering that they weren't the only ones in the sexual universe with their obsession, in some cases an obsession so rarefied they thought they were its only examples?

SM: Let me quote from the splashpage of the very first Hiccup Lovers' website, circa 1997 (hosted on Tripod and no longer online):

Welcome to the Hiccup Lovers' Web Site. We are a group of both male and female lovers of the hiccups. We have found one another through the power and anonymity of the Internet. Most of us had one very basic thought when we found one another: that we were strange or weird or that there was something very wrong with us because of our attraction to the hiccups, either in others or in ourselves.

By finding others who share this powerful attraction, we found that we are not alone. We are not strange or odd and there is nothing wrong with us.

By the way, the site discussed various methods for getting the hiccups. Naturally, it had no pictures — just sound clips!

MD: Speaking of arcane obsessions, I still can't get that hilarious, fascinating image

from your presentation at the Netporn conference in Amsterdam out of my mind: the sneaker freak—the guy with his cock in a running shoe!

SM: The Web inspired people. You had regular people posting images that for various reasons hadn't been available, images of real people enjoying themselves in various ways, some of them predictable (the alt.binaries.pictures.erotica newsgroups are still full of self-portraits of people just having missionary sex), some unusual, like the sneaker fucker.

Via the web, the white couple into well-hung blacks who hosts a gangbang in an Austin apartment can arrange it a lot more easily, and probably got the idea from images posted by happycouple69 (happycouple is a popular nickname) from Dover, England, who will get very horny when they see the images posted by the Austin couple...and so it goes.

MD: What inspired you to coin the term “Realcore”?

SM: During the 1990s, there was a strong trend toward “reality,” culminating in today's reality TV shows. I'm thinking of the Rodney King video, shows like Jackass and Cops. In this genre, there are some aesthetic factors, such as low resolution, unsteady camerawork, and unedited footage, which we gladly accept because of the so-called reality of what we're seeing. We wouldn't believe the Rodney King footage if it was shot by three cameras with adequate lighting. Only 9/11 is an exception to this rule: many people objected to the cinematic editing of news coverage of the attacks and their aftermath exactly because it made things look unreal.

Now, cellphone cameras allow people to film in adult theaters, parking lots, cars, or wherever. And, as in the case of Rodney King, you exchange good, high-definition photography (cold, in McLuhan's terms) for imagery that is low-res but indisputably real (very hot!). This is why I call it Realcore. Softcore was simulated sex, hardcore went as far as actual sex, Realcore goes beyond: it strives to portray, without too much interference, people “actually” fulfilling their desires, often fully clothed.

Realcore is all about the reality of what you see, the truth of these images. It's about the desire to see someone doing something because they like to be seen. They're filming it because you are part of the game as well. You're the audience. They get horny because someone is getting horny over them. As Dante said, “Amor ch'a nullo amato, amar perdona” (Love, that exempts no one beloved from loving).

MD: Cultural theorists might argue that Realcore goes beyond Baudrillard's Nostalgia for the Real, crossing over into a fetishization of the real—a fetishization that is only possible in a Matrix world where the air is thick with simulacra, from the digitally retouched celebrity faces on magazine covers to the surgically perfected flesh of the millions who whittle themselves to fit those images; from Bush's Last-Action-Hero photo ops (Mission Accomplished!) to the Hollywood blockbuster titling and pumped-up



Sneaker fetishist. Realcore image found online by Sergio Messina. Used with permission; collection of Sergio Messina.



Asked about the unapologetic ugliness of some Usegroup Realcore-ers, Messina counters, "It isn't ugliness, it's normality---a shopping center stripped bare, you could say. The ultra-fat or extra-ugly are us." Realcore image found online by Sergio Messina. Used with permission; collection of Sergio Messina.



If you've got it, flaunt it: according to Messina, this Realcore swinger is trolling for playmates by baring her assets banana breasts and a jones for nicotine. Fetching. Realcore image found online by Sergio Messina. Used with permission: collection of Sergio Messina.



*Realcore image found online by Sergio Messina.
Used with permission: collection of Sergio Messina.*



"A different tribute, very evocative," notes Messina. "He is getting a hard-on over another newsgroups user, and maybe he's even online, at that very moment." Realcore image found online by Sergio Messina. Used with permission: collection of Sergio Messina.



*Photoshopped tribute. Realcore image found online by Sergio Messina.
Used with permission: collection of Sergio Messina.*

theme music cable news shows slap on war-porn footage of bombs bursting in air.

If this is so, then the gross-out nature of some Realcore practices, and the stunning ugliness of some Realcore practitioners, begins to make a certain sense: Realcore's grossness and ugliness — its irrefutable corporeality, and its frequent delight in what Bakhtin would call the pleasures of the “lower bodily stratum” — heightens its reality, making Realcore realer and therefore rarer in an age of simulations.

SM: That might be part of it. But think of these TV shows where you see police chases, car accidents, rescues, bungee-jumping gone wrong, etc. For most people, there is something very compelling in watching these shows, much more so than in watching a reenactment. Is it because the TV channels are thick with fiction? Partly. But reality TV fulfills other needs, touches some of the same strings that Realcore does. Jenna Jameson-type industrial porno, which is becoming a bit more extreme every year, is to Realcore what reality TV police chases are to Hollywood cop shows. It's like Independence Day compared to Robert Frank's *Cocksucker Blues*. In the first movie, you know where it's going and you enjoy the FX; but in the second, anything, literally anything, can happen — and does.

I agree about “the gross-out nature of some Realcore practices, and the stunning ugliness of some Realcore practitioners.” Realcore stuff such as gloryhole pictures, amateur gangbangs, and sex in adult theaters often ends up on “tasteless” sites. Scat, for example, was extremely popular on gross-out sites like Rotten.com. That's because Realcore is shot in a way that proves the stuff is real: unedited equals immediate, actual, true — qualities treasured by gross-outers and fetishists (and millions of reality-TV fans) alike. For scat fetishists (and there are quite a few of them), knowing that the shit in the photos is really shit and not chocolate (that's another fetish!) is very important. This is why extreme-fetish porno tends toward Realcore. The very first people to understand this were European BDSM moviemakers in the 1980s; reality was very important for them, too.

MD: What do Realcore people themselves say about the “realness” of their auteur porno?

SM: I've tried to bring up the “reality” subject a few times, in e-mail exchanges, but it seldom bounces back, conversationally. They say that they got online, and they found these different images, and that's how they got involved in the scene. This is a common story: Realcore seems to be more satisfactory than porno because it isn't passive, it's interactive.

In my lecture (which isn't exactly a lecture; it's more of an edutainment show, a cross between stand-up anthropology and an X-rated Discovery Channel feature), I talk about “tributes.” A woman posts her picture, some guy downloads it, prints it, cums on it, takes a photo of the results — the tribute — and posts it back into the newsgroups. She gets comments, requests to wear specific items — her home suddenly becomes public.

It's a whole game, involving mostly two or more people, where the first post is only the opening move. Once the tributes are made, the person portrayed in them collects

all these images and makes Photoshop collages that also end up online, on the person's website or in the newsgroups. The more tributes he or she gets, the greater the glory.

You don't do this with just any image: tributes tend to involve portraits of faces. And there are often specific requests for "tributes."

What a digital, complex, multi-stage way to please each other! Real, then virtual, then real again (and sticky), then virtual again, then sticky again...

MD: Again, very Baudrillardian: the precession of the simulacra. Or is it semulacra? (Forgive me, J.B.) And, in its own way, Freudian: I'm reminded of that passage in Freud's essay, "The Uncanny," where he talks about the survival, in the modern psyche of the "atavistic mental activity" that he calls "the omnipotence of thoughts" — the primitive belief that subjective mental processes can affect external reality. The "tribute" has something of the occult about it; it's a kind of sympathetic magic — what I do to your image, I do to you.

How has being part of the Realcore scene affected the people in it?

SM: Many people have seen a change in their sexual lives, from "spiced up" to "turned upside down" — at least, that's what they say. Most of them started downloading first, and then they got cameras and started taking pictures themselves. So emulation plays a role: they like what they see and make similar stuff. Almost all the ones I've contacted were unaware of the implications — social, networking, futuristic — of what they were doing. They didn't have much to say about the images in terms of cultural-critical insights, but were happy to give juicy details on the setting in which the images were taken: many even kept online diaries (for members) — long texts, intended to accompany the images, and serve as further evidence of their reality.

MD: You mentioned setting. I was particularly taken, during your Amsterdam lecture, with your reading of the image of the woman proudly displaying her new trophy breasts. As you noted, the surgical results were underwhelming, if not grisly. But you focused (brilliantly, I thought) on the real subject of her self-portrait, namely, the sociological subtext hidden in the backdrop she had chosen. The image was really a sort of status-symbol porn. It was about the erotics of consumer desire — the tokens of the good life this woman had managed to amass, proudly and prominently on display in her petit-bourgeois livingroom. Her newly augmented breasts were just her latest acquisition.

SM: That image is very Realcore: it has no center, everything is equally relevant, from the picture on the TV to the vases on the shelf, the carpet, etc. There's an almost Renaissance quality to the image — the new breasts proudly displayed with the other house commodities.

MD: It reminded me of a Dutch master's portrait of a self-satisfied burgher, surrounded by the creature comforts that proclaim his status.

SM: Many couples stress their respectability: “We might do gangbangs (black cocks only, inseminate my wife), but we would never cheat; we do this within the sacred institution of marriage.” Interesting and exotic to me as an Italian, but probably more understandable in the US. I always love details—bookshelves, pictures, whatever.

Realcore people are seldom aware of the photographic beauty of their images; they're always surprised to hear me say that. In most cases, they don't seem very aware of anything else but the sexual side(s) of what they're doing. (Personally, I find this attitude very refreshing!)

MD: Do what extent do you — and/or they — see their autobiographical or documentary porn as a rebellion against, or a critique of, mainstream porn, whose unblemished glossiness rejects the Rabelaisian grossness and ugliness we've been talking about?

SM: They aren't aware of the changes they (along with the rest of the digital revolution) have induced in the porn industry. New mainstream porn genres have been born out of Realcore, such as point-of-view movies. I guess it's a bit like everything else digital: we just do it, and analyze it later. Yet, as in the blog phenomenon, there is an awareness, and often a pride, in differentiating what they're doing from the mainstream media — in this case the unblemished glossiness of magazines or corporate sex websites. They know they are different, because they look different, and in their images they stress this difference.

They're also aware of the different temperature of their porn: in Realcore, the camera is inside the action; most of it is shot by one of the partners, and eye and voice contact with the camera is almost a rule. So I would say this: they might not be “aware” of the rebellious quality of their stuff, but the images tell a different story.

NOTE

Sergio Messina adds: “I presented Realcore for the first time in 2000, at the Ars Electronica symposium, whose theme that year was Next Sex. As sometimes happens in digital culture, that presentation was too far ahead of the cultural curve; the phenomenon was blooming, but hadn't gotten the attention of mainstream culture yet. In the succeeding seven years, many things have happened in terms of technological change and digital culture, and most of these changes have affected Realcore in some way. Broadband, Bit-torrent, Web 2.0, YouTube, camphones, videoconferencing: personal media has never been so personal. While this interview is the most comprehensive “written” text about Realcore so far, I'd like to emphasize that I prefer to present my research as a one-hour live infotainment show, which is what I do best: a peer-to-peer session, in the flesh, where my body talks about bodies to other bodies. I'd like to thank the Institute of Network Cultures, Marije Janssen, and Mark Dery for their interest in my work.

Sergio Messina (ragla@radiogladio.it)

PLAYBLOG:
PORNOGRAPHY, PERFORMANCE
AND CYBERSPACE

Nishant Shah

I intend to make two arguments about Internet pornography that might, at first glance, seem to be already well made, made around other media forms, and made by names more famous than mine. The first is about how pornography on the Internet needs to be understood, not in its sexual content, but in the narrative devices and the performance within the blogosphere. The second is about how a pathologisation of pornography in the third world, especially in the case of India, is symptomatic of a resistance to another larger phenomenon, something that is perhaps best left to its amiable ambiguity: globalisation. By the time I reach the end of this essay, I hope to have revisited both arguments and formed them differently to propose a certain understanding of interactive cyberspaces.

I want to make a quick clarification: throughout the essay, I shall be making the distinction between the use of the words Internet and cyberspace. While the Internet refers to the technology that binds several networks through a single access protocol, cyberspace is borrowed from William Gibson's definition in his novel *Neuromancer*. Gibson coined the term cyberspace and defined it as something more than a network: "Cyberspace. A consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators, in every nation, by children being taught mathematical concepts. [...] A graphical representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system" (128). Gibson's notion of cyberspace was necessarily inter-active and agential. The 'consensual hallucination' is a deliberate act of creation of the space and of the self. The 'sense of who' is firmly connected to the 'sense of where' within cyberspaces. This interactive nature, and the embodiment of the self in the space are crucial in my deployment of the notion of cyberspace. Another distinction that I would like to preserve is between pornography on the Internet and cyberspatial pornography (or netporn as it is more popularly called).

I hope to formulate the two differently in the course of this essay.

I would like to suggest that categories are produced by the law through a process of reification, where the abstract idea becomes hypostatized into an object or a thing. Pornography is a reified product where the notions of sex, sexuality, morality, obscenity, vulgarity and prurience all converge to produce the 'thing' that we identify as pornography. In the virtual world, the reified object is actually ephemeral in nature, thus leading to a new definition of Internet artefacts. The law is a big player in the construction of these categories, and the attempt by the state at policing and governing are essentially through the medium of law. Also, an artefact comes to be recognised as 'pornographic' through the interventions of the legal system.

In this essay, I hope to look at the interactions of law, culture and cyberspaces in order to come to a new understanding of netporn outside of the prejudged categories of morality, obscenity and sexuality that are generally deployed in conceiving of any notion of the pornographic.

PENETRATING PORNOGRAPHY

The Internet in India arrived at a time when pornography and 'obscenity' were already emerging as public concerns. Here is a brief outline:

1993

- The outrage surrounding the Kamasutra condoms ads generated a lot of talk about the nudity and sexuality they used to market their product.
- The first major controversy around 'obscenity' in the imagination of a 'spectating public' around Subhash Ghai's blockbuster movie *Khalnayak* where the heroine and her accomplice shed the conventional roles of chastity and purity, and unabashedly celebrated their sexuality and desires in a song and dance sequence to the lyrics "Choli ke pichey kya hai...?" (What lies behind the blouse?). Though the petition demanding a ban for the song was rejected, the Information and Broadcasting Ministry (I&B) actually recommended revision of the Censor Board for Film Certification (CBFC) guidelines to curb material that was 'obscene and vulgar.'

1994

- Anjali Kapur, advocate and model, was charged with accusations of obscenity when she posed naked for the cover page of *Fantasy* magazine. Nudity was immediately translated into 'Pornography' without examining either the framing of the subject in the picture, or the attempts at 'aestheticisation' of nudity in the picture.
- The Shiv-Sena in Maharashtra announced its intentions of protecting India by "repelling the attack on culture by sexual permissiveness." Under the aegis of Pramod Nalkar, the then Shiv Sena Minister for Cultural Affairs, there were attempts made to remove sex and vulgarity from Indian popular cultures through an indiscriminate confiscation of books, magazines and films that contained sexually explicit material.

1996

- The infamous Tuff shoes advertisement that had a naked couple (models Madhu Sapre and Milind Soman) locked in an embrace, wearing nothing but a snake around their neck, saw moral panic attacks coming out in a rash.
- The Delhi High Court was flooded with petitions that demanded immediate censure and legal action against an idea that was not yet launched – An adult entertainment channel called Plus 21.
- Mira Nair's controversial movie *Kamasutra – A Story of Love* was released, banned, re-released, censored and shunned by many audiences.
- Metropolitan magistrate Prem Kumar asked Doordarshan – the State owned television network - to stop screening all material that did not have a Censor certificate (*The Pioneer*, 4 July, 1996). Kumar also issued directions that authorised the police to enter a place that screened objectionable material and seize it. A High Court decision later stayed Kumar's orders (*The Times of India*, 31 July 1996).

1997

- The Bajrang Dal—a youth wing of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) attacked an exhibition of artist M.F. Hussain's paintings where he had portrayed Hindu goddesses in the nude (*The Times of India*, 30 January 1997). This overtly communal attack was articulated through the ideas of 'obscenity' and 'vulgarity.'

These arguments were later mapped on the Internet though they were not specific to the Internet. The arguments are indeed an extension of the claims that were made against satellite television, beauty contests, music videos, free economy, Hollywood movies and the re-appearance of Coke¹ in the Indian markets. They were arguments against the outsider, who was slowly penetrating the Indian socio-economic sphere, and effecting a new way of living; around a change which threatened to disestablish the existing order of things, and altering the domains of life, labour and language² in unprecedented ways; around globalisation and the paraphernalia that it carries with it; arguments which were eventually mapped onto the arrival of the Internet and the easy access to 'pornographic' material that it provided.

It is within such a quagmire of moral panic, redefinition of the notions of decency, obscenity and culture that the Internet made its presence felt. In May 1997, a national film magazine, *Stardust*, carried a morphed picture of Pooja Bhatt with the title: "Scoop of the Month: Actresses caught nude in the net." The first public face of the Internet was the possibility of unmoderated, unpoliced pornographic material on the WWW—the realm of the forbidden, the dirty and the desired.

The State's initial reactions to the Internet were also rooted in technophobia and pathology and a strong desire to police this new space. From attempts at blocking the ports that supply pornographic material to passing laws against the under-age use of Internet and the public consumption of Internet in cyber-cafes,³ the State has tried and failed to monitor or thwart the proliferation of pornography on the Internet. Eventually, unable

to predict or control the cyberspaces, the State took a new approach towards the Internet and its users. Computers and technology were looked upon as the panacea for curing all the diseases that Development had spawned in India. The policing of these technologies was taken to a new level of 'responsible usage' and 'ethical consumption' of material.

The State adopted a policy of disavowal with regards to the Internet and instead of focusing on the grave concerns that pornography and its proliferation through the Internet were posing, it decided to put the onus on the individual user⁴ and transferred its attention to fights over the radio spectrum and the threats to national security that the new technologies posited. The State has a policy of reactive resistance to Internet pornography; taking measures as, and when, the material 'offended' an individual who reports it to the machinations of the state. The new cyber laws that exist in India blame only the consumer of pornography for his/her (generally his) access to the pornographic material, thus creating the category of a consuming citizen who is responsible, law-abiding and morally 'chaste.'

However, the State's circumvention of the problem has had new age mutant cyber theorists dwelling on many interactive sites like P2P networks,⁵ IRC chat rooms,⁶ MMORPGs,⁷ MUDs,⁸ webcams, forums around pornographic material⁹ etc. in order to understand how pornography proliferates newly in the ungoverned circuits of cyberspace. Most of them look at the easy availability of pornographic material online and do not set out to define or understand netporn. I would like to suggest that what needs to be studied, in relation to Internet pornography, is not the easy availability of pornographic material on the Internet or the sexual content of this material, but the shaping of pornography within cyberspaces. While the Internet with its multimedia platforms serves as an ideal space for sharing pornographic material in different formats — erotica, still images, moving images, webcams, anime, etc. — this is not what netporn is about. I would like to make a claim that pornography as a genre is defined differently within each of the media it populates.¹⁰ Cinematic pornography and its conventions of framing, performance and narrative, for instance, are very different from still image pornography in magazines like *Playboy* or *Penthouse*. Similarly, written erotica/pornography has different structures to operate within. To club all of these as netporn is to overlook the differences between these pornographic products. More significantly, it draws our attention away from pornography as it is shaped and designed by the Internet. We need to start by defining netporn as a category of pornography that is structured within cyberspaces and inherits the characteristics of the medium within which it is produced.

SEX IN THE CYBER-CITY

The first signs of recognition of netporn come from other spaces. Microsoft Networks (MSN), on September 24, 2003, announced the closing of its chat rooms in certain parts of the world — largely the third world. The concern about pornography and the Internet was suddenly made more visible and vocal as claims were made that the chat rooms (interactive Internet forums) were used for "illegal sexual acts."¹¹ This was a new notion of Internet pornography, pornography not as something that was created in a place of pro-

duction and then circulated through a medium, but pornography as created in the unfolding of the very space within which it is housed. Unlike the earlier media forms like print and moving images—especially moving images—the creation and consumption of pornography were the same process. This is the first take-off point to start thinking of Internet pornography as constituted within interactions. Earlier interactive sex sites like telephone sex or ‘talking dirty’ were often objected upon as obscene or indecent. However, it is only with the Internet that these interactions are looked upon as products, as pornographic in nature. Netporn then can be located separately from the proliferation of pornographic material on the Internet. It is housed in the interactions that take place within cyberspaces across different platforms such as IRC, MUDs and blogs. Netporn is not only a product of cyberspaces but it also becomes the visible characteristic of most cyberspaces.

Traditionally, pornography was a visual spectacle of sorts where the dividing line between the performers and the audience was very clear. On the one hand were the paid professionals who embodied the desire of the audience and performed several sexual acts for the gratification of the audience. On the other hand was the audience who took vicarious pleasures out of the acts being performed on screen by performers who were the manifestation of their own desires. With netporn, the performers and the audience are the same people. Sherry Turkle maps how users of interactive cyberspaces do it not for something else, but for the act itself. The action becomes an end in itself and this is a characteristic that is common across interactive cyberspaces.

There is absolutely no audience to a chat, or a blogging network outside of the participants in the blog or the chat: participation can range from active performance to passive and innocuous lurking. The blog, though documented, is ephemeral and often lost in the matrix, remembered only by search engines and Internet archives. These are forms where the user becomes a performer as well as the audience. Netporn seems to encourage such a narcissistic turn where the embodiment of our desires are us. A similar claim can be made for webcams that allow capturing a person’s daily life and making a spectator out of the person. Sites like DefyCategory.com have proved that the performer in front of the webcam is as much a spectator as anybody else.

While pornography within cinema and earlier forms is so predicated upon the body, netporn is essentially disembodied porn.¹² Due to the very nature of interactive pornography, the pornographic value of the production is not about gratification but about the projection of this gratification. To take an example; within a blog, if the user does not make a representation of his/her orgasm—the ultimate aim of most pornographic acts—the pornographic value of the production is completely lost. Even if the user in the physical world does not reach an orgasm and yet makes a representation of it within the conversation, it is accepted as the culmination of the production. Disclosure on a blog would not become pornographic in nature till it is consumed and visibly desired by the audience that it is produced for. Self-representation (visual as well as verbal) becomes pornographic because of the address the representation carries and the responses it elicits from the consumers of the representation. The ‘pay off moment’ in netporn is not in the physical or-

gasm of the consumer/producer, but in the desired or projected orgasm of the user behind the virtual handle. This disembodiment of pornography and its severe wrenching from the notions of body is definitely a unique characteristic of cyberspatial pornography.

ONCE A-PORN A TIME...

Within the blogosphere of Livejournal,¹³ netporn needs to be defined through the motifs of blogging and the methods of networking which are deployed in this sphere. Let us start by defining a blog. Traditionally, in a conception that seems to think of cyberspace as an extension of the 'real' world; a space of fantasy and escape, blogs have been looked upon as an evolution of personal diaries or personal publications. It is easy to define blog as a web-publishing tool, thus spiralling an immense amount of speculation, discussion and critique of blogs as replacing the traditional news media and bringing out subversive narratives that shall change the world. However, this conception of blogs comes from a techno-utopic idea and has been redundant for some time. While it is indeed a valid argument that the documented visibility of non-mainstream and marginal voices leads to a certain impact on the way information and knowledge production are treated, this is not the structural motif of blogging.¹⁴ Nor is it the defining characteristic of a blog. Instead of looking upon blog as a medium of communication and information dissemination, it might actually help in treating it as a cultural artefact.

A cultural artefact, to avoid any confusion, can be clearly defined as a living repository of shared meanings produced by a community of ideas. A cultural artefact is a symbol of communal (in the non-violent, non-religious sense of the word) belonging and possession. A cultural artefact becomes infinitely mutable and generates many self-referencing and mutually defining narratives rather than creating a master linear narrative. Because the cultural artefact is beyond the purview of the law and becomes a signage for the construction of the Symbolic Order within a community, it carries an illegitimate authority, which is not sanctioned by the legal systems or the State, but by the lived practices of the people who create it.

If looked upon as cultural artefacts, blogs can reveal different ideas as to why people blog and what are the motifs of the cyberspace medium that they inherit. I would suggest that blogs be looked upon as structured around the idea of Hypervisualisation. Hypervisualisation can be detected in the Disney and Pixar animated movies where the aesthetic of the movie is not in the narrative structure but in the rendering visible of that which was not previously available to a normative eye.¹⁵ It is easy to claim that cinematic pornography also made the usually invisible acts into viewable performances and hence is hyper-visual in nature.¹⁶ It is necessary to understand that Hypervisualisation is not just a method or a tool of framing but an aesthetic which helps us make sense of an artefact.

It is easy to confuse Hypervisualisation with Realism, but a close look at the techniques reveals that Hypervisualisation is actually almost the reverse process of Realism. While Realism sought to represent reality, Hypervisualisation seeks to substitute it with a higher and more believable notion of the real. Apart from the penetrative gaze that it

offers, Hypervisualisation is essentially about unravelling and revealing that which was hitherto unavailable to our notion of our sense of the self and the spaces we inhabit. Hypervisualisation is the characteristic motif of interactive cyberspaces wherein it becomes a trope for revealing.¹⁷ The users within interactive cyberspaces like blogs, get into a virtual striptease of sorts, where they increasingly reveal parts of themselves which adds not only to the notion of their self but also to the idea of what blogs are.

Most studies of blogging seem to concentrate on what they call ‘political’ blogs or ‘information’ blogs that have a large audience and are more visible. However, we need to look upon blogging, not as being inspired by these promises of reportage or analyses, but as driven by the innate desire to tell a story, and a story not of the other, but largely of the self. A large section of the blogosphere consists of ‘personal’ blogs — biographical narratives documenting the ephemeral experience of living every day. At the cost of sounding lyrical, I would suggest that blogs are an attempt to achieve immortality — to create documents that shall outlive the user and live in the limbo of the virtual. It is the same drive that perhaps drives an artist to use blood in her paintings on canvas, or a writer to put his angst to paper.

The visible face of blogging — the informative blogs and the meta-blogs that analyse the blogs — are actually exceptions rather than the rule. They are visible because they are rare and it would be a mistake to look upon these blogs as representative of the blogosphere. They need to be evaluated as subversive rather than allied to the nature of blogging. This is the reason why I look upon the blogging community within Livejournal rather than looking at the more celebrated blogs that have a large readership and are looked upon as ‘objective’ representations. I would rather focus on blogs that tell the story. In the methods of telling this story, and the kind of things this story telling enables, I shall try to formulate the notion of netporn as we have conceived it so far.

A typical life cycle of a blogger on ‘ElJay’ (as it is often known amongst the more prolific bloggers on Livejournal) is interesting.¹⁸ A ‘Noobie’ starts with tentative narrative accounts of the world around him/her and initiates a commentary about their daily life. This is what I call the foreplay of blogging. The writer in the narratives is exploring, expanding, nudging and unfolding the physical surroundings around him/her. Through user-pictures, personal profile pages and subscription to communities, the blogger begins to reproduce him/herself in a specific way; trying out different names, forms and identities. As the bloggers start ‘befriending’ people and increase their audience and readership, a strange thing happens. Instead of suddenly becoming more cautious of the self and the things that are being revealed on the blog, the blogger increasingly sheds the layers of pseudonymity and facades that they create in their early narratives. There is a typical increase in talking of the self in these narratives, and one can notice a sharp shift from the exploratory narratives to the intimate revelatory biographies that are produced in the blogs. The disembodied protagonist self makes it easier for the blogger to strip his/her virtual garments and exposes more of the self than ever before.¹⁹

Through moods, through user icons, through the music that they mention they are listening to, through emoticons, through subject lines, through the filters that they set

around their posts, and through the metadata that they generate, the users initiate long discussions that range from existential angst to the best kind of bread to eat with pita salad. However, more than the content of the blog, it is the nature of conversation that they encourage and the element of the personal that comes out in the conversation. Flirting, talking dirty, using sexual innuendoes, putting intimate pictures of the self, or even inventing sexually charged blogging language like 'comment whore' or 'blog virgin' are a part and parcel of this stripping. The narratives of the self take on the overpowering temptation that the Internet offers — of stripping the self bare without any inhibition of any kind. The blogger enters an orgiastic setting where s/he is intimate with a huge range of people. These are the people for whom the filters don't work and the most intimate and personal feelings and descriptions are put forward. Advice, exchanges, sharing of emotions, bonding — the process takes many different roads. With each of the persons in this clique, the blogger develops a sense of safety, security and intimacy that allows him/her to take things at a different level. It is the post third date scenario and things are going to hot up.

Directly in proportion with the conversations that people start on the blog, the blogger becomes more revealing, more explanatory, more stripped of the layers that technology has imposed on him/her. And then comes a moment when the blogger finally achieves what s/he is looking for: an acceptance of his/her narratives and the realisation that comes from the reciprocal actions by the others who read their blogs. The content of the blog no longer matters. The blog often dwindles into something that is mundane, dull, everyday, regular, uniformly un-anecdotal and private. The blogger realises that it is not so much the content of what s/he is writing as the act of writing that is important. This moment when the blog content comes full circle and resembles the first posts, is the moment of 'blorgasm.' The sense that the self has been realised and that the experience of the moment is captured in that one representation or conversation is the pinnacle of pleasure for a dedicated blogger.²⁰

This is also the moment where the blogger engages in a reverse strip tease. It is at this supreme moment of climactic joy that the blogger suddenly becomes conscious of the publicness of his/her virtual persona. The hypervisualised self becomes the naked self and this sense of rawness is evident in the way the blogs are written. They are no longer for a wide audience or the large readership that the blogger has accrued. The narratives are a form of exchange of sexual signs between the blogger and the adulterous group of close friends that the blogger has cultivated. Often the comments take the form of an orgiastic setting so embedded in personal views, shared meanings and language that they make no sense to anybody else. If pornography is indeed a representation of an exchange of sexual signs in a post-Derridian world, then blogging falls under that pattern.

It also leads to an unsettling reverse embodiment which is perhaps unique to interactive cyberspaces. In the first half of their blogging cycle, most users try to map their known-imagined and aspired-for bodies in the virtual world, and look upon these bodies as an extension of their physical presence. In the post-blorgasm world, where the blogger suddenly becomes conscious of the disembodied body and makes a call for privatising the public, the disembodied self comes to be mapped upon the physical body of the user;

something that needs to be hidden from the people not in the grid of the blogging community. The very act of blogging becomes pornographic in nature as it moves towards creating a certain ethos of sexual interchange and a coming of the self in the course of this interchange. The blog becomes a space of shared meaning where signals need to be decoded and signs get produced out of intimately shared meanings. The blogs on EJJay, specifically the personal blogs, take on the form of pornography as they use the pornographic structure of interplay and represented pleasures of a disembodied spectator in their unfolding.

The blog in fact becomes an illustration of netporn as I define it. Cyberspatial pornography needs to be tracked in interactive spaces like the blog where the self—real or imaginary, physical or disembodied, consuming or consumed—is put on display and reveals itself in progression, arriving at a stage where it realises itself through the conversations that take place in the blog. There are thus two ways of understanding netporn: through the grid of experience, where the user is allowed to recognise the stripped naked self, and the realisation of the publicness of the self, where the virtual persona of the user is mapped out on the physical body of the user. The elements of performance and participation also need to be understood as encouraging the process of stripping the self that happens in such environments. Pornography has been the major motif of attraction for young and first time users of the Internet. However, the users get an intuitive understanding of pornography as existing not only in the visual/written material available freely on the Internet. They recognise the pornographic potential of cyberspace and hence most users who come to cyberspaces looking for pornography also become producers of pornography in the interactive cyberspaces. More than the legislating bodies or theorists, it is the users who have defined netporn in the interactive cyberspaces and have exploited them to escape the panoptical view of a blinkered State apparatus.

The geeks—the power users of cyberspace, the virtual flâneur who have constructed, explored, exploited and coined cybercities—had this idea of pornography and the pleasure principle long before the cyberspace became a democratic space of GUIs and intuitive navigation. Pr0n, geek slang for pornography of a different kind, was already in existence to give us clues to the pornographic nature of the Internet. In Geek lingo, pr0n has very little or nothing to do with sexuality, sexual act or nudity. It is about the pleasure of control, of manipulation, of knowledge and of penetrating through a system, not by breaking it but by knowing it inside out. Pr0n is in the ultimate pleasure that arises out of interacting with and through a system towards a physical and virtual climax. The subversive element of Pr0n is not in defeating the system but in embracing it, immersing in it and in deploying it beyond the initial conceptions of the system. The pornographic in blogging on Livejournal is not about getting heard but about practicing pornography without being detected by the machinations of the state.

While the incidents like MSN's closing of its chat rooms and Yahoo's currently withdrawn 'personal room' service are already hinting at their recognition of the pornographic nature of such platforms, the state remains impervious to such an understanding of netporn and clambers in the dark to arrive upon a policing of pornography on the Internet.

The IT law passed as late as 2000 understands Internet pornography in the old fashioned grids of production, circulation, distribution and consumption.²¹

The law is incapable of dealing with the ephemeral quality of netporn and the possibility that pornography is not always 'prurient or lascivious.' Hence it is unable to deal with either the digital sexual material that circulates so easily, or the intensely subversive pornographic nature of interactive surfing that the users indulge in on the cyberspace. This policing of cyberspace from an external body is an indication of the failure of the legal apparatus to understand, identify or account for the object under consideration — in our case, Internet pornography. The authority of policing has always been the privilege of the State and also one of the activities through which the State validates its existence. However, this authority is now displaced to governing post-geographical authorities that rule in the realm of the Internet. The pathologisation of the cyberspace by the very bodies that create and govern cyberspaces needs to be taken into account. The decision to police and to promote certain interactive cyberspaces is not just an economic decision but also a recognition of these spaces as embedded in cybercultural practices of a certain kind.

THE LAST STROKE

I had set out in this paper to explore the possibility of understanding netporn as a particular brand of pornography that is shaped exclusively within interactive cyberspaces. It was my intention to recognise netporn not as something embedded in sexual representations, but as something formed by the sphere of interaction and networking that emerges out of the practice of blogging. The need to recognise netporn as constituted in these spaces was to look at the possibilities of resistance and subversion without getting caught in the debates of obscenity and morality that usually surround any discussions of pornography. It is also interesting to note that netporn, thus understood, can be recognised as paraphernalia of the all-inclusive globalisation. It also lets us recognise that the resistance that the Internet meets in the names of obscenity and morality are actually misplaced and are geared towards protesting against the approach of globalisation in the third world. As a last remark, such an understanding of netporn gives the notions of subversion or dissent a new idea, allowing us to bypass the often all-containing decisions of the Indian nation state where pornography, and its production, consumption or possession, is a crime. It also hints at the shifting paradigms of authority and power—as bodies more powerful and pervasive than the geographically restricted nation state emerge—and become the new policing and governing bodies in a world defined, understood and consumed through the deployment of cyberspatial technologies.

NOTES

- 1 The story of Coke in India is fascinating. Coca-cola, the world's largest cola drink, was available in India till the 1960s and was emblematic of a certain Western modernity and urbanism in Indian cinema and art. However, following the closed market policy, Coca-cola disappeared from the Indian markets, only to make a reappearance after almost thirty years when the Indian economy adopted the free market structure. Coke once again became the brand that skipped a generation to arrive as the new sign of modernity and progress. The reappearance of Coke in the Indian markets was a sign of a new way of living and critiques of the State's economic policies and globalisation have often revolved around this particular phenomenon.
- 2 Michel Foucault in his *The Order of Things* talks about a paradigm shift visible in the domains of life, labour and language. Globalisation has changed the way we live, we work, we think of property and we create narratives of our self. It is one of the most visible paradigm shifts in the last century.
- 3 In many Indian states, the cybercafés still demand a photo identity proof of age before allowing the users to access the net. In a recent discussion in the Indian parliament about the access to pornography in public spaces, the concerned minister declared that they are encouraging cybercafés to do away with private cubicles and display panels, thus not giving privacy to the users.
- 4 In the recent spate of MMS scandals that have been doing the run of cellphone users in India, the case of the DPS MMS is particularly interesting. The infamous DPS MMS is a short video clip shot by a male student at the Delhi Public School, New Delhi, engaging in sexual acts with a fellow female student. The clip spread like a contagion among the cellphone users around the nation and hit headlines. The court's decision over the case rules that anybody found in possession of this or similar clips on their cellphones or personal computers can face up to six months of imprisonment and/or a fine of ten thousand rupees. Here again is an example of the law's inability to understand a cultural form so that the producers of the material run free, but the consumer of the material is found guilty. This is a definite example of disavowal on the part of the state, where instead of policing technology, it polices the consumption of technological forms.
- 5 P2P or Peer-to-Peer networking has been one of the most used ways of sharing sexual content on the Internet. Instead of uploading material on a home page on some server, the P2P allows the users to share files and folders unsupervised on the hard drive of their computers and transfer them across Internet connections. P2P was also the biggest forerunner in encouraging piracy of media on the Internet.
- 6 Internet Relay Chat (IRC) has been one of the most prolific Internet activities and has come to stand in for the popular Internet idea of 'forever connected.' Elizabeth Reid's account of IRC in her Master's thesis has been one of the more influential texts on the experiences and economy of IRC.
- 7 One of the biggest excitement in the gaming world currently is about massive multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) which allow the users to work in an

- evolving virtual world at the same time over the Internet. More information about the MMORPG is available at <http://archive.gamespy.com/amdmmog/week1/>.
- 8 Multiple User Dungeons or Multiple User Domains are text-based virtual reality platforms where players interact through massive role-playing and characterisation, investing a lot of time and text in creating the contexts and environments for their interactions. One of the most celebrated MUDs, Lambdamoo, has been made popular by Julian Dibbell's essay "How a rape happened in cyberspace." More information on Lambdamoo is available at <http://www.lambdamoo.info>.
 - 9 Very few studies of pornography on the Internet have actually focused on the physical moorings of cyberspace. Jane Gaines is a rarity who, in her productive article "Machines that Make the Body Do Things," looks upon the arrival of electric vibrators (more popularly known on the net as dildos) as an indicator of the relocation of the female clitoris and its gratification; something that heterosexual porn had blind-sighted in order to focus on the 'pay off moment' — the sperm of the male orgasm spattered all over the body of the female performer. This was perhaps one of the first indicators of how netporn is not located in the material available on the net, but in the way the users deploy the technology in their interactions with each other. These interactions are threefold: human to human, human to machine, and machine to human.
 - 10 In his study of the infant Jesus iconography *Childhood*, Chris Jenks explores the objectification of the child for a particular gaze; religious, in this instance, as the beginnings of child pornography and the constitution of the child as an object of pornographic interest. Jenks tries to make a claim that pornography is not constituted within the content but in the framing of the subject. With film studies and especially 'porn studies,' this is an argument that has often been made. Ashish Rajadhyaksha, in his forthcoming book, talks of Realism in Indian cinema as pornographic in nature and looks at the world-renowned films of Satyajit Ray and Dada Saheb Phalke to make a case for cinematic pornography.
 - 11 It is hardly surprising that the only pornography that is objectionable in the USA — child pornography — is presented as the reason for MSN and Yahoo's discontinuation of their chat rooms.
 - 12 Take for instance, the blog of a 'desperate housewife' at <http://tademy.blogspot.com/> where the blogger writes about the most intimate parts of her life in a very graphic nature, often bordering on the pornographic.
 - 13 <http://www.livejournal.com> is now one of the biggest free blogging services available based on open source software. One of the biggest advantages of using Livejournal for a sample is the unique community features that Livejournal offers by which people of different tastes, preferences and geographical locations can come together to network and interact.
 - 14 Anna Nataro, in her forthcoming book provisionally titled *Introduction to the Blogosphere*, makes a strong argument for blogging as a Habermasian public sphere. However, such an argument is valid only for blogs that are obviously con-

- structed for a notion of public participation. It would be misleading to say that blogs are primarily public in the Habermasian sense of the word.
- 15 This setting of the Hypervisual against the Realist is an interesting juxtaposition. It allows us to look at Hypervisualisation as the overthrow of the cinematic ethos of Realism and the introduction of a new way of looking at the world around us.
 - 16 Linda Williams, in her work *Hard Core*, provides an illuminating account of how the pathologisation and clinical framework of approaching pornography is actually a way of controlling and shaping female desire and sexuality. Williams is bent on talking of pornography as that which renders the invisible visible, thus relocating the invisible in the domain of consumables and approachable. Though Williams doesn't use the term Hypervisualisation, it is on this simple understanding of 'make it visible' that she bases her argument.
 - 17 Within blogging, especially within the blogosphere of Livejournal, Hypervisualisation can be observed and studied in the interactive memetic behaviour across the blogs and user groups. Memes, generally identified as a bundle of data that gets transferred from one agent on to another, come in many forms and a liberal definition of memes would identify computer viruses, computer generated quizzes and results, chain letters and emails as memetic behaviour. My focus is more on memes with two active agents participating in the transfer. Also, Livejournal, because of its interactive space encourages memetic behaviour and thus offers a strong connection between narrativisation and memeisation.
 - 18 A power blogger for more than six years now, Min Jung (MJ) at www.Minjungkim.com gives a hilarious, although a little stereotypical idea of a blogger's life cycle on his personal blog. However, my model moves away from his a little and is more typical of a user on ElJay.
 - 19 In an extremely provocative article: "Bloggers need not apply," available at www.chronicle.com, Ivan Terrible unwittingly notices the same trope of hypervisualising the self that is visible amongst the bloggers. In fact, Ivan goes ahead to warn prospective and current bloggers to make the same mistake of revealing too much about themselves. Ivan's warnings have a 'practical' tone to them, but he too recognises the discomfort that comes from activities like blogging or other interactive cyberspaces.
 - 20 Paul Willemen, in his aspirations for a Pornoscape, draws a close link between the knowledge and the experience of sexuality. Drawing from the parable of the Original Sin and tracing it to the claims of authenticity that are produced through experience of sexuality, Willemen brings to the fore the power equations that revolve around the construction of sexuality and the pathologisation of it through an uninformed critique of pornography. The blogger, in the blorgasmic moment bridges the gap between experience and knowledge. The first cycle of blogging is experiential, and the knowledge of that experience feeds the second part of the cycle.
 - 21 "Whoever publishes or transmits or causes to be published in the electronic form any material which is lascivious or appeals to the prurient interest or if its effect is such as to tend of deprave or corrupt persons who are likely, having regard to all

relevant circumstances, to read, see or hear the matter contained or embodied in it, shall be punished on first conviction with imprisonment of either description or a term which may extend to five years and with fine which may extend to one lakh rupees and in the event of a second or a subsequent conviction with imprisonment of either description of a term which may extend to 10 years and also with fine which may extend to 2 lakh rupees. “ – Section 67 of the IT Act (New Delhi, 2000).

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SEX ON THE OPEN MARKET:
SEX WORKERS HARNESS
THE POWER OF THE INTERNET

Audacia Ray

Sex work may be the world's oldest profession, but the word "profession" until recently, has been only vaguely applicable to this line of work. It's perhaps more accurate (though less snappy) to say that sex workers¹ are the world's oldest unregulated working population. But for a profession that can stake such a historical claim, the industry is extremely adaptable — and workers have been quick to pursue opportunities provided by the Internet as they arose and continue to change, including but not limited to online porn. Though the porn performers I wrote about in the last chapter, as well as the cam girls in the first chapter, certainly qualify as sex workers, the Internet provides women whose sex work is conducted in person, especially escorts, with new opportunities for advertising, screening clients, and building community with one another.

Because of the shame of societal disapproval and the logistics around the legal repercussions inherent in this line of work, advertising, safety, and access to community are immense challenges to people who work in the sex industry. Over the last dozen or so years, the Internet has allowed for a massive shift as far as access goes, and the sex industry has therefore become more accessible to would-be workers and clients. The sex industry has also simultaneously become more private and more exposed, more professional and more of an identifiable culture. The culture of shame around the industry is very much alive in some respects; however, for many women, shame is being chased out as more and more current and former sex workers out themselves in the media beyond the Internet.

The most obvious example of this outing is in the ways porn stars are obsessed over by mainstream media. Sex worker chic is spreading like wildfire. In certain ways, this is nothing new: *Xaviera Hollander*, internationally known as "the happy hooker" after her

1972 book by the same name, became a celebrity and symbol of free love in the 1970s. Since then, porn stars, strippers, and high-class call girls have leapt into the mainstream spotlight through sex scandals and tell-all memoirs. For the sex workers themselves, this popularity is not dissimilar to the shiny red apple with a razor lodged inside: As trendy and appealing as sex work can seem to be, the profession is still rife with stigma and many inherent risks. The possibilities of the Internet for sex workers lead to a kind of choose-your-own-adventure negotiation with notoriety and secrecy, where a sex worker can easily become something of a celebrity both within her own community and outside of it if she puts in the effort. Though there are many different kinds of sex workers who use the Internet, including escorts, fetish workers, dommes, and strippers who use online forums for support, the bulk of this chapter focuses on middle-class escorts, the most rapidly growing and visible part of the industry mainly because of the ways the Internet has changed that particular aspect of sex work.

PRINT IS DEAD

When I was doing public relations for a porn company, people were always surprised that such a job existed. Sure, sex sells other stuff, but, they wondered, doesn't sex just sell itself? The truth is that a lot of deep marketing-thought goes into the sex industry, whether the entity being sold is an independent escort's companionship or couples' porn. However, it's true that marketing becomes tricky when there's no physical product, or when the service that's being provided isn't necessarily legal. Mainstream ad agencies deal with versions of this problem all the time as they market brands and lifestyles, but sex workers tangle with it in a different way, because the thing on the market block is them. Advertising has always been the simplest for street workers, because what you see is what you get—with maybe a few minor and inevitable variations. However, for women who work in dungeons, brothels, and private apartments, or outcalls to hotels, advertising is a very precise art form requiring that they reach a perfect balance between adequately representing themselves so that the client is not disappointed and construing themselves in a way that attracts the kinds of clients they want to see.

For women who work independently, the Internet has opened up a vast new world of opportunity in which different marketing styles can be tried out cheaply and easily—and changed immediately if they fail. It's hardly an overstatement to say that the Internet has transformed the sex industry: the ways businesses are run, the stigmas attached to being on either side of the transaction, the visibility of the industry, and the information available about sex workers who market their services. Many sex workers who worked in the industry before the Internet jumped right on board with Internet advertising as soon as they got a glimmer of the opportunities the web offered.

THE OLD GUARD GOES HIGH TECH

The Internet has also inspired a new generation of sex workers to find their places in the industry and develop opportunities that may not have presented themselves without the Internet. In 1989, Verónica Monet started working as an escort in Berkeley, California.

She advertised in the *Spectator*, a major weekly adult tabloid at that time. The paper was essentially a vehicle for sex workers' ads, which were its major source of capital. Each ad, which typically took up a sixteenth of a page, consisted of a few lines of text, a sort of abstract photo that didn't show the woman's face, and a phone number. For Monet and other independent sex workers of her era, small ads in the *Spectator* and the information provided, Monet received many more phone calls than she did clients. Oftentimes the potential client would reveal what kind of woman he was looking for and it wouldn't be a fit. Agencies weren't always helpful, and they were renowned for the "bait and switch," in which a photograph or description of one woman is provided and then someone not matching that description at all appears for the job. Certainly the thrill of the unknown was part of the appeal for some clients, though for others the roadblocks to getting exactly what they wanted were numerous.

Monet used the *Spectator* exclusively for the first two years of her career, until a technologically savvy client of hers gave her the heads-up about Bulletin Board Systems (BBSes), an early, nonpublic form of the Internet. After discovering the BBS, Monet continued to use print ads, but she began to give potential clients a password so they could log on to her little corner of the system. The men were able to check out pictures that gave them a much better sense of her than the newspaper ads. Monet made the bold choice to show her face in the photographs she posted online, something almost unheard of at the time. By 1992, Monet was fully exploring the options that the burgeoning Internet technology had to offer.

Likewise, Catherine La Croix, a sex worker who had started in the business as a BDSM phone sex operator in the 1980s, got her start on the BBS in the mid-1990s. She and a business partner (also a sex worker) built the first major woman-owned BBS, Two Babes Online, in 1995. They hosted sixty-four incoming lines and held forums on which people were able to discuss sex. Two Babes Online quickly became a go-to place for people of all stripes to explore their sexuality. But this site became more than just its message boards; it was an early incarnation of a porn site. The images made available on the BBS were posted in many different formats, which meant that a porn consumer had to make some effort to get to know the technology of the system so he or she could sample the wares in order to get the instant gratification that these sites had the potential to provide. Slow-paced and roundabout not-so-instant gratification aside, the BBS proved to La Croix and her partner that there was money to be made from sex on the Internet.

After experiencing the sharp rise in popularity of Two Babes Online, La Croix began to explore the options for advertising offline services on the Internet. She had since become an escort, and decided that the Internet seemed like a good way to pursue clients. Located in Seattle, she was in close proximity to Microsoft. Her foresight that, in her words, "Geeks need sex, too, or even more so" led to a thriving business. Like Veronica Monet, she made the choice to show her face in the photographs she posted on her first website. Though she hadn't shown her face in print advertisements before that point, La Croix had done an appearance on The Oprah Winfrey Show, so she wasn't afraid of the level of exposure that might result from her postings. She saw showing her face as an

important tool in reaching the kinds of clients she wanted to see. Today, face shots are commonplace among sex workers who advertise online. La Croix notes that the Internet fools people — both sex workers and clients alike — into thinking they're anonymous. In fact, she says, it's quite the opposite. It's possible for anyone posting photos online to be recognized out in public, especially when posting face shots, or pictures with other identifying details, and the IP (Internet Protocol) address one posts from is recorded on each website a person visits and viewable if the website's owner keeps track of visitor statistics. So with a little bit of know-how, anyone's Internet use can be traced.

For both Monet and La Croix, the Internet opened up a new, untapped market of tech-immersed, middle- to upper- class men who were spending tons of time in front of their computers and who were looking for ways to interact with women in a structured and limited way because they claimed to have no time for a full-blown relationship. These men began to form the backbone of the online advertisement-driven sex industry. They had money and time to burn on the Internet, which made them ideal guinea pigs for searching and contacting sex workers online. Sex online — something that was previously only accessible and appealing to people who understood the inner technical workings of the Internet — has exploded since the early 1990s, and the Internet has become more widely available and user-friendly.

New York-based dominatrix Jo had been a sex worker before she moved to New York in 1997 but hadn't capitalized on the Internet until she started using the message boards at fetish and BDSM website Max Fisch Domina Guide. Jo launched her website in 1999, a bit later than Monet and La Croix. She doesn't think that the clients she has obtained through the Internet are any different than the clients she got through other forms of advertising. This difference of opinion probably stems from a range of factors pertaining to the different experiences of someone coming to the industry a bit later in the game. When Monet and La Croix first began to experiment with the BBS and online advertising in the early 1990s, Internet access was not as widespread as it would be just a few years later. At that time, the notion of meeting people online was seen as dangerous and sketchy, even though most users were likely to be introverted computer programmers who are more harmless than the average Internet user today. By the late 1990s, America On Line had begun to dominate the Internet and promote a more user-friendly platform, which acted as an invitation for average Americans to get online in droves.

Just as trends in clientele have changed over the years, there have been changes in trends for workers themselves. The change witnessed in the industry was perhaps most jarring for women like Denzi, who became a sex worker in the late 1970s, got out of the industry, and then returned to escorting in the early 2000s and started to use the Internet to advertise. Whereas Monet, La Croix, and Jo all made relatively smooth transitions from print to online advertising, Denzi had a steep learning curve to deal with after having been away from the industry for so many years. More than two decades ago, Denzi started working at a massage parlor in Tucson, Arizona, at the age of nineteen, staying there until she met a pimp who took her to Phoenix and later to Los Angeles, where she became a streetwalker. After a few years, she escaped her pimp and made her way back to Arizona

to finish school. “After getting married, divorced, having kids, and a long career in the paralegal field, I decided to return to prostitution via online escorting,” she says. Now forty-eight, Denzi has remade her sex worker persona without a trace of the street worker aesthetic, and notes, “I think I would have definitely started back in sex work without the Internet, but my experience would be far less prosperous without it, I imagine.” Denzi, whose tagline on her website, Denzi4u, is “Beyond the Ordinary Erotic Encounter,” positions herself as an elite companion with session options that include a sensual Japanese tea ceremony. Like many women who have their own sites, Denzi appeals to a middle-class clientele of gentleman who want to be pampered.

CLASS AND A NEW GENERATION OF WORKERS

One of the most powerful changes the Internet has brought to the sex industry is that it’s created a vast and visible middle class of sex workers who cater to middle-class men. Prior to the advent of the Internet, the media tended to portray an extreme when it came to sex workers: The women tended to be either high-class escorts who made upward of \$20,000 for a weekend excursion to an exotic locale with a high-status businessman, or downtrodden, drug-addicted streetwalkers who were usually women of color. The number of sex workers who fell somewhere in between those two extremes is difficult to quantify, but there’s no question that the widespread infiltration of the Internet into the majority of people’s homes has resulted in an increase in the number of women who make up that middle ground. It’s populated by women who may be full-time, long-term sex workers, as well as others, such as college students who are temporarily doing sex work or women who do sex work casually to supplement the income they make from full-time jobs in other fields. The scope of the Internet does seem vast, but the majority of the world’s sex workers do not use the Internet to do their work.

Documented in blogs and on message boards, middle-class sex workers tell their stories directly and indirectly, detailing lives of middle-class comfort that include homes, families, and friends—just like people in any other line of work. Online advertising venues, message boards, and communities have, in many respects, standardized the industry and brought it to a newly professional level. Without too much effort, a potential client or sex worker can find out what the going rate is for an hour-long session in his or her region; sex workers who charge much higher or lower tend to be criticized by others in the area. Likewise, there are standards for behavior and modes of dress for both online and offline experiences that are increasingly being enforced on message boards and through review sites.

The Internet makes dabbling in the sex industry as an independent worker much easier in most respects, but it’s debatable whether the Internet has brought more women into the industry than would otherwise be in it. The Internet makes it possible for the curious woman to explore her working options without having to make the scary phone call to an agency, or go to an interview at a brothel, and she doesn’t need to have any direct connection to the industry to try it on for size. Because it is a high-stress, stigmatized, and sometimes illegal business, the turnover among sex workers is immense. Most

women don't stay in the industry for more than a year or so at a time. Though they may drift in and out of the industry over the years, it's unusual to find a sex worker who is devoted to sex work as a career.

Catherine La Croix comments, "The web has unfortunately made more women think they can do this because they think it's easy . . . A lot of women don't contemplate the ramifications of this job because of the Internet. What lots of them don't understand is that this is a business, first and foremost." Though sex workers' websites are of course meant to attract clients, they can also have the effect of seducing wannabe workers into the industry under the pretense that the work is sexy, fun, and easy. Speaking about the deceptions offered up by Internet advertising to young dommes, Jo says, "It's easy for them to get the wrong impression because of the way websites are put together. Many women have lists on their sites of things that they will not do because of legal restrictions, but the reality is that everyone in the business does these things once they get to know a client a bit better."

Although interest in sex work has certainly increased since the advent of the Internet, and women who may not have wanted or been able to work independently without an agency or pimp can do so now, the work itself remains the thing that ultimately discourages women from getting into the industry. The Internet has, in Veronica Monet's words, created a class of sex workers with a "pseudoc celebrity status," but it has not changed the essential nature of what sex workers do—exchange erotic labor for a living. La Croix is direct: "To put it bluntly, you need much more than tits and ass; it's whether or not you have the mind for it. You have to know who you are, and the way that you see yourself is all-important," she says.

Recognizing the difficulties of sex work is often challenging when women are faced with the ease of technology and increasing availability of both online and offline guides to the ins and outs of the sex industry, as well as intricate support and networking systems. For young women flirting with the idea of entering the industry, the options are both daunting and comforting, as there is no longer the need to do sex work in a void, without the support and understanding or at least email correspondence of fellow workers. Whether a woman ultimately chooses to get into the industry or not, there are many resources available to her online, not the least of which are advertisements posted by other sex workers. Over the last few years, online advertising for sex workers has become a serious business with seemingly limitless options.

PITCHING THE PERSONA

There is a massive number of websites that assist sex workers in advertising to their potential clients. Two of the biggest national sites are Craigslist, which is free for sex workers to post and clients to browse, and Eros Guide, which has a monthly fee for sex workers to place ads and is free for clients to browse. There are many other sites that cater to particular tastes or are similar to these sites with minor variations in design and searchability. While sex workers and clients tend to have their preferred sites, they often use several different ones at the same time, though how widely they cast their net often

depends on the associated costs for membership; some sites charge sex workers to post ads, while others charge clients to search them. Craigslist and Eros Guide have each been online for more than a decade, so their national standing is well established. Newer sites that host nationwide ads quickly learn that it is more profitable to cater to select cities and have many ads for one city rather than few ads for each of many cities.

Craigslist's Erotic Services is one of the many pages on the free, public, reader-moderated board, which, like all Craigslist pages, is organized by city. Posters can create text posts of any length, and as of a few years ago, they can also add pictures. Craigslist is a bit of a clusterfuck, though it's searchable by whatever keyword you can dream up. The posts go up on a first-come, first-served basis, and they cycle off the front page of the forum as new ads are posted. The front page features the one hundred most recent posts, which in major cities like New York and San Francisco cycle off at an alarming rate—as quickly as a half an hour after posting. Craigslist's Erotic Services postings are highly sensitive to things like weather, holidays, and time of day, with big spurts of postings near lunchtime and toward the end of the workday. Some of the more amusing posts go up late at night to appeal to high and horny guys trolling the Internet and making less-than-stellar choices about where and how to spend their money (well, maybe stellar for the girls they give their money to). Though the search feature helps make things more exact, Erotic Services doesn't have categories; posters include keywords that they know people will search for, including online escort slang so that they can attract the kind of clients they are most interested in.

Because of the fact that the Erotic Services forum is free to use and doesn't require any kind of registration to post or send messages, as well as the fact that it's attached to a larger website that doesn't have erotic implications (unless you think finding an apartment or trading your bicycle for a TV is sexy), it tends to attract a high number of men who have never hired a sex worker before and have no idea how to go about it, as well as men who are looking for a cheap, fast fuck, and men who don't understand why they have to pay for sexual services. Craigslist is considered by many sex workers to be the bottom of the barrel because of the type of clientele it attracts, but many workers who use other advertising venues as their primary means of getting new clients still occasionally advertise on Craigslist if they have a gap in their schedule to fill.

Craigslist is also popular among women who don't do sex work as their primary source of income and who don't want to spend the money on a monthly ad that will attract more clients than they are willing or able to see. They use Craigslist to post an ad and book a session as their time allows and when their income could use the padding. Chariz, a lesbian in her midtwenties who spent some time making money by wrestling men she connected with on Craigslist in Portland, Oregon, stumbled across the world of erotic wrestling by way of Google. Her work in freelance construction sent her onto the job boards on Craigslist, and after she pursued wrestling as a casual erotic interest, a friend convinced her to try moving her wrestling ad from the Casual Encounters section to Erotic Services. About her choice to do this work, Chariz says, "I probably wouldn't have started wrestling men for money without Craigslist. It was part necessity, but not com-

pletely. I've always been able to get other jobs, so if it hadn't been as convenient, I don't think I would have put the time into getting clients." Although Chariz developed a few regular clients who she wrestled once or twice a month, wrestling wasn't her main source of income, and her use of Craigslist to get clients remained fairly casual and dependent on her schedule, as well as her financial needs while she was a college student.

Workers like Chariz are the coveted "non-pro" workers. They're typically young, college-age women (or women who pose as such) who claim to love sex or whatever fetish they're catering to. They often post ads that say something to the effect of "I'm doing this for the extra pocket money," to buy books for school or new clothes or other nonessential items. Full-time professionals are often criticized on Craigslist, despite the fact that, technically, a person who accepts money for sexual favors is a pro. The assumed value of a nonpro is that she's not doing the work primarily for the money, but rather because it's fun and the money is a delightful side benefit. On Craigslist, the message boards and the advertising boards are one and the same, so clients and workers alike declare their disappointment with one another right alongside the ads highlighting the very services the men are seeking out. Whenever clients describe a woman on the board as a pro, they're almost always saying so with a sense of disappointment, because they seem to be perpetually in search of slutty college students who may ultimately agree to a no-strings-attached, no-fees-involved kind of arrangement.

Professionals, however they position themselves, are the name of the game on Eros Guide, which has online advertising branches in more than thirty US cities, as well several in Canada and the United Kingdom. Lily, a thirty-two-year-old from Manhattan, started stripping at twenty-two and later became an escort, placing an ad on Eros Guide in 2001 that was the mainstay of her marketing strategy. Even though escorting was her main form of income, Lily found it worthwhile to advertise herself as a non-pro college student, which was a marketing angle that resulted in her never having to launch a website of her own. She thought a website would make her appear to be the professional she actually was, and that it would destroy her carefully constructed college-girl image. An added bonus was that she could avoid the costs and headache associated with creating and maintaining a website. Lily found that the wording of her ad, as well as the photographs she used, made a big difference in terms of the types of clients she could get: Photos shot from a low angle attracted submissive men, while photos featuring her in conservative outfits baring little skin attracted vanilla clients who were easy to get along with.

Advertisements on Eros Guide are broken down by type of session: escorts, massage, dancers, BDSM/fetish, tv/ts/shemale, men, and tantra; they also have searchable subcategories for hair color, Asian, ebony, Latina, porn stars, boob size, incall/outcall. Though the ad offerings are standard city to city—two hundred words, a phone number, a weblink, and three photographs (all of which are updatable at no extra cost whenever a worker supplies new content)—the ad rates vary by city depending on what the market will bear: In Denver an ad costs \$60 a month, while in New York it costs \$175.

Eros Guide ads target a middle-class market of men who have Internet access and money to burn. They're for men who prefer an online shopping experience of casual

browsing and research before they make a decision. The interconnected networks of Eros Guides in each city make the website ideal for traveling businessmen, because even though the sex workers are different in each city, the website navigation is the same, which lends a sense of familiarity and security to the process. Likewise, some sex workers choose to go on tour and use the Eros Guide network, and the website is set up to put notices up on the profiles of sex workers who are in town on tour for a short amount of time.

Though agencies that employ sex workers use advertising on Eros Guide and other sites, it's usually easy to tell the difference between agencies and independent workers. The easy browsing feature on the site makes searching for independents a more rewarding prospect than it could be if independent workers' sites were not linked in a common space. Lily worked for escort agencies before trying her hand at independent work, which she only did because the agencies she'd worked for were busted. She says, "I'm not sure if I would have gone independent without the Internet, because I just wasn't aware that that was a possibility." Initially, she says, "It was scary to be responsible for doing everything on my own." After learning the ropes of advertising and screening clients, and starting to make connections with other sex workers, Lily began to love working on her own because she was able to control so many different factors—from her image to her schedule to her rates and the degree of interaction she had with clients before deciding whether to see them.

In the trade up from Craigslist to Eros Guide, sex workers gain and lose power and freedoms. On Craigslist, restrictions are put on postings by other members of the community, who can flag noncompliant postings for removal, and occasionally by the Craigslist staff, who may remove postings that blatantly disregard the rules that bar explicit exchange of sex for money. However, the actual structure of the advertisements is totally open to the poster's discretion and can be as brief and vague or as long and detailed (though not sexually explicit) as possible. Ads on Eros Guide look much more put together and typically feature professional photography instead of photos taken with a webcam or a consumer-grade digital camera. Eros Guide ads are also scoured by their staff for any hint of sexual activity; in fact, the word "sex" is not allowed at all. Additionally, the limit on word count puts restrictions on what a sex worker can say about herself, which is similar to the limitations in print ads. However, the advertisements do have the escape valve of a link to the worker's website, where she can say whatever she wants—within the limits of what's acceptable regarding the legal restrictions around the business of sex work. Both websites allow and even encourage a sex worker to operate her own business, whether or not she has her own website.

Both Craigslist and Eros Guide, albeit in different ways, exist as cultures beyond just the listings for sex workers, which makes them not so different from print publications. Their content may be about sex, but it's not always pure advertising. In this respect, sex-worker-advertising sites are increasingly becoming online communities where people hang out to discuss different issues centered on sexuality, but the discussions also deviate from this topic. These advertising/community sites have increasingly begun to look

more and more like dating sites, with their articles about sex and off-topic discussions. This design and functionality crossover is an important one — it lessens the stigma of sex work and hiring of sex workers by making it appear more like dating — just with required “generosity” on the men’s behalf.

DISH AND BITCH: THE MESSAGE BOARDS

If the community and webzine aspect of advertising sites is a bit confusing and nudges the sex industry away from pure commerce and into something else, the world of message boards geared at sex workers and their clients (or providers and hobbyists, as they are called on the boards) is infinitely more complex. Since the late 1990s, message boards have emerged as the more highly interactive counterpart to advertising sites. People who use the boards tend to also use advertising sites, though the reverse isn’t always true. Clients who use message boards on a regular basis tend to be very engaged with the culture, referring to themselves as “hobbyists,” and referring to the act of hiring sex workers as “the hobby” and the sex workers themselves as the “providers.” The slang that sometimes appears on sites like Craigslist and Eros Guide runs rampant on message boards, to the point that some of the postings are difficult to decipher for readers outside the culture.

The key component of message boards like UtopiaGuide, Big Doggie, The Erotic Review (TER), and Max Fisch are the reviews, submitted by men who have had sessions with sex workers and want to report on them, ostensibly to give other hobbyists the inside scoop so they can make informed decisions about which women they want to see. Though it varies, the boards tend to be password protected. Some, like Max Fisch, are free to read and post on but require registration with a valid email address, while others, like Big Doggie, can be perused in an abbreviated version for free, but require a paid membership on the part of both providers and hobbyists in order to see full reviews or to participate in board discussions. The boards create a space for providers and hobbyists to interact socially outside of private sessions. Explicit advertising is outright banned on most boards, though providers are permitted to post notices about their whereabouts and available days and times. Eve Ryder, a now-retired New York–based escort who primarily used UtopiaGuide, says, “Many of the threads are about guys reviewing girls and swapping tips and such, but interesting stuff is always appearing. I’ve seen threads there where guys and girls openly debate how tips should work, for example. I’ve watched girls attack johns who behave badly toward women — openly and with other girls and johns backing them up! Imagine that ever happening before the days of boards.” In addition to the spaces where providers and hobbyists can talk to one another, most boards also have sections of the sites that are available only to providers or only to hobbyists.

For the providers, the boards are a mixed blessing. Jo, the dominatrix from New York, spent some time as a moderator on the fetish and BDSM message boards for Max Fisch, but she quickly tired of the drama and downright nastiness. She found many of the men to be pushy and annoying: “They were always expressing their preferences, which is generally okay, but they were being very judgmental and had screwed-up ideas about

what it means to be a true domina.” Because of the flame wars and general sniping on the site, Max Fisch shut down its community boards and DomBoards and replaced them with The Hang, a more heavily moderated and community-oriented board. Though The Hang is more regulated than earlier incarnations of the boards, it would be naive to expect that people will ever be completely polite on online message boards, especially when dealing with matters like sexual preferences and fetishes, which have the tendency to offend even (or perhaps especially) people who spend a lot of time in a sexualized environment and know what they do and do not like.

The review function of the message boards is the most controversial part of these types of sites. In order to make the reviews a good and sexy read, hobbyists often embellish the truth, which would not be such a bad thing if the changes were only in florid language, but some hobbyists report on sex acts that providers are not actually willing to perform in their sessions, setting a troubling precedent for women and future clients. Some boards bestow special privileges and discounts on hobbyists who have written a certain number of reviews, which results in the writing of bogus reviews of providers hobbyists haven’t actually seen as they scramble to boost their numbers closer to whatever quota they are trying to reach. A provider’s reviews can certainly affect her business, as many serious hobbyists strictly pay attention to the boards and what their fellow men have to say about the providers.

Eve, an active participant and often agitator on UtopiaGuide, says, “I once posted a review of a client I had after he posted a ridiculous review about me claiming to have done all kinds of acrobatic stuff. I posted what really happened, because I just didn’t care. You know: ‘He was never really hard, and he has a bad back, so I had to be on top for the thirty seconds it took him to come....’” Some of Eve’s experiences on the boards were frustrating, to say the least, but overall the boards had a positive impact on her business. During her career, Eve never paid for advertising, but her active participation on the boards—especially when she was argumentative—drummed up plenty of business.

Though Lily recognizes the value of good reviews, she was extremely wary of the review boards and how they affected client expectations, as well as her privacy and reputation. She made her clients aware of her rules: “They weren’t allowed to post on TER if they wanted to see me again—that site just has a terrible reputation. I allowed them to post on Big Doggie, but without writing about sex even with the lingo, and it did help my business.”

THE FALSE VEIL OF SECRECY

Beyond the day-to-day mini-crises and controversies on the boards, several larger scandals have erupted and brimmed over beyond the reaches of the message board communities in recent years. In the late 1990s, message boards, reviews, and online sex worker advertising in general were a free-for-all. At that time, clients and workers felt that their anonymity was protected on sites like Big Doggie and The Erotic Review, and that they weren’t being watched or recorded by law enforcement, or that even if they were, they were safe because they’d developed an intricate-enough slang and a clever-enough dis-

claimer (which still appears on many websites and which is intended to provide protection from the law):

Money exchanged is intended for companionship only and modeling services. Anything else that may or may not occur is a matter of personal choice between two consenting adults of legal age and is not contracted for, nor is it requested to be contracted for in any manner. This is not an offer of prostitution.

On the boards, which participants view as private, membership-based spaces that are not open-to-the-public forums, explicit sexual acts were often described and dollar amounts provided. As it turns out, law enforcement did start to take an interest in online action. A Florida State attorney launched a two-year investigation of Big Doggie in 2000. The operation, stealthily called “Operation Flea Collar,” targeted hobbyists by creating profiles on the site for fake providers. The vice squad went so far as to buy stock images of a lingerie-clad woman around whom they built a website that was a convincing facsimile of a real escort’s site — eventually, that is, as it took a little trial and error for them to get clients interested in their provider. When the vice squad felt it had gathered sufficient evidence to definitively accuse Big Doggie of being a conduit for illegal activities, they pounced on the co-owners of the site, Charles Kelly and Steve Lipson, who were charged, along with eleven other men, with more than fifty felony racketeering, procurement, and obstruction charges in July 2002. In December 2002, a judge dismissed charges, ultimately deciding that the message boards were a protected form of free speech.

A big part of the message board scare was linked to the inherent sexism of the legal system when it comes to prostitution: Female workers are the ones most often arrested and made an example of, while the men who purchase their services or facilitate the business stroll away without incident. In this instance, however, the men were being targeted in what is sometimes called a reverse sting. It’s interesting to note that “reverse sting” acknowledges the fact that the women are the real targets when it comes to law enforcement around prostitution. It also begs the question: Would there have been such calamity over the message boards in the summer of 2002 if the providers been the targets rather than the clients? Probably not.

Though today Big Doggie is once again the powerhouse it was before the bust, vice squads throughout the country have started to employ online advertising and communities to make arrests. But it’s sex workers rather than clients who need to be most concerned about the increasing interest of the legal community in online spaces. Since providers cycle in and out of the industry so quickly, there isn’t a strong sense of history or awareness about the types of things they should avoid when pursuing their online sex businesses. New providers often make the same mistakes that providers and hobbyists made half a decade ago: They give too much information about their precise services and what they will and will not do for their rates, while also naively assuming that they’re anonymous. Though clients often express concerns about discretion, their worries are

mostly about wives and families, while the risks that sex workers undertake are a real and present danger. This danger does not just come from outside the business, either; it often comes from within.

I'VE GOT YOUR BACK

In the sex-negative, guilt-ridden, judgmental society we live in, the leap in people's minds from sex to danger is a short one indeed. And I'm not even talking about BDSM play, but just regular ol' fucking. Add commerce to sex and you've got a formula for all kinds of fear and guilt, not to mention tsk-tsking and "I told you so's" when a sex worker gets into an ugly situation. Double up this whore stigma with the stigma of Internet weirdos, and you've got a scornful-nearing-gleeful newspaper article waiting to be written. Though many sex workers report never having had a violent client, violence against sex workers is the number one thing that the press pays attention to. This is more often about sending the message that sex and violence go hand in hand than it is a warning that this is something awful that should be stopped.

Despite general assumptions that have led to sex work being voted the job most likely to get you chopped up and stuffed in garbage bags, the non-sex-working public is often surprised to learn that sex workers have elaborate systems for screening potential clients. Though screening and safety systems existed before the Internet—clients were sometimes approved through word of mouth from other workers and discreet but investigative phone calls to the client's place of business were made—the Internet has streamlined the process. Screening serves a dual purpose: to confirm that a potential client is pleasant to deal with and not dangerous or a rip-off artist and to prevent those who work in illegal parts of the industry from getting busted.

DIY SCREENING

Most ladies do some, if not all, of their client screening themselves. For the purposes of this book, I'm primarily concerned with middle-class sex workers who use the Internet as their primary source of obtaining clients and who work independently or in collaboration with a few other women. I am not addressing the experiences of street workers who advertise their wares by being present on a stroll known to be a place where commercial sex can be acquired, because they are beginning and ending their transactions in person rather than online. However, it's important to note that street workers, like Internet workers, often have very tight-knit systems of checking in with one another.

Independent workers who work through the Internet rely on several different forms of free screening. Before they even get to that point, they first decide what level of information they require from a potential new client before agreeing to a session with him. Levels of screening vary from worker to worker; it's a matter that can cause cattiness and judgment between fellow sex workers because oftentimes one provider may perceive another as being too lax or overly paranoid. Some sex workers simply require a few exchanges of email in which they assess the client's general behavior and determine whether he brings up anything illegal ("How much for a blow job?") in his initial correspondence. This first

level of screening, before and sometimes without the exchange of personal information, tends to be the most basic and can simply be based on a gut feeling in regard to both safety and compatibility issues. Most sex workers are not just concerned with their safety and well-being, but also with their general sanity, and the question “Is this guy going to annoy the hell out of me for the hour we’re together?” is usually a much more pressing one than “Is he going to ax murder me?”

For providers who take screening measures beyond gut feelings and correspondence with a client, a simple electronic check is the next step—and a lazy but curious girl’s best friend. Just as many women have taken to Googling a potential date’s personal information, many sex workers poke around the Internet in search of any and all information they can find about potential clients. Providers Google a client’s email addresses, phone numbers, names, businesses, and whatever other shred of personal information the men provide. For the most part, this kind of search isn’t going to yield any kind of “this man is meant to hookers” explicit warning, but it may deliver vacation photos, a flan-recipe blog, or boring PowerPoint presentations about a company’s gains and losses—all of which contribute to a better sense of who the man is in the real world. If a client is unwilling to provide his real name and the provider doesn’t insist on it, his online nickname or handle may be more than useful, because such men are likely to have set up email accounts specifically for their illicit affairs. These handles may lead the intrepid provider to client-and-provider message board discussions starring the man in question.

MESSAGE BOARDS AND BAD-DATE LISTS

Though message boards have their fair share of both comedy and tragedy as a sparring ground between providers and clients, it’s worth going into the fact that they’re a valuable resource for women who want to have contact with other providers, and also for those who want to sniff about for signs of insanity or general disrespect in a potential client. More than that, public as well as membership-based message boards serve as an interesting counterpoint to something that has grown out of the ease of information sharing online: the bad-date list. Networks of sex workers, especially call girls, have always tended to maintain their own internal blacklists with the tacit agreement that no girl in their particular circle will see such-and-such a client for whatever infraction they deem serious enough. Those internal support systems aside, the Internet has led to an increase in this type of information sharing.

Private provider-discussion Listservers, like the one run by Prostitutes of New York (PONY), require a reference before a new provider can get on the list, and they often have posts about trends in local and national law enforcement, sex worker news, and the ever-important bad-date list. Providers circulate information meant to assist and protect their fellow workers, and the information can include anything from “He smelled weird and shorted me on my rate” to “This guy was high on something, freaked out, and pinned me against a wall when our hour was up.” When possible, providers describe the clients they wish to make persona non grata in as much detail as possible, including images and driver’s licenses if they have them, as well as email and phone contacts. Once these de-

tails circulate, local sex workers band together and won't see that client, and they'll work to circulate the information to warn other colleagues. Bad-date lists generally do a great service to providers without exposing the clients to the whole world, though there are instances where other sex workers on the list may encourage a fellow provider to go to the police if she's been assaulted.

The popularity and ease of self-publishing on the Internet via blogs and websites has led to the rise of public bad-date lists and blacklists. This is due, in part, to the ease with which workers can put up and update their own sites. While sex workers are unanimous in their support of private bad-date lists, which help to keep providers safe and encourage a sense of community and concern for other workers, there is much debate over the value of public bad-date lists.

The primary argument in favor of public bad-date lists is that by posting even a little bit of a client's information, like an email handle that he may use only for communicating with sex workers, the client is being held accountable. A public bad-date list does not require any kind of registration or exchange of information to gain access. This makes the list a powerful tool for sex workers who are not connected to other workers in their area, but who have Internet access and stumble across the list. Though groups run by sex workers are usually very diligent about their members' privacy, some sex workers are hesitant to trust other sex workers. Public bad-date lists published by sex workers directly serve the workers: The lists supply the information without requiring that the sex worker provide identifying details. Lars Ollson, who runs *Don't Fuck with Us!*, a blacklist blog for sex workers around Washington, D.C., maintains that "making the list public isn't to shame the client, but to motivate him to fix the situation, and to show that we all talk to each other."² Many clients may not be aware that sex workers talk to each other. Away from the comfort of message boards, only die-hard hobbyists spend lots of time in the company of like-minded enthusiasts. (At least as far as they know.) However, intentional or not, if a client's phone number or email turns up in a Google search that leads to a blog that derides him for being mean to prostitutes he hires, that could probably be construed as shaming.

Whereas the private bad-date list only serves the purpose of warning providers about dangerous, unpleasant, or time-wasting clients, public blacklists serve two purposes: warning providers and embarrassing clients. Of course, a client gives up his right to privacy and discretion (the things that keep the sex industry moving along) the moment he robs or physically assaults a girl he has hired. And working girls often win cases against clients who assault them, despite the fact that they're sometimes in the throes of an illegal act when something like this happens. However, some of the incidents that qualify clients for public bad-date lists fall into more of a gray area. On *Don't Fuck with Us!*, the most common offense is a "no call, no show" (NCNS in the industry lingo) appointment, which is when a client establishes and confirms a date and time but then isn't heard from again—or is maybe heard from after a bit of time passes and he wants to set up another appointment. This kind of infraction, though annoying and disrespectful, comes with the territory of being a sex worker; clients will occasionally flake out due to

cold feet, discovery by wives, last-minute change of plans, or a number of other excuses that may or may not be valid. When a client violates the basic etiquette of a session in a way that shows his ignorance of the situation but not his maliciousness, having his information posted on a public bad-date list puts his infraction on the same level as those of guys who push sex workers' limits.

The NCNS client is a close cousin to the time waster. One of the curses and blessings of the availability of ads for erotic hire on the Internet is that it sets up almost infinite opportunities for window-shopping. Because of the absence of face-to-face communication, online window-shopping often extends past looking and into emailing. However, providers quickly get acquainted with the tactics of time wasters and learn to sniff them out. These are guys who ask lots of questions that are thinly veiled attempts at acquiring masturbatory material; they are vague about what they want and when and where they want it. The New York- and New Jersey-area blog Black List is composed almost entirely of lists of the emails of the time-wasting men who populate Craigslist's Erotic Services board.

Though clients, like service providers, are initially careful about concealing personal information, things like phone numbers, which most providers require before agreeing to an appointment, are easily traceable online through reverse-lookup services that give the street address of whatever phone number is plugged into the system. As a result, it's fairly easy to link blacklisted men to their real-world identities: A simple Google search turned up the real names and home addresses of several men on the Don't Fuck with Us! blog. Although men who remove condoms without telling their partner or cross physical boundaries certainly deserve to be reprimanded at the very least, clients with more-minor infractions are subject to blacklist-wielding providers' whims as well, creating a power dynamic based on shame and what could turn into blackmail.

Other than the whole personal-information-posted-online- without-consent thing, a major side effect of public bad-date lists is that men who make good dates fear that their personal information will wind up broadcast all over the Internet. After they've seen some examples of the infractions men commit to land themselves on bad-date lists, I'm sure that many potential clients shy away from making appointments. Likewise, sex workers who mock would-be clients' phone messages and emails on public forums are potentially driving away perfectly harmless clients, who cower in fear from Internet wrath and keep their wallets safely in their pockets. Some might perceive the posting of minor infractions as sex workers acting out in various ways, but the reality is that sex workers are expected to always be well behaved, while clients are not; clients are often less afraid of the consequences of misbehaving because of that old "customer is always right" mentality— not to mention their sense of male entitlement. Public blacklists are a way for sex workers to anonymously lash out at bad and irritating clients. In essence, this functions as a solid counterpart to the posting of anonymous reviews by clients who basically claim that the providers need to be well behaved or be out of business.

Public bad-date lists might have their share of problems, including the fact that they can spur a particularly litigious client into legal action. However, they do serve their pur-

pose well. The freedom to post information about bad clients allows sex workers to alert each other to clients to avoid—the next time this client’s email or phone number gets Googled as part of a screening process, it will lead to the bad-date list, which wouldn’t happen if the list were on an email list or password-protected message board. Public lists may likewise get the attention of the men who are on them and are either directed to the site—as *Don’t Fuck with Us!* asks providers to do—or find it through vanity Googling, and they will know they’re being watched and disapproved of, much in the way that providers know this through reviews clients write.

HIGH TECH VERIFICATION

Posting a client’s information online breaks with most clients’ top priority: being discreet (or that cringe-worthy common Internet misspelling, “discrete”). Though providers are at a higher risk of attracting the attention of law enforcement than their clients, whether a sex worker is discreet is one of the most common questions posed by clients when seeking out a provider. This question has two unspoken dimensions to it: The first is “Please don’t show up at my hotel looking like the hookers I see on TV;” and the other is “Please be very careful with the personal information I give you.” Just as different providers have requirements around how much information they need about a potential client before they see him, clients’ comfort levels vary from person to person. As the sex industry becomes increasingly professionalized, what information is required is becoming more standardized, which has opened up the market to businesses whose sole purpose is the sharing and protection of information.

The most widely used of these services are Room Service 2000, often referred to as RS2K, and Date-Check, which is popular among escorts and occasionally used by independently operating dominatrices. Both sex workers and their potential clients need to sign up to use the system—and clients have to pay a one-time membership fee. The client is required to submit a heap of personal information, including his full name and credit card information, as well as a home and work address, the name of the company he works for, and his position and title. This information is not passed directly on to the provider, but it must be given for membership so that a provider can rest assured that the client checked out when the website’s staff followed up on his points of contact. The purpose here for Date-Check is the approving of the client, which gives providers the security that the client they are in touch with has passed a background check. RS2K creates a buffer between the provider and her client’s personal details, which many clients like because it means that their information is not at risk in the provider’s hands and they’re reducing the risk of transmitting their personal information over the largely unsecured Internet by having to go through the process just once rather than repeatedly. Providers who list RS2K as a verification option sometimes give a discount for their sessions set up using RS2K. In addition to their role as providers of screening, both websites have also evolved into escort-advertising sites, making them sort of one-stop-shopping operations.

Though these sites certainly fill a need and step the escorting business up a notch—out of the shadow realm of strange business dealings—they also create a new kind of mid-

dleman between the worker and her client. This can be both helpful and a hindrance. Services like RS2K are a marker of the upscaling of escort businesses and a recognition by business owners that there is legal money to be made from the sex industry. This service, therefore, removes some of the power of interaction from an independent provider. While many providers may be willing, even happy, to surrender the tedious and often frustrating task of verifying a client's identity, it nudges them away from independence and one step closer to signing up with an escort agency or having their hard-earned money soaked up in payments for other "necessary" services.

Lily, whose escorting career started when she worked for a Manhattan agency, took on the responsibility of doing screening herself after going independent and prefers it that way. She says, "I didn't like the idea of putting screening into a third party's hands. I feel like I'm safer verifying a client myself." Other sex workers who use the verification services available feel that the companies offer a veneer of legitimacy. Beverly Fisher, an escort from Denver, Colorado, disagrees with the idea that a third-party service is a hindrance, and says, "I see these services as a help for providers, and they help the clients feel secure, like they don't have to give providers all this extra information."

SEX WORKER ACTIVISM

Sex workers and businesses that take measures to protect them demonstrate a commitment to making the sex industry a bit more organized, at least when it comes to the topic of safety and making a profit. However, since the late 1970s, a growing number of people involved in the sex industry have started to argue for and debate about sex workers' rights, supporting causes ranging from labor rights for legalized workers (like strippers in the United States) to decriminalization of prostitution in places where it's illegal to the more general and less quantifiable struggle against the stigmas of being a sex worker in most parts of the world. Just as the Internet has transformed advertising for sex workers, it has increased the capacity for coalition building for sex-worker-rights activists on both the local and global levels. Since the advent of the Internet and its communication tools, sex worker organizations that existed prior to the Internet have adapted to using the new technology, and projects that might not have been possible without the Internet have been launched and carried out.

Prostitutes of New York (PONY), a thirty-year-old sex worker support and activism group that distributes information to its members through a moderated email list that requires a recommendation to join, was once operated solely by sending discreet mailings about events and actions affecting sex workers. Its members maintained a phone tree to notify each other about meetings, as well as bad dates. PONY's website is a one-page informational site without any bells or whistles—or even its own domain—that's maintained its exact same look since it was launched in 1996. The page offers minimal but adequate information about the group; due to its simplicity, it seems as if PONY activities don't take place online. Though it's true that there aren't any public online forums associated with the organization, it has moved most of its written communications services online. This shift has certainly attracted new members who aren't necessarily ready to

make contact in person or by phone, or who aren't willing to provide a mailing address, but it has also contributed to the loss of members who aren't technically savvy enough to use the Internet or who don't have access due to financial constraints.

Like PONY, the Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP) was formed before the Internet became widely accessible and was transformed as the Internet made its way into the homes and workplaces of more activists. Activists Cheryl Overs and Paulo Longo hatched the idea for NSWP in 1991, and formalized it in 1992 to promote sex workers' health and human rights. By 1997, the NSWP Listserv was running strong, and its existence has facilitated international communication and collaboration. Critics of NSWP say that since going online the project has become increasingly American in terms of the voices represented. This is mostly due to the fact that 75 percent of Americans have Internet access, while in many developing countries, less than 5 percent of the population has access. This is certainly a limiting factor, but the gains and time saving that have resulted from the move online have made an immense impact within the activism community. Melissa Ditmore, who works with NSWP, says, "The Internet has brought higher levels of dialogue because the conversation is wider. Language is a huge issue—not only what languages people can use for communication (English is the online standard for international communication), but also the very words chosen. Specific issues, even things about which everyone agrees, have to be presented differently in different contexts. Stronger language is used in some places, while greater tact is required elsewhere." Through the unity the Internet brings, it also underscores international differences.

These differences—both as obstacles and unifying forces—are part of what drove Ana Lopes and her colleagues to form The International Union of Sex Workers (IUSW). The union is a part of Britain's general union, GMB, and its benefits are strongest for its members. In January 2006, for example, the union won its first-ever unfair-dismissal case for a sex worker, against Essex-based phone sex company Datapro Services Limited.³ In this case, a phone sex operator and IUSW union member named Irene Everitt, who had worked for Datapro for eight years, was fired after having been accused of gross industrial misconduct. The union sued Datapro for her job and won. Though it's not as effective in countries outside of the UK, IUSW owes its international presence to the Internet. Says cofounder Lopes, "I cannot imagine how my colleagues and I could have founded The International Union of Sex Workers without the Internet. It was and is absolutely fundamental. It was through reading other sex worker organizations' websites that we became aware that sex workers all over the world were demanding to be treated as workers. It was through email and Internet discussion lists that our positions were formed, our policies developed."

Sex workers' activists groups aren't necessarily a unified front, on the Internet or elsewhere. Unions appeal to a small subset of sex workers who do work that can be unionized, like stripping and phone sex, which are legal in most places. For workers whose jobs are illegal or who fear that unionization will take away some of the appealing pieces of the sex industry—its flexible hours and the potential to earn a lot of money in a short time—unionization is not a primary concern. On the Internet, perhaps the most powerful way that sex workers disagree with sex-worker-rights groups is by disregarding them

entirely. While the more politically active groups focus on issues like unionization and decriminalization of prostitution, many sex workers use the Internet solely to advertise and connect with other sex workers in a social and business framework that they don't see as political in any way.

Melissa Gira, a San Francisco-based activist and one-woman Internet sexuality phenomenon, is keenly aware of the role that online advertising has played in banding sex workers together in ways that may not seem overtly political to them, but become so over time. Though she began her sex work career as a dancer, Gira didn't begin to discuss the industry with other sex-workers until she began doing alt porn modeling online in 1999. At that point, she began meeting people through LiveJournal who were having similar experiences. In the fall of 2000, a LiveJournal friend of Gira's got arrested for escorting, which led to an uproar online, followed by pointed conversations among other sex workers about the wrongs of the sex industry and what they could do about these issues together.

For Gira, a major point of power was her ability to create her own media online. Whereas PONY, NSWP, and the IUSW had all hired people to make and maintain their websites, Gira struck out on her own and built her own sites for creating porn (on her now-defunct site RadicalFaeries), camming (initially on NakkidNerds and then Beautiful Toxin), and blogging (at LiveJournal and various incarnations of her own sites: Sacred Whore and Melissa Gira). For Gira, the Internet facilitated offline sessions with clients, but perhaps more importantly, it created online opportunities for doing business and collaborating with other women. Gira says, "Porn on the web was a way to get all the models talking to each other, and learning to do my own site and run my own business was political for me then." For many women, business and politics weave together in intricate ways. This is not to say that all sex workers who talk to each other online become politicized by sharing their experiences in a sort of "consciousness raising for the Internet generation" scenario. Gira, for instance, had already been working in a politicized environment before making her own website and running her own business; for other women politics don't come into play unless their business is affected. Even so, threats to sex workers' businesses and safety don't necessarily turn most workers into activists overnight (or at all): sometimes because they don't want to spend more time than absolutely necessary on their work, sometimes because they don't want to risk a greater degree of exposure, and sometimes because they just don't care and want to be left alone to do their work.

The younger generation of sex workers — which really just comprises women who are five or ten years younger than the women who started groups like PONY and NSWP — turns to the Internet rather matter-of-factly for advertising, information, and resources. Women like Gira found community on the Internet partly because they were seeking it out, but also because they were already spending social, working, and information-gathering time online. Creating a network and support community among sex workers was a natural progression for Gira and her colleagues.

In the summer of 2006, the swirl of online sex worker activism came to a head with the Desiree Alliance's four-day-long sex workers' conference in Las Vegas, Nevada. Gira

and I were both members of the conference's official media team. Gira told me that the conference was "the first sex worker conference in the United States that I know of organized by mostly Internet-based sex workers using the net to organize the conference itself." Stacey Swimme, one of the conference's organizers, echoes a point Melissa Ditmore has made: that organizing online made it possible for an entire group of people to be involved in the organizational process in a way that is actually democratic and responsibility sharing. "Because of the Internet," Swimme says, "we had more community buy-in to the conference. More women felt responsible for and connected to what was going on in the planning stages, so it made for a better and stronger conference."

The strength of gathering on the Internet was very much apparent at the conference, where many conversations among young women about day-to-day sex worker issues like advertising, photographs, and safety hovered around issues connected to the Internet. The women who came together at the conference, many meeting in person for the first time after lengthy correspondence online, were technically adept and overwhelmingly young—though young isn't necessarily a shift away from what sex workers always have been. Swimme believes that "the sex-worker-rights movement would not have moved forward without the Internet, because the Internet links independent workers who are flexible in terms of class, work, and time available to work on activism projects."

Social activism has long been the province of middle-class, college-educated white kids, and judging by the attendees at the Desiree Alliance's conference, the sex workers' rights movement isn't much different. Independence from pimps and harsh economic situations is the norm for sex worker activists—most women who are highly active in the movement don't work for agencies or other kinds of bosses, and many don't have children. Street workers are a minority in the activism scene, though the women who are street workers and involved with activism are not hesitant to make their presence known. After all, they've typically gone through a lot to be able to tell their stories. Most sex workers' rights advocates who aren't street workers are keenly aware of the class disparities within the ranks, and are concerned with diversity and representation, but are also wary of speaking for other women and their needs.

Though it's nearly impossible to characterize an average sex worker, the half-joking T-shirt that reads I SUPPORT SINGLE MOMS next to an illustration of a stripper on a pole is clearly based on the belief that many single mothers enter the sex industry because of the potential for high earnings over a short time coupled with the appeal of a flexible work schedule. It's true that there are plenty of single moms who work as sex workers, and most of their activism is limited to online work, since the need for a flexible schedule is the very thing that prevents them from uprooting and attending a sex worker conference for several days. Their activism may stay online, or their voices may not be heard at all because of the financial and time constraints of earning an income and supporting and raising children. Single moms often choose the sex industry and forego standard middle-class comforts in favor of flexible schedules and an income that isn't fixed. The class divide, especially when it comes to the Internet, is very strong, and when the jump from online to in-person interaction occurs, it becomes even more apparent.

As the Internet has increasingly brought sex workers together, they have formed communities with people in their towns as well as across the globe. They continue to maintain their separate spaces as well, and to be guarded and suspicious of each other in certain areas, which is a natural outgrowth of this line of work. Activism has been part and parcel of the online shift toward being more connected for sex workers, and though the Internet has enabled conversations to happen across the world about sex workers' issues and has allowed collaborations and comparisons of models to happen in a powerful way, sex worker activism online has not just been about chatting and emailing, but about real coalition building. So much about activism and coalition building is essentially about communication, and the ease and speed of the Internet—at least for those who have access to it—brings both communication and activism to a whole new level. In this respect, even sex workers who are not interested in joining activist networks benefit from the work and awareness of other sex workers.

NOTES

- 1 “Sex work,” is a phrase that was coined by self-proclaimed whore activist Scarlot Harlot in the late 1970s to refer to the explicit exchange of erotic labor for a mutually agreed upon amount of money, goods, or services. Though “sex work” is often considered to be a euphemism for prostitution, the sex industry encompasses many different kinds of work—stripping, naked oil wrestling, phone sex, domination, and panty hose modeling, to name a few—many of which never involve genital contact and some of which don’t involve any kind of physical contact at all. Just as there are many different kinds of sex work, workers have many names for the work they do. More politically active folks tend to refer to themselves as “sex workers,” which is linked right up with socialist, labor organizery folks (even if those same people don’t connect themselves with the struggles of said sex workers). Most women in the industry identify themselves with respect to their specific job: escort, porn performer, dancer, masseuse, dominatrix. Despite the names different types of performers and service workers prefer, I will be using the term “sex work” throughout this chapter, though when quoting workers, I have left their lingo usage intact, and I refer to the workers however they choose to refer to themselves.
- 2 Lars Ollson and Tracy Quan. “Positions: Are Public Client Blacklists a Good Idea?” *Spread Magazine* (Summer 2006): 10.
- 3 “Sex Workers: GMB Wins First Ever Unfair Dismissal Case,” Independent Media Center (2006), www.indymedia.org/nl/2006/01/832371.shtml.

WEBSITES

THE BEST OF BLOGS: Annual reader-nominated and voted on awards for blogs in many different categories, including Best Sex Blog.
www.thebestofblogs.com

BEVERLY FISHER: Denver-based escort and writer.
www.beverlyfisher.com

BLACK LIST: a New York– and New Jersey–area blog that is seldom updated but has several extensive lists of emails used by men who attempt to hire providers through Craigslist.
<http://providerblacklist.blogspot.com>

CATHERINE LA CROIX: Catherine does sex work and sexuality consultation, which she details on her website. She is also the author of the self-published book *On Our Backs, Off Our Knees: A Declaration of Independence by a Modern Sacred Whore*.
<http://catherinelacroix.com>

DENZI: Denzi is a middle-aged escort who used the Internet to remake herself after a career in her teens and early twenties as a street prostitute.
<http://denzi4u.com>

DON'T FUCK WITH US!: Run by a Washington, D.C.–area male escort, mostly male workers in and around D.C. list their grievances with various clients, whose aliases and phone numbers they post.
<http://blacklistednow.blogspot.com>

THE INTERNATIONAL UNION OF SEX WORKERS: Sex workers union most active in the U.K. that uses the Internet as an organizing tool.
www.iusw.org

MAX FISCH DOMINA GUIDE: The premier site for listings and links to the websites of professional dommes around the United States. Also hosts a very active discussion board.
<http://maxfisch.com>

NETWORK OF SEX WORK PROJECTS (NSWP): Project linking together sex work projects from around the globe; members' meetings often take place online.
www.nswp.org

PROSTITUTES OF NEW YORK (PONY): New York City-based organization for sex workers with a thirty-year history.

www.walnet.org/csis/groups/pony.html

ROOM SERVICE 2000 AND DATE-CHECK: Websites that offer client-verification services for escorts.

<http://roomservice2000.com>.

<http://date-check.com>

UTOPIAGUIDE, BIG DOGGIE, THE EROTIC REVIEW (TER): Message board and advertising websites where providers and hobbyists can interact and hobbyists can review providers.

<http://utopiaguide.com>

www.bigdoggie.net

www.theeroticreview.com

VERONICA MONET: Veronica is a former sex worker who offers sexuality education and consultations and is the author of Veronica Monet's Sex Secrets of Escorts: What Men Really Want.

<http://veronicamonet.com>

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NETPORN:
 THE WORK OF FANTASY
 IN THE INFORMATION SOCIETY

Adam Arvidsson

'The industrialization, through home computers, of physical and psychical care and hygiene, children's education, cooking or sexual technique is precisely designated to generate capitalist profits from activities still left to individual fantasy.'
 (Gorz, 1982:84)

'What do the punters want from us?[...]Right now, it's the psychological part that is most important[...] With the kind of clients I have, the real work is not so much physical as it is intellectual.'

- Lucrezia

'We sell an idea. On the street they sell pieces of meat.'

- Luciana.

'In Colombia people fuck much more. The whores do it, and other women do it too. Here it seems men mostly take their pleasure in thinking up things.'

- Patricia.

For Lucrezia, Luciana and Patrizia, up-market sex-workers interviewed by Alessandro dal Lago and Emilio Quadrelli in their brilliant survey of the hidden life of a contemporary European metropolis (dal Lago & Quadrelli, 2003:208-209), the most important aspects of their *metiér* is intellectual and cerebral. It is their capacity to pretend and perform; to make up situations and relations that satisfies the demands of their middle class professional clients, and as Luciana comments, sets them off from the 'meat mar-

ket' on the street where working-class men go. Furthermore, the stories told in dal Lago & Quadrelli's book indicate that at least among middle and upper class clients, the demand for more 'advanced', 'cerebral' (or 'kinky') services has increased in recent years. Certainly, the enriched media environment—video cassettes in the 1980s and Internet porn in the 1990s—has greatly enhanced the erotic imaginary of the European middle classes (McNair, 1996, O'Toole, 1998). As an industry with about twice the turn-over of the Disney corporation, and with a highly differentiated structure (operators range from large vertically integrated companies to small amateur enterprises), Internet porn offers any conceivable kind of kink at just a couple of mouse-clicks' distance (Cronin & Davenport, 2001, Lane, 2000). Patricia's comparison with Columbia (presumably based on personal experience) is suggestive (if far from conclusive) in this respect. Is it the case that where the habit of surfing the net for thrills is less widespread, sex is generally more corporal and direct? While in relatively well-wired Northern Italy men are used to investing time and energy in their fantasies and want comparable Real Life performances? Looking at the turnover and popularity of Internet porn one could suggest that the three women's experiences with increasingly cerebral sexual demands could be a side effect of the further 'industrialisation of fantasy' that André Gorz predicted be a consequence of the spread of computers and information technologies. These technologies have enhanced the capacity to fantasise about things like sex. This, one could hypothesise, has produced more advanced and more fantastic demands on the part of the consumers of sex worker services. If this is true, then the 'industrialisation of fantasy' on the part of new media technologies has re-positioned such fantasising from a private, essentially recreational and non-productive activity, to an integral, productive element of the value chain of the booming sex/porn industry. How, this chapter asks, can we understand this new relation between technology, fantasy and value theoretically?

THE (IMMATERIAL) LABOUR OF FANTASY

While (decreasingly) marginal to respectable academic debates, the porn industry seems to supply a paradigm case for the emerging 'new' or 'second' (in the sense of Web 2.0) information economy. This not only in the sense that the porn industry has been a driving factor behind the development of new technologies (like Real Time Streaming) and new media forms (like the Amateur genre), but also in the sense that the subjective relations (or forms of 'interpellation' to use Althusser's old term) promoted by porn (both on and off line) are becoming exemplary of the ways in which consumers or viewers are positioned as value producing subjects by the new information economy in general. Phenomena like SecondLife, MySpace, the booming Internet dating sector and most of what is known as Web 2.0, are increasingly based on the ability of viewers to produce affective relations to others in the absence of 'meaty' embodiments. Such fantasising about the other is precisely what porn consumers have engaged in ever since the inception—sometime in the mid-1700s—of modern pornography. The new element in online porn, as in Web 2.0 more generally, is that such fantasising is now becoming critical not only to the realisation of value (where Marx placed it, but also to the *produc-*

tion of value (cf. Miranda, 1998). The imagination is empowered, but it is also put to work as an important source of profits.

This affective productivity has itself been greatly empowered by new information and communication technologies.

Internet porn thus shows how an emerging productive power—a media enhanced capacity to imagine and relate, which is itself a consequence of the particular sociological and technological features of the information society—can be subsumed under capital as a source of surplus value.

Seen this way, Internet porn is but one aspect of a more general trend to commodify our ability to construct a common social world through communicative interaction, putting it to work in generating economically valuable outcomes (Arendt, 1958, Habermas 1984, 1987, Hardt & Negri, 2004). Indeed, one can argue that such a movement towards the *commodification of the common* constitutes an emerging paradigm of valorisation in e-commerce (as well as in other vanguard sectors like software development, biotech, brand management and design). The first strategy that guided the commercialisation of the Internet in the mid-1990s built mainly on a vision of that medium as a new channel for the provision of content. The key to making money online was to capture consumers, or ‘eye-balls,’ to whom one (commercial sectors?) could subsequently broadcast ready-made products through new channels. This was the economic rationale behind the merger of large media companies with large content libraries, like Time-Warner with Internet portals, like AOL. Even though this strategy allowed for a certain amount of ‘interactivity’ (as to the choice of feature and time of viewing), it basically replicated an older broadcasting logic in which content was understood as produced by professionals, and then broadcast to a public of consumers. But already the success of AOL in accumulating a critical mass of ‘eyeballs’ built on different relations between ‘producers’ and ‘consumers.’ To a large extent AOL’s success derived from the unpaid efforts of tens of thousands of volunteers who administered online communities, actively contributed to discussion groups and built and maintained websites. It is estimated that in 1996, ‘at the peak of the volunteer movement, over 30.000 community leaders were helping AOL to generate at least \$7 million a month’ (Terranova, 2004:92). The success of AOL thus already built on the ability to put the communicative production of users to work. Stretching the definition a bit, we can argue that a similar principle stands behind more recent forms of media voyeurism, like web-cams or reality television, where viewers interact and engage in a ‘work of watching’ that effectively extends the production of valuable content to include the social and communicative processes of the life-world (Andrejevic, 2003).

This strategy actively utilises the interactive bias of the medium. It builds on putting to work, stimulating or empowering the human ability to create a common through investments of affect. To quote one Merrill Lynch consultant: ‘to say that the Internet is about information is the same as saying that cooking is about oven temperature—right, but wrong. The real creator of value is relationships’ (Schrage, 1997). This relational capacity is then made to evolve in such ways that it creates an enclosable area for which one can charge access fees or it is made to sustain a distinct brand identity.

The commodification of affect is nothing new in itself. Already Karl Marx recognised the potential value of the production of common meanings and aesthetic experiences, through the labour of singers, schoolmasters and poets. But he considered these activities so marginal in relation to capitalist production overall that it was not worth wasting much intellectual energy on them. Until recently most economists — Marxists or not — have shared this view of immaterial production as economically insignificant. We can date the rediscovery of immaterial labour to the 1970s when feminist economists began to argue for the productivity of housework and the mostly female production of affect and care in general. It accelerated in the 1980s as the developing service economy was the subject of a host of studies of service professionals, like air-line stewardesses and retail personnel. Recently, the focus on immaterial labour has come to invest the new culture industries or 'creative industries' and the contemporary 'creative' workforce as such. An important part of the productivity of such knowledge-intensive professional workers is understood to rest with their capacity to work with sociality and communication to produce the kinds of social circumstances (project teams) and shared meaning complexes (corporate culture) that allow a flexible adaptation of the production process to the rapidly shifting demands of a volatile market environment. There is also a growing body of literature that stresses the connection between the mediatisation of the work process and the necessity of, and capacity for, such immaterial, affective work, (Zuboff, 1988, Mowshowitz, 2002). To my mind, this points to the possibility of a more general connection between the mediatisation of the social and the productivity of affect.

Arguably, Marx is not the right thinker to start with in establishing that connection. A better point of departure is Gabriel Tarde. This long marginalised (but recently rediscovered) sociologist pointed to the direct economic relevance of public communication. In his *Psychologie économique* (Tarde, 1902), he argued that, at least for luxury goods, the value of a commodity was partially determined by the public production of standards of 'truth, beauty and utility' that could serve as a measure (because such goods did not have a place within traditional standards of value). The cognitive and affective productivity of the public should thus be understood as an integral element to a society-wide, extended production process by means of which the values of such goods were established. Tarde's argument was that the public could serve as such a productive subject because it was not directly tied into the fixed codes of traditional social circles. Rather, the public mobilised individuals across geographical and cultural boundaries in a sort of transversal networking of minds. This autonomy of the public allowed it to produce ideas that could not emerge elsewhere. In short, the productivity of the public rested on its particular ability to fantasise, and likewise construct virtual alternatives to the actual.

Indeed such a relation between the mediatisation of public communication and the enhanced powers of fantasy has stood at the core of critical receptions of new media technologies for a long time. An enhanced capacity for fantasy has been perceived as the flip-side to the new capacity for rational argument that has commonly been attributed to the emergence of the modern public. One of the central preoccupations of early social theorists was that the new mass media would create excessive powers of imagination. People

would imagine situations that they simply could not realise, or situations which realisation would severely disrupt the established order of things. Gustave LeBon (1896[1991]), Scipio Sighele (1901) and later Ortega y Gasset's (1932) preoccupations with the disruptive effects of the mass mind are examples of the second attitude (as are instances of press censorship and the eighteenth century suppression of coffee houses). Emile Durkheim's (1897[1966]) concept of 'anomie' is an example of the first attitude. He argued that the greatly enhanced powers of the imagination that characterize modernity risk propelling the individual's plans and prospects beyond what is realistically possible or socially permissible. Divorced men, Durkheim argued, risk becoming anomic because, beyond the limits of marriage, they are now free to imagine a sexual life too fantastic to be realised. It is telling that Durkheim choose love and sex, or to use a common term, 'the erotic' as an example of the anomic dangers of the modern, mediatised intellect. As Lynn Hunt (1993) among others have argued, the mediatisation of erotic fantasy, from the early publications of libertine thinkers like the Marquis de Sade onward, there has been a powerful and potentially destabilising force of the imagination. Sade's imaginations of fantastic erotic relations were deeply intertwined with fantasies of a different social and moral order. When censorship of erotic publications began in the mid-1800s, mass literacy, cheaper printing technologies and significantly photography, had empowered a mass capacity to fantasise about sex and, by implication, about 'a new standard for sexual difference' (O'Toole, 1998). Female erotic fantasies have been feared to have equally disruptive results. In fascist Italy, the new erotic demeanour of young urban girls, who modelled their behaviour on Hollywood films and romantic stories in new, American-style women's magazines, was perceived to have dangerous consequences for established gender roles as well as for female fertility (de Grazia, 1992). In India in the 1950s, newspapers and cinema were major driving forces behind the emergence of non-traditional attitudes to love and marriage (Gist, 1953). In the 1950s, sociologists Francesco Alberoni and Guido Baglioni (1965) argued that the new 'urban culture' spread by television had made girls in Southern Italy refuse to marry peasant men. This they claimed was a major push factor behind migrations. In short, the erotic has historically proven to be an important example of how the media can enhance the capacity to imagine social relations, and how this enhanced capacity can subsequently have real, transformative effects.

Indeed, it is telling that according to Thomas Laqueur's history of masturbation, the real dangers of the 'solitary vice' were not so much physical as they were social. He shows how enlightenment thinkers from Voltaire and Rousseau to Kant worried about masturbation primarily because it risked deviating psychic energy away from the moral project of the social towards the individualistic pursuit of fantasy. 'Autoerotic sexuality was at odds with social and moral life as it ought to be lived,' it risked making the subject 'hopelessly enslaved to himself' (Laqueur, 2003:42). This perspective on masturbation as an asocial or even anti-social danger prevails until the 1970s, when masturbation begins to be taken up by the feminist movement. The right to control one's own fantasy now becomes something to fight for and fight with. The possibility to imagine alternative forms of sexual relations becomes a political tool. Finally in the 1990s, masturbation becomes an important

business. Through the diffusion of the Internet, masturbatory fantasies could be shared, collectively produced and augmented by a booming Internet porn industry, to ultimately feed into an equally successful industry for the manufacture of various props and tools. In true Tardian fashion, the explosion of Internet smut served to make companies like Doc Johnson, the largest sex toy manufacturer in the US, go from a turn-over of \$ 8 million in 1990 to \$ 45 million in 2000, or Beate Ushe, their German equivalent, to increase sales by 50 per cent between 1999 and 2000 (Laqueur, 2003:78 — not to speak of the turn-over of the actual porn business itself, cf. Cronin& Davenport, 2001, Lane, 2000). It is telling that as the Internet realises the hidden potential of the masturbatory economy, fantasies become interactive. True, a lot of online porn sites are about the simple provision of content. But, the growing trend is to provide spaces for interaction be this a blog, an interactive strip-tease, or biographical information on models that makes possible identification and an intimacy that extends beyond the strictly carnal. This is particularly evident in new forms of amateur pornography, where users are invited to follow the models around as they 'masturbate *and* water the plants *and* walk the dog *and* take college classes' thus approximating a form of consumption that builds on 'the abolition of the spectacular in favour of other models of relationality' (Pattersson, 2004:112, 119, cf. McNair, 1998). This interactivity has been pushed yet another step by the emergence of blogging. There are at present blogs for most erotic specialities, that combine postings, fiction and other forms of 'user-produced' content with links to commercial and non-commercial content sites. Some commercial ventures, like Nerve.com, has realised the potential in this enhanced interactivity: constituting itself as a platform that links different users and their different activities (blogging, dating, producing fiction, posting photos) into a community which is not only highly educated but also actively involved in their topics of interest ('all things smart, sexy and culturally important and entertaining'). Advertisers are invited to weave their messages into the environment of the site, to place their products as part of the context within which communication unfolds.

CONCLUSION: THE FETISHBRAND

Sites like Nerve.com are thus an excellent example of the tendency to put to work the capacity for interactive fantasising that computer-mediated communication promotes. It utilises the dual capacity of network information technologies to function both as a means for enhancing desire and as a means for channelling and managing it. Indeed, in the absence of old Fordist institutions (like the family, the state and the party), desire tends to be directly organised by media circuits. This way, value and profits come to depend, as Daniel Dieuaide (2006) argues, on the ability to control such flows of desire. The productive power of capital becomes an organising capacity that extends far outside the individual firm. This is particularly clear in the diminishing boundaries between online porn and real life sexuality. One no longer simply produces a pornographic film. One invests in a particular fetish 'scene' that comprises online content, blogs, spaces in SecondLife and communities on MySpace, and importantly, a lived 'scene' with clubs, bars, shops and professionals, where the particular form of desire is lived out. This way

the hyper-reality of porn — with its streamlined fashions and standardised practices — is incarnated in the ethically significant, affective reality of real life: porn becomes sex. Indeed, in this way the economy of fetishism profoundly resembles that of the brand, the perhaps paradigmatic capitalist institution of the information economy (cf. Arvidsson, 2006). The brand (perhaps the original fetish, *pace* Marx) also accumulates value by pre-structuring and programming circuits of desire. Like the commercial fetish it does not command the desire of the user, but empowers it in a particular way: want a pair of sneakers? These are the ways you can be with them and relate to what you do with them. Feel like S/M, these are the costumes, whips and scenarios... This form of power is distinctive, as Žižek (1999) suggested, it says not 'You Must!' but 'You May!' It is ultimately based on the fusion of media and life, and the plasticity that this entails.

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THE NAKED TRUTH: INTERNET EROTICISM AND THE SEARCH

Manuel Bonik and Andreas Schaale

Erotic/pornographic sites (from now on: X-sites¹) are among the most popular on the Internet and form one of its constitutive moments. Worldwide there are, depending on the estimation, between two and ten million of them. They signify a phenomenon of important dimensions, whose economic, societal and cultural consequences are hardly surveyable, but that surely are and will become gigantic. At the same time, old taboos concerning sexuality are evidently active even under cyber-relations: offline, the theme 'eroticism on the Internet' is largely ignored and with traditional socio-economic surveys such as Kinsey² one only obtains highly distorted results. In the following article, we choose a different, more useful approach, as we will analyse the interrelations between search machines and X-sites; in particular, we evaluate the requests made at various, usually German, search machines. There are neither taboos nor interview-effects here, but simply the naked truth concerning the desires of the user.

1. THE SEARCH

The search forms an elementary human function, and in all likelihood plays a role in many universes. Like many elementary human functions it can be formalised: besides the human ("Where are my glasses?"), the search has, in the last decades, been noticeably expressed in software; maybe most prominently so in the UNIX-command *ctrl F* (= find), even though that does relate only to the search within a document. With the Internet emerged the so-called search machines, necessary software to retain an overview within the flow of netdocuments, and to find just those documents related to the theme one is actually searching for. There are currently attempts underway to develop search mechanisms that directly search for images, but for the time being they are still based

on text as it can be found on HTML-, DOC-, PDF- and other pages as well as in their Metatags. From this has developed in the last years a full-blown search-machine-industry,³ which is currently most prominently represented in the public sphere by the name and business of Google. Others include: AltaVista, Look Smart, Inktomi, Infoseek and Fireball. Even though Google currently seems to possess almost a monopoly⁴ in the public perception, search machines are also subjected to fashions. Yesterday it was AltaVista, today it is Google or Yahoo, and tomorrow another search machine might be the new star for whatever reason. Even Microsoft has recently entered this business with its MSN Search and clearly possesses the capabilities to increase its market share in this field. In the area of open-source, Nutch⁵ can be mentioned.

1.1. SEARCH TECHNOLOGY APPLICATIONS

Whenever the search is mentioned, most people will probably think of search machines such as Google or Yahoo. Yet, search machines are not the only field in which search technology⁶ is being used; one need only think of the fact that some of the most popular and successful websites are based on search technology, such as Amazon, EBay, iTunes or the dating-site, Adult Friend Finder. Many websites incorporate their own search masks ('sitesearch') and on the intranet of businesses, for example, there are numerous search-applications in relation to databases and content-management-systems.⁷

On the other private side of applications, there are now various software applications that perform a 'Desktop Search,' the search on your own computer(s). Desktop search returns home to a certain extent the search technology of the Internet and it may be expected that it will also transform the dealings with information there: no longer is there any need to save data within hierarchical and sensible structures, instead one can leave data at arbitrary locations on the computer and crawl through these data whenever needed. It must be said, however, that we do not necessarily rate the applications of Google and Yahoo among the best⁸ and in relation to desktop search we would currently advise Copernic.⁹

1.2 HOW DO SEARCH MACHINES FUNCTION?

Whenever starting a request in a search machine, many people probably believe that by doing so they trigger a search of the complete intended database, for example the Internet. That is not the case, or at least not in real-time to the actual request. In principle, such (almost) real-time requests are possible, but usually reserved for those technologies that are much more elaborate and expensive than popular applications such as Google. In practice, search machines do search the Internet and send bots, spiders and other agents to crawl through the databases of sites, but they do so at various rhythms, and for various reasons, and therefore not in real-time. With the information collected by these agents, indices are built that contain the information of/about the visited sites in condensed form, simplified and searchable according to algorithm. These indices are saved on the servers of the respective search machines which then make the connection with the site containing the referenced information (hopefully still there since the last

spider-visit). Currently (August 2005), the index of Google contains approximately 11.3 billion documents; Yahoo almost twice as many – 20.8 billion documents – of which, according to Yahoo, more than 1.6 billion are images and more than fifty million are audio and video-data.

The user's search request is decisive for determining which links appear on top of the list of results. One can search for 'cuckoo clocks,' 'tits' or 'images with blue dildos, but without men,' and receive a list that might contain a few million results. Only a minority of users even takes a look at the second page of the list — that which is not on the first page does not exist for them on the Internet. In this regard, ranking-methods that determine the rank of a site on these lists are hugely important. Various criteria have been developed to measure the relevance of a site, such as the pagerank-method of Google or the *vox populi*-algorithm.¹⁰ Traditional ranking-methods function on a strictly algorithmic basis and measure, for example, the frequency of keywords on websites or the amount of links from acknowledged, 'serious' websites to the concerned site. On webcatalogues, on the other hand, sites can be recommended for inclusion in the list and it is a (human) editorial staff that checks these recommendations by hand.¹¹ Finally, there are commercially oriented methods, where positions in the list can be bought, and all possible mixtures between these methods.¹²

The sale of positions on the list of results is of vital importance to the business model of Google — it is here that advertising revenues are earned. Many struggles are therefore raging on the Internet for these positions: under the keyword of 'search-optimisation' (legal and illegal) ways are sought to improve the position of websites in the lists. Among the illegal methods one can count 'linkfarming' or 'Google Bombing,' and considerable investments are made in the development of search algorithms etc. to counter these methods.

1.3 RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

Lately, since the 2004, stock exchange public offering of Google has a wider public been shown how important search machines and search technologies actually are. 'Googling' has in many countries become part of colloquial language. Meanwhile, the search-market is very dynamic and heavily fought over. In June 2005, according to the press agency AP as well as Spiegel Online, the market share of Google was 36,9 percent, and before Yahoo with 30,4 percent, and now the newly launched search of Microsoft, MSN Search,¹³ is doing well in business.

Google is so successful that its actual core business, the search for texts, hardly promises any further growth. This is why Google (and its competitors) are currently continually developing new segments of business, such as the already mentioned desktop-search, the library-full-text search Google Library, or most recently, the satellite-image-software, Google Earth, which enables zoom-travels across a virtual globe.

Furthermore, image-, audio- and video-data increasingly come in the search machines' field of vision. At the end of August, Yahoo launched a special audio-search that also includes online music stores and enables price comparisons of titles. Of course, this — especially the search for music — is momentarily a particularly sensitive issue; one

need only recall Napster and, of course, more topically with a smirk, the panic reactions of western music-industries when it comes to the Russian search machine allopmp3.com.

2. EROTICISM ON THE INTERNET

2.1 CULTURAL-HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Pornography has, as is well known, not emerged with the Internet, but the Internet has merely increased its spread and, as one may suspect, its effect. Images of naked bodies are part of ancient statements of human culture. One need only mention here the Venus of Willendorf (ca. 25.000 BC) or the frescos of Pompeii.

In the history of art, the nude, in particular the female nude, has played an important role from the very beginning, and up to this day: merely taking a look at the yearly survey of the art market on the most heavily dealt works of the year in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*,¹⁴ shows that a substantial amount of these are female nudes. Pornography as an autonomous genre came into being at the latest with the emergence of photography around the mid-nineteenth century, which created new possibilities of real-time-portrayal; its multiplication and reproduction created new routes of distribution. A lot of people could now see what previously had been reserved to those privileged strata that could afford art.¹⁵ Pornography became part of popular culture, although a very special part, since it touched upon ancient pleasures and fears and long-standing complex systems of rules that people have constructed in the area of sex.

In similar and at the same time non-comparable ways, did the experience of Internet pornography bring new quantitative and qualitative dimensions (and the other way round)¹⁶, and this time the cultural break seems to be of an even more dramatic nature. This is not necessarily to be judged in a negative fashion, either from a conservative-moralist or a Foucauldian¹⁷ point of view. One need only think of the damage that has been done (and in Islamic or catholic countries still is) by religious sex-controls to be grateful for the contributions of X-sites as a form of education: the story of the stork will no longer convince contemporary youth. However, one does not know how their sexuality will develop when they are, from a tender age, only a few mouseclicks away from sexual content of all possible qualities and thus maybe moulded by less welcome role clichés. But to know this is not the task of this text: for one attempt to understand X-sites as a positive utopia, we refer to the Crash Conference paper "Pornographic Coding"¹⁸ of Florian Cramer and Stewart Home.

2.2 QUANTITATIVE ASSESSMENT OF X-SITES

According to some estimates, more than fifty percent of Internet-traffic is generated by pornography- and eroticism-sites (including peer to peer networks); more conservative calculations start at thirty percent (thirty percent of the top 100 keywords in German search engines are sex related¹⁹). In a 2004 study, the firm Secure Computing²⁰ has researched how X-sites are distributed between the various country-domains: .de²¹ amounted to 10,030,200 sites; second place was the United Kingdom with neverthe-

less still 8,506,800 sites. In addition to these, there are many times larger amounts of US sites, but these are usually registered under .com²² and are therefore not encompassed by this study. At the same time, these figures need to be reduced by considerable dimensions, since only a part of these X-sites actually offer content themselves, whereas other sites are either indexes or search-machine-sites or are fakes anyway. This last category includes linkfarms and other types of sites that carry all sorts of searchable terms in their text and/or metatags, but these merely serve the purpose of generating traffic and do not actually offer content or links to content. Since such spam-sites are particularly active within the field of eroticism, it is only possible to give a very rough estimate of 'real' domains with adult content—these might amount to anything between two and ten million sites worldwide.

Taking a look at the ranking compiled by the Alexa ranking-system for international websites - installable as a plug-in for your browser—one doesn't find any X-sites on the top of the list, but as expected sites like Yahoo.com (Alexa-rank 1), Ebay.com (8) or Microsoft (11). Even before Apple (69), however, is already ranked the dating site Adult Friend Finder²³ with an Alexa-rank of 45. Within the three-digit range X-sites are often to be found, such as the Dutch site TheHun.com (775) or Playboy.com (866). An X-site such as AskJolene.com all in all achieves with approximately 3.5-million search requests per day (self-advertisement) rank number 1.953 and a large amount of the four- and five-digit rankings are actually X-sites. This is comparable to non-X-sites such as WashingtonPost.com (207), the Süddeutsche Zeitung (sueddeutsche.de, 2.983),²⁴ the US government (firstgov.gov, 6.159) or the German government (bundesregierung.de, 90.219). Cut-up.com has a ranking of 5.032.530.²⁵

Interesting among the X-sites is Asstr.org (Alexa-ranking 2.576), the Alt Sex Stories Test Repository, since this is not a commercial pornsite, but a real community-site. Here there are no images, but solely stories written by community-members and offered online for free. The asstr-archive momentarily contains around 250.000 documents.

2.3 WHY ARE X-SITES ON THE INTERNET SO SUCCESSFUL?

Wanting to psychologise, one could argue: X-sites are in many ways immediate (sexual) wish-fulfillments. For many, they may constitute a far-reaching—although not necessarily a hundred per cent—substitution for (sexual) relations with real human beings. One can surmise that quite some men spend their overtime in the office before the computer screen with their hand on their very own joystick. No wonder that he feels overtired and is not in the mood at night to gratify his real wife or girlfriend with intercourse. Maybe X-sites have something to do with the low birth rates in the advanced industrial nations? Or is the collapse of the New Economy connected to the sexual weakening of its managers? But, all these are speculations and, seen from a more positive side, it is still better that man masturbates than develops a lust for war.

The millions of X-sites on the Internet are available around the clock. Contrary to the expensive porn magazines, pornography on the Internet is largely free of charge. And contrary to the magazines, one no longer has to visit the kiosk, the sex shop or the peep show

to get access to pornography; one can simply download it anonymously (whatever 'anonymous' may signify on the Internet) at home or in the office and 'enjoy' — and that means without control of concrete persons toward which one ought to be ashamed. The uses range from the mainstream-user to the Otaku, from the woman who followed the link in one of the women's magazines and finally would like to know what is going on there, to the pervert; to what extent X-sites are used by two or more people together is something we can not assess.

2.4 PORN NETWORKS

Pornography constitutes, as delineated above, a large factor on the Internet and a full-fledged industry. Its turnover can, similar to the amount of 'real' X-sites, only be estimated and this is to an important extent the case because much of the X-business traditionally takes place behind the scenes. For the year 2004 estimates range from at least five million to twenty or even thirty billion US dollars. Serious X-sites, those with their own contents, offer a large part of these contents for free on pages with series comprised of some dozen images (galleries) or a few brief videoclips that function as teasers for possible subscribers or that are simply there to generate traffic (with which one can also earn money). Subscribers receive passwords and/or dialers and are then able to advance to the 'secrets' of the site: series of longer duration or higher resolution or special services like webcams or livechats with porn actresses/actors.²⁶ In general, however, subscriptions seem aimed at inexperienced Internet users,²⁷ since an extreme amount of pornography is available for free and often the various offers on the opening pages converge with the content of the subscribers' pages i.e., there is actually nothing 'more' to see here.

'Real' X-sites often have a consistent aesthetic: from amateur-sites with rough video-resolution recordings (and such an amateurish suggestion can very well be consciously staged by professionals to conjure up authenticity) to high-end sites such as Playboy. And many content providers have consequently also developed a specialisation on specific genres, such as Most Erotic Teens with soft focus photographs in the tradition of bilitis-films or Blacks On Blondes with interracial hardcore (mostly a white woman and one or more black men). At Captain Stabbin they're humping on boats, at Backseatbanger in driving cars (after offering supposedly accidental passers-by a few dollar notes that are then also shown and the amount of which is willingly mentioned).

3. EROTICISM SEARCH

3.1 X-SEARCH SITES

To these 'real' X-sites one normally gains access through specialised search machines and webcatalogues — it is these that will concern us here in more detail. Before doing so, it needs to be mentioned that 'real' X-sites have to be seen alongside vast numbers of 'unreal' X-sites, i.e., contents are suggested in order to incite inexperienced users to download expensive dialers. Something similar is aimed at by the all too known spam mails; 'real' X-sites tend not to send spam. 'Unreal' X-search-sites offer pseudo text-links

or suggest, with images stolen from somewhere else on the net, access to contents. Usually, however, they are merely there to generate traffic and effectively do nothing more for the user than starting pop-ups and/or leading the user to further ‘unreal’ X-search-sites; viruses are easily spread via these kinds of sites. Finally, there are those mixed forms of X-search-sites — in a way of ‘hybrid seriosity’ — that partly leads to real content and partly to fake pages. Apart from that, though, there might be users for whom surfing from fake to fake is already sufficiently satisfying.

In principle, those searching for cybersex make their way to specialised X-search-sites. General search sites such as Google or Yahoo hardly play any role here. Although they are for many X-searchers the first contact points, since 2004 they largely suppress the theme (and with it regularly also those sites not meant erotically at all, such as gynaecology-sites) and also do not admit any bought rankings or banner ads. That is necessary, since otherwise they would very likely drown in pornography considering the sheer amount of X-sites, their massive web ‘presence’ and the resulting amount of applicable keywords, as well as the programming effort undertaken by many X-entrepreneurs to gain a high ranking in search machines. Whenever firms make public the most frequent requests at periodic theme-rankings, they simply lie and keep silent about ‘the naked truth.’ At google.de, it is simply not possible to turn off the family filter, but this merely functions as a fig leaf, since two thirds of the German requests at Google are dealt with by google.com anyway. Insofar as results are delivered here, it usually involves links that lead to fake sites.

Among the X-search-sites one has to distinguish between those that operate similar to traditional search machines — those that offer a search mask in which one can start a freely formulated request²⁸ — and X-webcatalogues that offer a search according to fixed categories and are either based on text-links, thumbnails or both. Here as well, there are many hybrids; for now, our concern is the X-webcatalogues.

3.2. CATEGORIES OF X-WEBCATALOGUES

On many X-sites one finds similar categories that classify the offered contents, in particular the images; some are however also specialised in videoclips, others offer in each category the choice between the search for images or videos. Mainstream-sites typically address a male audience and usually offer images of / with women (men mostly appear here merely as decoration, very much in the tradition of mainstream pornmagazines). Besides these, however, there is also an adequate amount of sites that specifically cater to a male homosexual audience and further below we will find that mainstream-sites only play a relatively minor role within the overall supply.

The material on offer is multifaceted; there are classifications along the lines of age (teens, matures, grannies), hair colour (blondes, redheads), clothing (latex, bikini), practice (toys, fucks, blowjobs, groups), race (Asians, blacks, Latinos), body features (hairy/shaved, small/large breasts), gender (gay, transvestites), etc.²⁹ Hustler Platinum, for example, advertises with “Pornstars, Amateurs, Teens, Grandmas, Lesbians and More!!” Nationality is a rare criterion, although Russia and several states of the former Eastern bloc are to some extent represented, which probably corresponds to the actual produc-

tion circumstances of pornography: Asian usually means Japanese and less often Thai, Chinese or Korean; Latin stands for all South American countries, particularly Brazil, but often also includes US sites.

Sometimes the genres converge and overlap; when a series from Hardcore becomes a series from Blowjob or when in a dildo-session the dildo can be left out. These mainstream categories have produced a number of technical terms that are nonetheless fully understood by millions of laymen. Thus one will rarely find within the mainstream links to real child pornography X-sites; categories such as Lolita usually mean in all aspects Teens and often enough the depicted real Teens are in actuality Matures (although not Grannies). Many images that are used in advertisements for Lolita-sex have been circulating since years (on fake-sites). Search requests for 'children's sex' have to be taken literally, however – around ten percent of all requests with 'children' are meant sexually.

What is however so astonishing (and what gave the first impetus to write this text) is the circumstance that beyond these few categories of the mainstream X-sites, there are substantially more categorisations being undertaken. Pussy.org, to mention only one of the many X-catalogues, earns its money apparently with advertisements for dating, and carries according to its own advertisement 804.925 galleries in its database and presents these in four hundred (!!!) different and alphabetically organised categories; each category offers a choice between images or video. Here merely the letter B: Babe, Backseat, Banana, Banging, Bath, Bathing, Bathroom, Bbw, Bdsm, Beach, Beads, Beauty, Beaver, Bed, Belly, Bigcock, Bigtit, Biker, Bikini, Bimbo, Bisexual, Bitch, Biting, Bizarre, Black, Blindfolded, Blonde, Blowjob, Bondage, Boobs, Boots, Booty, Boss, Bottle, Bound, Boys, Braces, Brazilian, Bride, British, Brunette, Brutal, Bukkake, Business, Busty, Butt, Butt-fucking, Butthole, Buttplug.

One notices that a (usually illegal or in any case dire) category such as Beasts (sex with animals) doesn't show up at all. After clicking one of those categories, one receives (completely analogous to Google), a list with short descriptive texts, which contain the requested keyword. The descriptions are delivered by the content-providers, as for example "Blonde young bitch fucking a bottle"; one thus gains access to this specific gallery through several keywords and it is therefore able to 'satisfy' more than one preference. A category such as Bizarre isn't defined in any clear-cut fashion, but can contain punkgirls as well as groupsex with whatever abstruse masks. It is clear that some of these categories are synonyms, Boobs and Tits for example; most of them are not however (leaving aside the fact for the moment that Tits are also offered in various sizes).

3.3 TARGET GROUPS

It can be assumed that the various porn categories have developed in the way they did and that by doing so they reflect to some extent the wishes of the users. Meanwhile, as we have established, the categories are varied and in that respect one also has to assume a variety of users. Even the mainstream can already offer anything from twenty to over one hundred categories; the underground many more. This variety is not only astonishing, but from a quantitative perspective also overwhelming. And those searching for 'normal'

mainstream eroticism are more likely to be part of a minority: it is striking that the search is not just for the horny girl next door or blonde Playboy-beauties, but that the extremely specialised sites have to be seen alongside an equally specialised spectrum of users.

Here, the search is quite obviously for what ephemeral acquaintances or ‘normal’ (love) relationships between two people do not have on offer: fetish-sex, sex with animals etc. The majority of users searches for such specialised sites, only ten percent for ‘normal’ sex. No theme is remote enough, no fetish too exotic, for it not to be searched and it doesn’t matter if one is dealing with Bukkake (apparently a Japanese invention, in which a number of men, either with preceding gangbang or merely after jerking off in groups drop their sperm on (usually) the face of (usually) a woman³⁰) or boxing (rubber-) nuns. During talks among men — at least this has happened to one of the authors a number of times — if they even address the topic of Internet-sex at all, the site *Fucking Machines* is sometimes discussed, an X-site where women are being fucked by various dildo-reinforced machines. On *Vulis-Archives* one can see women in various sports disciplines, basketball or swimming for example, in any case nude; on the ‘alternative’ X-site *IShotMyself.com* (female) models take photos of themselves; it is not very easy even to imagine an erotic category aka fetish for which there is not one specialised website.

3.4 FULL-X-SEARCH

That what is not given away by the categories of the X-webcatalogues has to be provided in another manner. The variety of the (verifiable) X-categories is confronted with the open (and endless) variety of freely formulated requests of the users. The categories of sexsites are varied, but do not exactly reflect the interests of the users, since there are simply too many and too many specific fetishes for all of them to be conceived by editors of a webcatalogue. That does not mean, however, that there are no X-sites that cater to these highly individualised wishes, sometimes merely by accident, sometimes actually by specialisation, sometimes even in surprisingly high differentiation.

In pure webcatalogues, the searchers have to adhere to the existing categories. If their special fetish isn’t there, they might click on a different category that is similar to the one wished for. Statistics of webcatalogues can therefore only be the statistics of norms, which they themselves have — based on the frequency of requests — constructed. On the one hand, a search within search masks freely formulated requests, and on the other, shows the actual wishes and its distribution. Contrary to studies such as those of Kinsey — without wanting to denigrate its achievements — these kinds of studies do not have to deal with any kind of interview-effects. Conventional socio-empirical studies have to restrict themselves to the questioning of several hundred or thousand persons and often enough produce artefacts.³¹ With searches one is often dealing with several million of requesters and even when one does not really know if behind a specific IP there is a human or a bot, a female or male or some other ‘gender,’ one thing is clear: here no one is lying, here the truth is naked.

One example would be the data provided by the *Keyword Datenbank*,³² where the goal is to determine which keywords are requested most often. One can find here (al-

though not for free, but only after payment) the data of two hundred million requests of various (German) search machines³³ and months. On a yearly regular basis, erotically connotated keywords, besides some more obvious candidates such as 'Google' or 'Aldi',³⁴ are part of the front-runners.

On an average day, in this instance, 3 April 2005, the Keyword Datenbank registers no less than 1.798.979 requests that are clearly aimed at X-sites. They can be divided into about 2500 different requests that were made at least ten times a day. Lonely leader among these keywords is, with almost 300.000 requests, 'Erotik' ('eroticism' or 'erotic'), followed by 'sex' (142.251), 'Sex Bilder' ('sex images,' 64.741) and once again 'erotic' (54.726); all this is hardly anything surprising. It becomes more interesting at ranking eight with 'FKK,' in other words 'Freikörperkultur',³⁵ since such a request tends to be made not by friends of nature that want to know where they can find a nude beach, but more genre-specifically from people who (also) want to see nude children. Rank ten is taken by 'bondage' (28.580). On eleven one finds 'erotische Geschichten' ('erotic stories,' 24.278), on twenty 'Sexgeschichten' ('sex stories,' 12.903), in other words, literature. Position number fifteen goes to 'Swinger' (19.753), position nineteen to 'Sexkontakte' ('sex contacts,' 13.327), twenty-one to 'Swingerclub' (12.520),³⁵ clearly attempts to reach actual sex through virtual sex. The list goes on and on — one can also mention 'Kamasutra' on rank twenty-six (9.436), 'gaychat' (28/8.595) and 'homo.de' (30/7.980), 'Parkplatzsex' ('car-park sex,' 70/3.207), 'Hängetitten' ('soggy tits,' 113/1.813) and 'Omasex' ('granny sex,' 181/1.044), 'animalsex' (137/1.405), 'Inzestgeschichten' ('incest stories,' 139/1.404), 'Haarfetisch' ('hair fetish,' 207/871), 'Gummipuppen' ('rubber dolls' 216/816), 'Titten-grabscher' ('tits grabber,' 227/783), 'Kinderporno' ('child pornography,' 299/623), 'horsesex' (309/614), 'deutsche Stars nackt' ('German celebrities nude,' 320/599), 'Windelsex' ('diaper sex,' 409/448), 'Britney Spears nackt' ('Britney Spears nude,' 436/413).

These are, as already mentioned, merely the requests on one day. Many requests aim at similar directions or might differ only by one letter or by the fact that they are written as either one or two words. A clearer picture emerges when they are rated: eight percent of the requesters are interested in BDSM/Toy Sex, in other words, areas that go beyond the so-called 'Housewives-sex.' Seven percent is searching for homosexual X-sites, contacts or locations. Two percent searches for paedophilic or incest-contents, one percent for sodomistic.

CONCLUSION

Our figures would be even more exceptional if one could compare them with official statistics. A comparison, however, is not possible since these statistics are fraught with a high amount of estimations and are therefore basically unusable.³⁶ We therefore dare to assert that these numbers of search statistics are the first that are actually resilient and convincing — this is the 'naked' truth.

Translation: Bas van Heur

NOTES

- 1 In principle, blogs, chats, MUDs, newsgroups, UMTS-applications etc. can be part of this category, but these will not be discussed in this article.
- 2 That said, even Kinsey already noticed that the majority of sex is experienced alone. Cf.: <http://www.jackinworld.com/library/articles/kinsey.html>.
- 3 See for example <http://www.webpronews.com>.
- 4 That is, at least in the West. In Russia, for example, Google hardly plays a role.
- 5 <http://lucene.apache.org/nutch>.
- 6 Quite a good, although not really well-edited overview of the informatics' concepts of search machines is offered by: Michael Glöggler, *Suchmaschinen im Internet: Funktionsweisen, Rankingmethoden, Top-Positionen*, 2nd Revised Edition, Berlin, Heidelberg, etc.: Springer-Verlag, 2005.
- 7 See for example <http://www.intranetsuche.de>.
- 8 The search is, seen from a mathematical viewpoint, still a relatively young field that will, as might be expected, further develop; the question of the 'relevance' of documents itself will see quite some formalisations. And despite its popularity, the algorithms of Google are by no means the non plus ultra of development. Those interested could take a more critical look at his or her search results and pay attention to how many of x-thousand results are plain doubles.
- 9 www.copernic.com.
- 10 www.newsfactor.com/perl/story/22301.html.
- 11 Reference is made to Jane's Guide (www.janesguide.com) where X-sites – and besides X-sites even erotic poetry and fiction, photo books, artists' pages and more – are even discussed as well as ranked by the editorial team.
- 12 See for example www.janesguide.com.
- 13 <http://search.msn.com>.
- 14 The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* is the major conservative newspaper within Germany.
- 15 Reference can be made, for topical reasons, to the exhibition 'Spirit' of Rémy Markowitsch; for example as part of the collection Coninx in Zurich, of which a considerable part belongs to appropriate genres: female nude, atelier-scene, nude with long hair, *jeune femme devant son lit*, boy at brook, *nymphes au bord de l'eau* etc. See: <http://coninx-museum.ch>. Also cf. chapter 3.2.
- 16 Interestingly enough there is very little cultural / technological-historical research on the question of to what extent pornography has supported the emergence and spread of new mediatechnologies. For photography it is obvious that without pornography it would not have become the historic media-power that it now is in a similar manner; and as many other media the Internet would not exist in its current form without pornography.
- 17 A reference that one probably hardly needs to mention among the readers of cut.up.media.magazine: Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, New York: Pantheon, 1978.

- 18 <http://cramer.Netzliteratur.Net/writings/pornography/london-2005/pornographic-coding.html>.
- 19 www.keyword-datenbank.de.
- 20 www.securecomputing.com.
- 21 Counted are also artistic sites such as www.fotoshop.de. But, naturally, the name of national top-domain does not say anything about the actual location of the server.
- 22 To the commercial sites also belongs de hippie-porn-site www.fuckforforest.com, whose operators support projects in favour of rain forests. Greenpeace, however, has rejected to accept money from them.
- 23 www.adultfriendfinder.com. There are quite a number of X-sites that merely seem to exist to generate traffic for this dating-site. See for example: www.sleazydream.com.
- 24 The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* is another major and more liberal German newspaper.
- 25 All data are from 29 August 2005.
- 26 To what extent subscriptions play a role at illegal sites (child pornography) and what kind of services are offered there is something we cannot and do not want to assess.
- 27 And it is only to these users that illegal dialers might constitute a problem.
- 28 See for example www.allthesmut.com.
- 29 In this list, that so strangely recalls the divisions into minority-labels, the only things missing seem to be disabilities and religions; for all that, there are the categories 'dwarfs' and 'gothic.'
- 30 Ejaculations in the face or at the least on the skin of the partner are part of the standard repertoire of pornography. In contrast to actual sex this is the only way for images to 'proof' that the man has actually had an orgasm.
- 31 Despite the strange title still worth reading in regard to all deliberate and unde-liberate statistics-falsifications: Hans-Peter Beck-Bornholdt and Hans-Hermann Dubben, *Der Hund, der Eier Legt – Erkennen von Fehlinformationen durch Querdenken*, Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1997.
- 32 www.keyword-datenbank.de.
- 33 One can assume that the search of the largest German site T-Online (www.t-online.de) occupies a large share here. That site also has a special eroticism-search including traffic-numbers, which are very high. One of the reasons for this might be that, as already mentioned, Google is no longer useful in this area.
- 34 Aldi is the largest discounter/supermarket in Germany.
- 35 Freikörperkultur and its abbreviation *FKK* are the German words for nudism and its associated lifestyle.
- 36 Cf. Michael Schetske, "Internetkriminalität: Daten und Diskurse, Strukturen und Konsequenzen," www.creative-network-factory.de/cybertheorie/cyberpapers/Texte/Internetkriminalitaet.html.

NETPORN, SEXUALITY AND THE POLITICS OF DISABILITY:
A CATALYST FOR ACCESS, INCLUSION AND ACCEPTANCE?

Tim Noonan

People with disability are just that, people. People who happen to have differing capabilities and limitations. Anything which applies to people, in general, also applies to people with disability. So, since many people in the broader community choose to access, consume and participate in netporn, it follows that many people with disability (being a subset of the community) also wish to be afforded the same opportunities.

There are very few treatments of netporn that recognise the specific characteristics, issues, and cultures of Internet users with disabilities. Nevertheless, there is a significant impact that netporn is having on people with disability, including issues of access, inclusion, consumption and changing social attitudes towards both disability and sexuality.

In a chapter describing the effects of pornography on attitudes towards sexuality, McKee concludes: “For many Australians it seems that pornography has helped their ‘participation in society’ by raising self-esteem, confirming identity and confidence, and building communities” (2005:130). People with disabilities were not the subject of this study, but it seems logical to suggest that similar positive outcomes would be reported by disabled consumers of pornographic material.

Classical paper-based porn formats can be very difficult or downright impossible for many people with disability to access independently. For this reason, access to online porn resources is even more crucial and significant for people with disability, often being THE ONLY – rather than ONE of SEVERAL options for consumption and participation. For online access to information to be viable, awareness of the specific access needs and options for people with disability by netporn producers and designers is paramount, but regularly overlooked.

Historically, people with disability have been largely sheltered from all manner of sexual knowledge, material and even opportunities for healthy socio-sexual expression and engagements. Content which may be considered as very mildly erotic by a person who has had longer-term access to a rich range of sexual content, could in fact be powerfully exciting and arousing for another, less exposed person. Accordingly, I don't try to categorise or label netporn content in terms of art, erotica or porn, my focus is on equivalent levels of access for all across the gamut of sexual material from sex information and sexuality awareness, through to erotica and what might be termed hard porn.

This focus is supported at points in the article by anecdotal experiences from people with various disabilities and their challenges and successes with online erotic/pornographic consumption/engagements. The anecdotal data were gathered from various discussions and email correspondence I've had with a variety of people with disability, including some first-hand experiences of my own as a blind person. They throw light on various elements of people's personal sexual lives, their sexual desires and experiences, the channels they use for accessing and consuming content, and their subjective reporting of the impact of such technologies in their day-to-day lives. All case study references, including mine are anonymized, but all reflect real-life experiences and responses of the people who have so generously shared their personal experiences.

A variety of different disabilities are covered, but the greater focus is on netporn and people who are blind or vision impaired. One reason for this is because I believe that insufficient justice is given to the various non-visual aspects of porn and netporn, and certainly compared with physical disability, too little information exists which explores issues of blindness and sexuality. Finally, I feel it's particularly appropriate to write about material with which I have direct experience, rather than predominantly recycling existing theoretical concepts which exist elsewhere.

DISABILITY AND IMPAIRMENT- MODERN DISABILITY THEORY¹

Disability has largely been thought of as a deficient or terrible loss. The biomedical model of disability revolves around an image of people with disabilities as having bodies that need to be cured, fixed or at least treated and rehabilitated by expert and professional efforts of medical and health professionals, who — though they themselves usually do not have a disability — all-too-often believe they 'know best.' While the charitable approach to disability is gradually changing, it still is quite powerful, more often than not positioning people with disabilities as individuals deserving of pity, who should be assisted by caring, well-intentioned benefactors.

More contemporary approaches to disability significantly challenge these dominant and dominating classical understandings. Informed by the movement of people with disabilities that has arisen since the 1970s, disability is considered a socio-political process. This understanding of disability draws upon the ideas and work of what has been variously called 'new' or 'critical' disability studies. The central tenet of these studies is to radically call into question the fixed idea of disability and its location in 'deviant,' disabled individuals. In the British disability movement, activists and scholars such as sociologists

have famously proposed a binary opposition between ‘impairment’ and ‘disability.’ They suggest that impairment is the material, bodily dimension: the ‘objective’ sensory condition of blindness, for instance — as opposed to disability, which is what society makes of vision impairment.

The proponents of the social model point out that many of the difficulties and barriers people face are people-made and socially constructed. For example, if information technology is not designed with the desires and capabilities of people with disabilities in mind, then *it* can be disabling. Disability does not reside with, nor is not the fault of the person with disability; it is something brought about by an inequitable and even oppressive and careless set of social relations. This perspective is documented in a study entitled *Digital Disability: The Social Construction of Disability in New Media* (Goggin and Newell 2003). The study looks at how, time and time again, much vaunted ‘new’ technology is needlessly inaccessible to people with disabilities. The social model has been critiqued by a range of theorists who have pointed out the shifting and complex relationships between body and society, matter and idea, nature and culture that are not well explained by a fastidious adherence to this disability/impairment couplet (Corker and Shakespeare 2002).

DISABILITY AND SEXUALITY

There is a small, but growing body of literature examining disability and sexuality issues. This subject, with a focus on sexual access for people with disability, is explored in the 2002 fall issue of *Disability Studies Quarterly*. It is interesting to note that the focus for requested submissions was largely on issues such as facilitated sex, sexual surrogacy, sex work and the access opportunities of those disabled people residing in institutions and more structured living environments. Sensory disabilities (such as blindness and deafness) and access to online information were not strongly reflected in the journal.

The introduction of the *Quarterly* explains the problem well: “Obstacles interfering with access to sexual expression and sexual relationships are often quite similar to those barriers faced in attempting to integrate into the majority society. That is, attitudinal constraints, lack of monetary and/or programmatic access to personal assistance services, physical barriers, and communication issues and transportation difficulties can all contribute towards the prevention of full expression of sexuality. Unique to sexuality, however, are the cultural meanings of sexual attractiveness and desirability, which often combine with other barriers to compound the problem of sexual access for disabled people. By sexual access we do not mean access to physical intimacy per se. Rather, we mean access to the psychological, social and cultural contexts and supports that acknowledge, nurture and promote sexuality in general or disabled people’s sexuality specifically” (Shuttleworth and Mona 2002).

In a keynote closing speech written for the *Queerness and Disability Conference* 2002, Eli Clare says: “On my bookshelves, you can find *Best Transgender Erotica*, *Bea-rotica*, and *Zaftig: Well Rounded erotica*, all fiercely asserting the sexuality of people whose sexualities have been marginalised. And now it’s time for queer crips to join this

line up, time for tantalizing tales about queer crip sex. And if we don't write them, then who will?" (Clare 2002)

Google searches on the Internet glean a growing variety of educational materials and resources relating to disability and sexuality, ranging from handbooks on "Safeguarding People who use Augmentative and Alternative Communication" (for example those people using speech synthesizers to speak, as does Stephen Hawking);² to the articles found on the Good Vibrations website which explore the what and how of sex involving people with disabilities;³ and to dating sites such as lovebyrd.com: "For disables singles Lovebyrd.com is a place to meet single adult men and women who share your challenge, handicap, disability or condition. Visit the chat room to chat with members or visit the forums to read the discussions on love and sex — two subjects of interest to singles of any ability, as well as more serious discussions on disability health and other topics relevant to disabled women and men of adult age."⁴

DISABILITY, SEXUALITY AND TECHNOLOGY

It has been said that for every application of technology, a sexual application is found. "Observers say porn and technology work together so well because each meets the needs of the other" (Arlidge 2002). It can also be said that for every netporn development, there will be people with disability who will wish to participate in, or consume. This is because people with disability are a sub-set of the broader community, being made of all people. Disability (or impairment) may hinder what people with disability are able to do with independence or privacy, but it doesn't change the needs, wishes and desires of this group. Whether people with disability can do so in practice is one of the core themes explored in this article.

ACCESSIBILITY OF NETPORN VS. CLASSICAL PORN

"The major difference between Internet and other forms of pornography (magazines, videos and so on) is accessibility. It is no longer necessary to go in to a newsagent or join a mailing list in order to access pornographic images" (McKee, 2005:120). McKee is speaking of accessibility from the perspective of added convenience and timeliness. For people with disability the term accessibility has largely to do with whether the service can be accessed with independence. Therefore, access is one of the key issues for people with disability. Depending on the nature of the person's disability, access barriers can take one or both of at least two forms: access to the physical (built) environment and access to information. Access barriers in the physical environment may include steps, things out of reach-range, narrow or confined spaces, or objects which are difficult to manipulate e.g., buttons and controls on self-service point of sale devices, manipulating or turning the pages of a book etc.

Information access barriers are commonly experienced by people with sensory disabilities – blindness or deafness and by people with intellectual disability or cognitive impairments. For people who are blind or vision impaired, online developments coupled with developments in computer access allow fuller participation. Textual information,

which would normally be rendered to the computer screen, can be converted into synthetic speech, presented in large print on the display or accessed via hardware, generating real-time braille output. Web-based services can be designed to be more (or less) accessible, depending upon the conventions adopted, such as the WWW's Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG).⁵

A quite enlightening but completely satirical article about the online porn site implications of the UK's recent Disability Discrimination Act, highlights the challenge of true accessibility of the Internet, particularly considering how it is one of the few significantly profitable aspects of the web: "All the webmasters we spoke to remain unconvinced that there is any technology that would allow them to make images of 'cum-slurping sluts' accessible to the blind."⁶

SOCIAL EXCLUSION

People with disability may also experience increased social isolation, or lessened opportunities for diverse social engagement as well as not finding suitable opportunities for meeting casual or longer-term sexual partners. People with disability still can be, and certainly have been, sheltered from and have reduced exposure to sexual education and sexual content. This may be due to their decreased independence or the 'caring' environment they find themselves in, which results in reliance on others for daily activities.

Many people with disability are often treated as though they are not sexual beings. This is a fact, not an assertion. A disability doesn't remove an individual's curiosity about their own body and what it can be used for, nor does it limit imagination. Too frequently an unbalanced power dynamic involving the carer/institution is created with the individual who is the recipient, whether due to fears, projection of values, codes of ethical and professional conduct, or simply ignorance. Irrespective of the reasons for greater social exclusion and certainly acknowledging that societal attitudes do appear to be gradually changing for the better, it's these social and even unconscious practices which are the issue. I strongly argue that the paradigm shift from traditional porn distribution models, over to the openness of the Internet has the potential to be profoundly empowering, enlivening and satisfying for people with disability in general and particularly so for those who are still being socially disenfranchised and protected. The Internet, circumventing classical information gate-keepers as it does, is truly emancipating people with disabilities, socially, sexually and indeed in all aspects of daily life.

Netporn has the potential to enable many groups of people with disability to consume and engage in ways that were never possible or viable through classic porn forms. But in order for this to be achieved, thought and consideration of the access needs of a wider range of potential consumers — including people with disability — must become a key part of design, implementation and marketing for all relevant technologies and services.

INTERACTIVE ONLINE PARTICIPATION

There is now considerable literature examining gender and gender representation on the Internet: "If the Internet is a hostile environment for women, why are women one

of the fastest growing sectors of the population joining and participating in the Internet? Gender issues exist in all areas of computing. However, women have devised certain strategies in order to overcome many of the Internet's previous barriers."⁷

I would argue that similar parallels can be drawn between women and with people with disability on the web, even though their presence may not be that directly obvious. There are very few good estimates of the uptake of the Internet for people with disability, but in more developed countries technology and disability is an ever-expanding industry. Just as gender is less visible via the Internet, so too is disability. People with disability can decide how and when to expose their personal situation and behind their computers, they can and usually are appearing the same as everyone else. So, depending on the context and the medium, do they opt to explicitly disclose their disability or do they opt to 'pass' implicitly or explicitly as a person without a disability? Just as there were many women who via their computer assumed a male persona and vice versa, so too there are a vast number of people with disability who, largely through a marvellously telling assumption by others, would appear to in fact be non-disabled. In fact, while online, such people are indeed temporarily abled!

Dorian says, "I've been in three significant long-term relationships, and each of them started online. What I most liked about this kind of getting to know people was that I could have time off from my disability, and people got to know my personality, and my values, before they got to know about my disability. It wasn't that I hid it, but rather as is the case with my homosexuality, I could choose when and how to reveal it. I can't say whether these relationships would have developed and turned into real life ones, if I had been blind, at first contact, but I suspect that perhaps they would not have. Still, the downside was that I had to 'come out' about my blindness at some point, too early and I feared they would be scared off; too late, and they would feel inappropriately deceived! Nowadays, I bring it up earlier and earlier, perhaps because now I have a, so I am told, more cool photograph of myself where I don't particularly look blind, and I guess I'm just much less scared of rejection these days." (Conversations with the author, August 2005).

Jen is considered to be very attractive and gets a great buzz using her webcam to have erotic engagements with guys, not letting them know that she is almost totally blind. "I love the excitement and challenge of bluffing the body postures and presenting body language so well, that the guys don't realise it. I can see just enough to have some confidence I'm looking towards the camera. I think it also improves my self-confidence that in spite of being blind, guys find me appealing, and that my disability is only a small part of me. I'm also a bit addicted to voice chat over the computer, and it [their voice] gives me a much better sense about the men I'm connecting with." (Conversations with the author, March 2002).

Jen touches on a concept of portraying oneself online as the person one would aspire to be. In attempting to display more natural body language, mannerisms, head angle etc, she is actually learning and practicing a more natural involvement in social activities. Because many people with disability may have had less comfortable social experiences when growing up, and because (if blind) they don't have visual observation to model

from, online communication, whether dialogue through typing, voice or cameras, can lead to increased confidence and effectiveness in social engagements online, and inevitably in real life.

Dorian relates a situation in the late 1980s where he was text-chatting online with a guy for a couple of weeks, and had noted some slightly unusual linguistic constructs in the other's language, calling into question whether the guy was as old as he purported to be. "One day I asked him what kind of music he was into, only for him to say to me (a blind guy), 'Oh, well actually I'm deaf, I'd rather chat about what movies you are interested in?' We met later and he thought 'he can't read my lips; I can't understand a word he is saying.' I thought 'God, he stinks, and 'everyone' knows blind people have sensitive noses!'" (Extracted from MSN chat transcript with the author, September 2005). Interestingly, the computer had acted to diminish and largely overcome each person's respective disability, and allowed an interaction to develop which could never have, and indeed did not, work face-to-face.

Participation in text-based virtual environments like Lambda.moo allows the user to develop an online persona in the virtual environment. That persona can truly reflect the person, as they perceive themselves, or it can present the kind of person they would like to be or to become. Text-based virtual reality environments are somewhat like a cross between multi-user chat, and text-based adventure games. People who are connected can either interact with (type messages to) others currently connected, or they can manipulate virtual objects through special commands in the virtual space. Such text-based virtual reality environments are used for any or all of the following purposes: they can present environments for online collaboration and learning, facilitate learning about programming objects in the environment, for developing and sharpening social, communications and writing skills. In particular, they are locations where one can meet and engage with one or more people who may share interests. Such meetings may involve social or technical chat, can lead to fostering romance, or—very common in some of the environments—act as virtual venues for engaging in virtual sex (often termed netsex or tiny sex).

To get a sense of how environments such as lambda work, as well as some perspectives on virtual reality, object permanence, online addiction and 'net sex,' the lambda moo transcript as saved by Colin McCalmac (Samiam on Lambda) is a good starting point.⁸ For an example transcript of a net sex interaction between three members from an online community, and an anthropological deconstruction of the interaction, see Marshall (2003).

Cotton (his Lambda identity in the early-to-mid-1990s) writes, "I spent a ridiculous number of hours on Lambda. I chatted, explored, and searched for virtual sex partners. The cool thing was that on Lambda you even could have virtual clothes, and could Emote actions, as well as just speaking. As well as making some good friends, from all over, I also 'virtually' dated, snogged and got off virtually with several people in the lambda community. It was pretty cool, particularly because I could follow the lead of people more experienced with dating and courting rituals, and all the (normally visual) actions

were described in text. In real life, as a blind teenager, I had no romance, a bit of faltering play, but none of those first base, second base third base things, necking kissing, all of that stuff you see in the movies. Lambda was helping me regain a lost past, a past where my disability seemed to preclude everyday social/sexual experiences. I met a couple of my lambda friends in real life, sometime later, and was pleasantly surprised how they mostly matched my mental image of them” (Conversation with the author, August 2005).

Over the last fifteen or so years, some blind people and people with other disabilities have become regular users of telephone chat or so-called phone-dating services. This is partly because of the anonymity such services offer, and more particularly for blind people, because the human voice is a very natural medium to express themselves and through which to read the temperament of others. Now, some of these systems are also moving online, merging audio from PC users with existing telephone users, or offering streaming video as well as audio. These telephone services are covered in this article both because they are still one domain of network-based sexual engagement for people who can't afford or easily use a computer, and because they are essentially employing the ubiquitous telephone as an interactive voice response terminal driven by significantly advanced computer software to pass voice messages from user to user, in a near real-time fashion.

Emma says, “I've found phone lines great for me, I've chatted to some really interesting guys, and I've also worked as a phone-sex girl. I loved that! They never knew I couldn't see, they didn't need to, and I was a lot better than most of the other girls at knowing exactly where the guy was up to, just from his voice and breathing. I kind of read body language through their voice, that's a great asset in this line of work!” (Conversations with the author, 2004)

People with physical disabilities, who have reduced mobility, for example those who use wheelchairs, can experience major access challenges in independently and/or privately getting to bookshops, libraries and other locations where pornographic and erotic materials are available. In Australia, certainly, adult bookshops are secreted away often at the top of stairs or located in areas where sidewalks are potentially less well maintained. For this group parcels and mail are often collected by friends or family so there is less privacy, even for mail-order options. With motor skills reduced some people find it difficult or impossible to hold a physical book, or to turn its pages. Others find inserting and removing videocassettes can be problematic.

In the last twenty or so years, technology, and software and hardware options for enabling people with restricted motor control to interact with such technology have become quite well utilized. Alternatives to the computer 'mouse' and keyboards have allowed many people to engage with computers independently. Netporn offerings available online have allowed this group to find and select images, streaming video, interact with others through webcams and text/voice chat etc, privately and independently.

David uses a wheelchair and is a frequent user of telephone chat services. “I'm in a sort of OK (real—life) relationship, but it is a bit unsatisfactory on the sexual side. Because it's not really cheating, I like the phone lines—I like to talk to other guys about sex, have phone sex, and fantasise about meeting up, but never have. It's inconvenient for me

to travel places, and because of my disability on one hand, and my seriously gym-built upper body, on the other, I am very memorable and well known around the place, so the anonymity of online chat is the best way for me to be discrete and no one is getting hurt. Because I never plan to really meet them, I don't see why I need tell them that I am six feet tall (only when out of my wheelchair). And the other thing is that it's nice to have some anonymity, some privacy, a break from all the endless questions about 'how do you do this,' etc., which I often get" (Phone conversation with the author, 1994).

People who are Blind or who have Reduced Vision. A colleague of mine was providing computer access training assistance to a man in his thirties who had recently lost his sight through an accident. One of the first questions he privately asked her was: "So, are there any porn sites online for the blind?" He then told her that seeing women, intimacy, sex and girly magazines were the things he missed and wanted most since his vision loss. While he will not be able to see images and actions on videos, he will be able to use his computer to access a variety of materials, formerly only available in print. Erotic stories, online chat, dating sites and net sex will all be options he can consume, and as we have already heard, this could lead to a real-life connection. People who are blind are arguably one of the groups most enabled by online netporn developments, certainly textual and voice-based ones, as compared to past options for access. Though porn is classically associated with visual still or moving images, it does have many other forms, and with anticipated developments in virtual reality, audio description and voice, its enablement could continue to increase for people who cannot see.

EROTICA, SEXUAL CONTENT AND CENSORSHIP

Implicit and explicit censorship has long been a concern to people who are blind. This largely stemmed from the nature of the people or organisations who transcribed printed material into braille or who made it available in audio. The large majority of these people were well intentioned but sometimes biased volunteers, donating their time to make 'important' information available to the blind. Religious material, classics, and educational materials were the most commonly produced. Romances and family-friendly adventure titles are also very popular.

Take a book like Frederick Forsyth's *Day of the Jackal*, two recorded versions: One studio read and complete, the other read by an older volunteer in Tasmania, Australia (which somehow had five paragraphs missing, relating to a (relatively tame by today's standards) passionate night of lovemaking). An extraordinary coincidence, perhaps, but not uncommon for the time.

The Braille edition of *Playboy* (produced by the National Library Service of the Library of Congress) was discontinued in the sixties due to 'funding cuts' until complaints lead to its reinstatement. It was commonly believed at the time that this was a moral, not a funding decision. Of course, only the articles were Brailled, the pictures not really being possible to produce in accessible and meaningful form.

TRANSCRIPTION AND DESCRIPTION OF PORNOGRAPHIC CONTENT

While tactile diagrams have been produced for anatomy texts and sex education materials, the kinds of images found in erotic and pornographic materials are not really expressible in tactile form, nor would the subtleties be necessarily understood in the tactile medium.

Technologies, such as SMIL, and other multimedia standards for film production now exist so that audio description and text captioning can appear along-side the visual and regular audio tracks of online and DVD movies. While these technologies could be used to add extra value to netporn materials, I am not, however, aware of any porn equipped with descriptive soundtracks for people who are blind. Moaning, screaming and distorted deep breathing don't really tell the entire story, especially when they often are not even synchronized with the 'action' on screen. With regards to an audio described porn movie, the closest I've personally got to experience one was at an unplanned after-dinner viewing of a new porn DVD, where two — not entirely sober — dinner-guests did quite an admirable job of bringing the quieter parts of the action to life, with their magnificently expansive and colourful verbal descriptions of the stars, their assets and their antics. This real-time live audio description was certainly considerably more informative and pleasant on the ear than was the monotone narration from the main star, who was obviously selected for something other than his talent for narration!

Erotic literature in print form was difficult or impossible for blind people to access historically, unless they could find a person who was prepared to read the material to them. The Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) estimates that only 3-5 percent of printed information is ever made available in formats accessible to people who are blind or vision impaired. (Kavanagh 2002) and of this, it is a certainty that only a minuscule fraction of a percent of all the erotic literature in print is made available.

COMPUTER-MEDIATED INFORMATION ACCESS

The Internet has indeed opened a world to people who are blind containing vast quantities of textual erotica, whether from newsgroups dedicated to the subject, special interest archives like www.nifty.org, or found on some commercial sites. This material is diverse, and ranges from light reading, through to very specific fetishes and genres. In recent decades, print-scanning optical character recognition technology, when combined with text-to-speech synthesizers has meant that hither-to unavailable printed material can be scanned, converted to text, and read in Braille or spoken aloud by a synthetic voice.

Erotica, as I am sure you can imagine, is not something that is brought most fully to life when read by a robotic computer voice, where the pace of reading and the inflections are perfectly consistent throughout. But, erotically enlightened blind people will tell you the world-over, when compared to no erotic material being available at all the synthetic speech versions can do pretty damn well, when no better alternatives are available. Nevertheless, it takes some time for listeners to initially acclimatise themselves to the nuances of their computer's synthetic voice. However, over time, for most listeners, the voices' unnatural characteristics move further into the shadows, much like a speaker's accent becomes less noticeable as familiarity by the listener increases. That is to say, the

message conveyed in the words, progressively becomes less tainted by the constraints of the medium of a synthetic voice. If, curious reader, you want to ‘see’ porn as I do, then I invite you to listen to a *short erotic story read out via synthetic speech* with permission by the author, Agave. Proudly and sizzingly read out loud by IBM’s ViaVoice speech synthesiser. Online at: www.timnoonan.com.au/PornAsISeeIt.mp3.

More recently, particularly with the flourishing area of Podcasting and audio on the web, there is erotica available in the spoken word form, read by real people, which adds a whole new dimension to the listening experience. One highly popular example is some of the erotica readings by Violet Blue, as found on her Tiny Nibbles website, even enhanced with occasional sound-effects such as locking of chains and ‘bottom-smacking’ as heard in her podcast open source sex 04.mp3.⁹ In recent months an erotica exchange list serve has recently been set up for people who are blind at eroticaforblind-subscribe@yahoo.com and the following message was recently posted to my blindness and technology list-serve, vip-l: “Erotica for the Sight Impaired. We are a company which produces tasteful, non-violent erotica. We would like to correspond with sight-impaired people who have an interest in this area to help us plan a new web site. Questions we have include: What is out there now for the sight impaired? How can it be improved? What conventional erotica is there which interests the sight impaired? What is erotic for you in your sphere of senses? If you are interested send an email to jessica@feck.com.au.”

CONCLUSION

To date, netporn has had a significant impact on people with disability and particularly people who are blind or vision impaired. That impact has been on the one hand unplanned and largely unthought-of inclusion and on the other often unnecessary and even careless exclusion from participation. We can’t change the past but we do have an opportunity to architect a more inclusive and participatory online future for everyone.

But as long as researchers, entrepreneurs, designers and marketers of netporn persist in thinking of people with disability as a group set-apart from everyone else, those in the netporn industry will remain destined to design sites and services which are unnecessarily crippled, myopic and flawed.

Adherence to open standards, accessibility guidelines, and interoperability, all contribute to services which are more likely to be accessible. It’s not just a case of specially designing for specific disabilities; it’s more about designing content and services which are accessible to a diverse range of people, with diverse capabilities and limitations. I am not particularly advocating creating ‘special services for The Disabled’; but rather am encouraging the development of well-designed services for all, as broadly as possible.

More research — both industry and academic — is clearly called for in the emerging and flourishing domain we term netporn; research into the needs, desires and interests of people with disability with respect to access and participation in erotic and pornographic content. This will not only serve those of us with disability, it will — just as importantly — enhance both the quality and the usability of netporn services for us all!

NOTES

- 1 The following three paragraphs are based on collaborative writing between Dr. Gerard Goggin and the author. They are part of a chapter for a book examining blogging and disability.
- 2 See www.aacsafeguarding.ca/resources-sexhealthk&saac.htm.
- 3 See www.goodvibes.com.
- 4 See www.lovebyrd.com.
- 5 Available from www.w3.org/WAI.
- 6 See www.utterpants.co.uk/news/sex/pornweb.html.
- 7 See <http://socserv2.mcmaster.ca/soc/courses/stpp4C03/ClassEssay/index2.htm>.
- 8 Available on www.ibiblio.org/pub/academic/communications/parc/contrib/DarkSideOfVR.txt.
- 9 From <http://www.tinynibbles.com>.

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REPORT ON THE LOCATION OF THE INTERNET ADULT INDUSTRY

Matthew Zook

INTRODUCTION

My research shows that the Internet adult industry is a globalized industry. Less than half of the free adult websites are located in the United States, and this share has declined since 2001. A conservative estimate places 32 percent of adult membership websites, and 58 percent of free adult websites outside of the United States. In all likelihood, the percentage of websites outside of the United States is higher than the figures presented here, for several reasons discussed below. Furthermore, there appears to be a steady diffusion of this industry away from the United States to other countries. Although there are a number of reasons for the global distribution of the Internet adult industry, three factors—regulation, low barriers to entry, and the diffusion of Internet use—have played leading roles in shaping the location of the Internet adult industry. These three factors offer a combination of push and pull incentives for the migration of the Internet adult industry out of the United States.

DEFINING THE INTERNET ADULT INDUSTRY

The Internet adult industry is difficult to define as it includes products with offline counterparts, e.g., images and video, as well as those without any offline equivalent, e.g., interactive video chatrooms. Therefore, rather than using an arbitrary definition of the Internet adult industry and seeking websites that fit it, this report first accesses existing indices of adult websites (found via the Google search engine), and defines the industry by what is listed in these indices. Based on this data, this report defines the Internet adult industry as adult-oriented websites that are accessible to the entire Internet community and offer adult images, audio, video, text, and chat to visitors. The majority of these web-

sites are commercially driven.

The definition used in this report does not include important distribution channels such as newsgroups, bulletin board services (BBS), and peer-to-peer systems of exchange. While these outlets are important to the online adult industry, they are difficult to capture using this report's methodology and often involve the exchange of images or conversations by individuals. This report does not account for illegal Internet activities such as child pornography or prostitution.¹

Throughout this report, the terms webpage and website are used. Webpage refers to a single webpage available on the Internet, e.g., www.domain.com/page1.html or www.domain.com/page2.html. Website refers to the domain name associated with a webpage, e.g., domain.com, and is under the control of a single individual or organization. A website can contain any number of webpages.

STRUCTURE OF THE INTERNET ADULT INDUSTRY

Although standard economic data sources provide no data on the Internet adult industry, it is possible to outline a general schematic of the industry based on secondary sources (Lane, 2000; Franson, 1998; Glidewell, 2000; Perdue, 2001; Rose, 1997; Rosoff, 1999) as well as materials posted on resource websites for would-be adult webmasters. Three geographically relevant and measurable components of the Internet adult industry include: (1) the creation of content for the industry; (2) the creation and maintenance of websites to distribute content; and (3) the hosting of websites. These activities are easily separated (both organizationally and geographically) from one another. This report outlines the structure of all three but focuses on the location of free and membership websites.

CONTENT CREATION

Although the Internet makes it possible for anyone to distribute adult content, it appears that a relatively small number of suppliers provide the bulk of the material to adult websites. Klein (1998) notes that creating original content is "Relatively easy to do... [but] relatively hard to do well." Estimates suggest that "90 percent of free porn [web] sites, and nearly all pay porn [web] sites, buy their material rather than create it themselves." (Rosoff, 1999). This is particularly true for video streaming and live interaction that requires expensive equipment and facilities. Much of the video and interactive offerings are reportedly generated from a small number of locations and then licensed to other websites (Rose, 1997). Obtaining content is described as the least expensive component of operating an adult website. Franson (1998) suggests that the cost for a website's content is less than five percent of its total budget, as most of the budget is associated with hosting expenses, i.e., paying for the bandwidth for the transmission of content.

WEBSITES – FREE AND MEMBERSHIP

Adult websites on the Internet can be categorized into two groups: free or feeder websites and membership websites. Membership websites require a payment (generally a recurring monthly subscription paid via credit card) to access their materials. Member-

ship websites offer affiliate programs that pay free websites for surfers who are sent to the membership website and subsequently sign up for a membership. Rosoff (1999) reports that according to the "...YNOT Adult Network, free [web] sites comprise between 70 and 80 percent of the adult material out there. These [web] sites are used as "bait" for pay [web] sites and make their money by successfully guiding viewers to premium services on other [web] sites." Free Internet adult websites have become increasingly prevalent over time (Shreve, 2001) and offer free pictures amidst a maze of banners and pop-up windows that direct visitors to membership websites. These websites are relatively easy to establish. Franson (1998) estimates that a few thousands dollars (and in some cases much less) is all that is required to start one.

This low barrier to entry has allowed many individuals to actively participate in the industry regardless of location. In particular, the low demands of running free websites make them particularly susceptible to re-location out of the United States. In fact, data presented later in this report suggests that this diffusion to off-shore locations has been steadily progressing since 1997.

While free adult websites comprise the largest number of adult websites on the Internet, they do not contain the bulk of adult materials (images, video, etc.). Material on these websites is often replicated on other websites and is designed to direct users to membership websites. These membership websites are the source of revenue for the industry and are able to attract paying customers by offering a greater quantity and quality of materials than the free websites. Thus, while smaller in overall numbers, these websites contain the bulk of images and video available online.

HOSTING

The final component of the Internet adult industry is the location of the computer upon which the website is actually hosted. Because of large bandwidth requirements, companies specializing in the adult industry, rather than traditional hosting services, generally host adult websites. Hosting options range from free hosting locations that come with a large amount of advertising to starter hosting packages that offer shared hosting for \$50 to \$100 dollars a month. Because traffic to adult websites can build quickly, hosting is generally the most significant cost to websites. Rosoff (1999) points out that "A couple thousand users grabbing one or two high-quality images adds up to at least two gigabytes per month."

It is precisely these hosting costs that make the paid membership websites essential to the functioning of a commercial Internet adult industry. The more content that is downloaded from a website, the higher consumption of bandwidth which ultimately must be paid for. Without paid memberships, the Internet adult industry could not pay for the bandwidth that it consumes.

OVERALL SIZE OF THE INTERNET ADULT INDUSTRY

Even with a sense of its overall structure, it is difficult to obtain accurate figures on the size and revenues of the adult industry either off- or on-line. Rough estimates suggest

that the percentage of adult material on the Internet is very small, ranging from less than 1 percent (2001 and 2005 estimates) to 1.5 percent (1999 estimate) (Zook, 2003; Adams, 2005; Lawrence and Giles, 1999).

However, it is difficult to determine the reliability of such estimates, which are determined by comparing the number of web pages returned for keyword searches from a search engine to the total number of webpages indexed. For example, keyword searches for terms like “porn” or “xxx” return a number of non-adult webpages in the top ten results, including a Vegan informational website called “VeganPorn” and more than one website for the 2002 Vin Diesel movie titled *xXx*.

Nevertheless, it is clear that adult web sites are an extremely small percentage of material on the Internet and may be becoming an increasingly smaller percentage as the Internet becomes more widely adopted in the United States and globally. Such a decline would likely be tied to increased levels of other Internet based activities, e.g., e-commerce, e-government, etc., as well as the increasingly diverse demographics of Internet users.

SURVEYING THE INTERNET ADULT INDUSTRY

It is possible to leverage geographically meaningful data based on the domain names of websites to construct a picture of the Internet adult industry’s presence inside and outside of the United States.

CONSTRUCTING A DATABASE OF ADULT WEBSITES

The first step in the process is the generation of a list of websites associated with the Internet adult industry. Rather than attempting to capture the complete population of websites, indices and directories of adult webpages that are readily identifiable and available on the Internet to an English speaking user are utilized. These webpages, e.g., <http://www.domain.com/page1.html> or <http://www.domain.com/page2.html>, were aggregated to the level of websites, e.g., domain.com. The total websites for each index are provided in Table 1. Although the resulting database is much smaller than the likely total population of such websites, it nonetheless provides a reasonable sample of the websites that an English-speaking Internet user would likely encounter.

Four different indices of adult websites that reflect different types of free and membership websites were used to construct a database of Internet adult industry websites. In order to provide as much continuity as possible to earlier research (Zook, 2003), previously identified indices were used for this report.² The indices are as follows:

- Adultreviews.net describes itself as “an independent [web] site aiming to give our visitors some advice about adult websites.” It further lists its mission as providing “reviews of a wide variety of adult pay [web] sites.” This focus on reviewing pay websites that users might wish to join indicates that it is a good source of Paid Membership websites.
- Google (Membership & Non-Membership Websites) provides a listing of webpages by topic via the GoogleDirectory (<http://directory.google.com/Top/Adult/>). These listings are based on the DMOZ Open Directory report which describes itself as “the

largest, most comprehensive human-edited directory of the Web. It is constructed and maintained by a vast, global community of volunteer editors.” Anyone can submit a website for inclusion in the directory, but it is categorized and placed by a human editor. Google Directory also makes a clear distinction between Membership and Non-Membership websites.

- Adultwebmasters.org is a website that seeks to provide operators of adult websites with services (such as sources for content and suggestions for vendors for website hosting) and the ability to network with one another. It also provides a listing of websites that are reported to be membership websites. It appears, however, that there is little filtering of these websites, thus making it impossible to determine whether the websites listed are paid membership, free or a mixture of both.
- Sextracker.com is run by Flying Crocodile, Inc. and provides webpage rankings for Internet adult websites (both free and membership). In this report all websites not listed as free were collected. However, it is unclear how reliable this distinction is, making it impossible to determine whether the websites listed are paid membership, free or a mixture of both.

Table 1. Summary of Source of Adult Websites Used in Report

| Type of Websites | Date | Source | Websites |
|------------------|----------|----------------------------------|----------|
| Paid | Feb-2006 | Adultreviews.net | 426 |
| Paid | Feb-2006 | Google (Membership) ³ | 1,253 |
| Free | Feb-2006 | Google (Non-Membership) | 6,193 |
| Mixed | Feb-2006 | Adultwebmasters.org | 336 |
| Mixed | Feb-2006 | Sextracker.com | 4,143 |

This data was collected in February 2006 and is based on computer programs (web spiders) designed to collect all the domains that are linked from a particularly webpage index. A total of 11,921 unique domain names were gathered for this research. Only 414 domains appear in more than one of the datasets indicating that each index represents a different constellation of Internet adult industry activity.

Because the Google (Membership and Non-Membership websites) and Sextracker.com (Membership website) indices were also used to gather data in 2001 (see Zook, 2003) it is possible to make comparisons with these three datasets over time.

LIMITATIONS OF THE DATABASE

First, this database (i.e., the five combined datasets) represents a sample of adult oriented websites on the Internet rather than a complete census. This sample is based on indices that are readily available to an Internet user conducting Google searches in English for adult materials.

The second (and much more significant) limitation of this database is the language used in this generation of websites. Searches for adult website indices were conducted via Google.com from a location in the United States rather than alternative portals specifically designed for different countries such as Google.de (Germany) or Google.fr (France). Moreover, the search terms used were in English. Although English is the *de-facto* language of the Internet, there is an increasing presence of non-English speaking users and non-English web content. Internet WorldStats (2006) estimates that speakers of English as a first language represent only 30.6 percent of Internet users. Because I have used only English indices, the database of websites is shaded towards English speaking countries such as the United States.

This shading of the database is particularly apparent in the case of German content on the Internet. A brief examination of the top adult websites found via the Google.de website revealed a number of prominently ranked German websites (i.e., 3211iebe.de, ab18frei.de, x-check.de, pporno.de, sex.de, xlook.de) that are not in the database generated for this report. Moreover, an examination of the top level domains (TLD) of domains included in the database reveals that the number of .de domains is much smaller than the total number of .de domains in existence. For example, the .de TLD is the second largest TLD on the Internet (after .com), representing 10 percent of all Internet domains, but only represents 0.3 percent of domains in the report database (See Table 2). Although a .de domain need not be registered to someone located in Germany, the

| TLD | Share of Domains in Database | Share of Total Domains, December 2005 | Difference |
|---------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------------|------------|
| com | 87.0% | 49.1% | 37.9 |
| net | 7.2% | 7.2% | (0.0) |
| org | 1.3% | 4.4% | (3.2) |
| ws (Western Samoa) | 0.5% | 0.2% | 0.3 |
| biz | 0.4% | 1.4% | (0.9) |
| us (United States) | 0.4% | 1.0% | (0.6) |
| info | 0.4% | 2.6% | (2.2) |
| nl (Netherlands) | 0.3% | 1.9% | (1.6) |
| de (Germany) | 0.3% | 10.0% | (9.7) |
| tv (Tuvalu) | 0.3% | 0.2% | 0.1 |
| uk (United Kingdom) | 0.3% | 4.9% | (4.6) |

Table 2. Distribution of Domains in Report Database by TLD⁵

overwhelming majority of .de domains are held by individuals or firms located there (Krymalowski, 2000).⁴

While German is the most striking example, a number of other language-TLD combinations (French-.fr, Dutch-.nl, and Italian-.it) are also under-represented in the database relative to their Internet presence more generally. While the exact extent of this bias towards English-speaking countries is impossible to measure, it is evidently significant. Therefore, the results of this report should be interpreted accordingly, i.e., there is an over-sampling of websites from English speaking countries such as the United States. As a result the United States share of Internet adult industry websites is likely inflated.

LOCATING THE INTERNET ADULT INDUSTRY

The location of the company or individual that registered a domain name is based on the information returned on a whois query as outlined by Zook (2000, 2001).⁶ Figure 1 illustrates the result of a whois query for nytimes.com. The Registrant information listed indicates the individual or organization which registered and owns the domain and its address. This address information is used in determining the location of a website. Although there is no guarantee that the registration address for a domain name and the actual location of the makers of the website is the same, I have shown in previous work (Zook, 2001) that there is a strong correlation between the two.

Whois data was successfully gathered for 94.2 percent of the 11,921 domains in the database. The 5.8 domains without whois data include: (1) domains that are no longer registered (1.4 percent); (2) domains in TLDs that do not provide whois information, e.g., .tv (1.0 percent); and (3) domains without geographical identifiers within the whois information (3.4 percent). All three types of missing whois information are aggregated

Registrant:
The New York Times Company
229 West 43d Street
229 West 43d Street
New York, NY 10036
US

Domain Name: NYTIMES.COM

Figure 1. Sample *Whois* record, NYTIMES.com.

and presented in this report as “Not Placed.”

One characteristic of the whois data is the use of whois proxy services. Many domain name registrars (e.g., GoDaddy or ItsYourDomain) offer customers whois proxy services that allow one to substitute a registrar’s location for the customer’s. Within the domain name data there are approximately 374 domains which are making use of this proxy service. As a result, 90 percent of these domains are listed as being located in the United States based on the location of the registrar rather than the location of the individual or organization which owns the domain. These registrars are overwhelmingly based in the United States. If these domains were removed, the United States share would drop. However, I have chosen to leave these domains in the dataset despite the known bias towards the United States, which increases the United States share of the Internet adult industry.

The combination of these factors — (1) the English language bias towards the United States and (2) the whois proxy bias towards the United States — means that the figures presented in this report represent the likely maximum percentage of Internet adult websites located in the United States. In all likelihood, the percentage of websites in the United States is lower than the figures presented here.

MIGRATION OF THE INTERNET ADULT INDUSTRY FROM THE UNITED STATES

Because of the role of the United States as the original location of the Internet, the diffusion from it is a good indicator of how quickly an Internet activity is dispersing to the rest of the world. Table 3 shows the percentage of the top 100 websites for seven different categories located in the United States from 1997 to 2000. It shows that 79 percent of the most visited adult websites were located in the United States in 1997. Three years later the United States share of top adult websites had declined to 58 percent.

Table 3. Percentage of 100 Most Visited Websites Located in the United States⁷

| Category | Jul 1997 | Oct 1999 | Jan 2000 | Oct 2000 |
|--------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Top 100 (All categories) | 94 | 90 | 87 | 86 |
| Shopping | 86 | 97 | 93 | 94 |
| Finance | 75 | 85 | 87 | 89 |
| News | 67 | 66 | 65 | 72 |
| Sports | 70 | 79 | 77 | 75 |
| Adult | 79 | 68 | 64 | 58 |
| Gambling | n/a | 67 | 52 | 39 |

A key observation from this table is that the category most likely to involve the shipment of a physical item, shopping, remained the category that was most highly concentrated in the United States where the largest number of Internet users and shoppers are located. Other types of websites such as news or sports were more dispersed to begin with and did not change much over time. In contrast, adult and gambling websites exhibited a steady diffusion from the United States during the late 1990s and by 2000 had become the most

highly dispersed activities on the Internet. Although later time series data is not available it seems reasonable (given the diffusion of other Internet metrics, i.e., users, domains, hosts, etc. from the United States) that this trend would be continuing.

CURRENT UNITED STATES SHARE OF THE INTERNET ADULT INDUSTRY

The whois information for domains in the database provides a look at the distribution of membership and free websites around the world. Of particular interest is the percentage of websites located within the United States.

The percentage of websites alone, however, does not tell the entire story; it is also of interest whether particular countries are more focused than others on adult Internet activities as a measure of total Internet activities. Countries that actively use the Internet will have larger shares of all types of Internet activity. To control for this, Tables 4 through 9 standardize a country's presence in the Internet adult industry with the number of domain names registered in that country. This measure, the Domain Name Ratio, divides a country's share of adult websites by its share of all domains (gTLD and ccTLD) worldwide in December 2005. The source of this data is my ongoing domain industry research of which an overview is available at ZookNIC (see www.zooknic.com). A value greater than 1.0 indicates that the country has a stronger presence in the Internet adult industry than on the Internet in general.

The data summarized in Table 4 represents the distribution of all 11,921 websites in the database. It shows that less than half of all domains in the report database are located in the United States. As discussed earlier, 5.8 percent of the domains in the dataset were not placed in a country. In addition to considering the overall distribution of domains from the dataset it is helpful to consider each data source as each represents a different component of the Internet adult industry. This table shows that the United States has a 47.2 percent share of the Internet adult industry.

The data in Table 4 also shows that the United States is not as specialized (based on its domain name ratio) as many comparable countries. For example, Canada and Australia, both English speaking countries with similar Internet infrastructures and per capita incomes, are more specialized than the United States in the Internet adult industry. The United States has a 1.23 domain name ratio compared to 2.85 for Canada and 1.89 for Australia.

| Country | Share | DN Ratio |
|--------------------|--------------|-----------------|
| United States | 47.2% | 1.23 |
| Canada | 8.5% | 2.85 |
| United Kingdom | 4.4% | 0.52 |
| Australia | 3.7% | 1.89 |
| Netherlands | 3.6% | 1.32 |
| Germany | 1.9% | 0.14 |
| Russian Federation | 1.8% | 2.69 |
| Cook Islands | 1.6% | 283.06 |
| Spain | 1.5% | 1.00 |
| Poland | 1.3% | 2.28 |
| Rest of World | 18.7% | |
| Not Placed | 5.8% | |

Table 4: Global Distribution of All Internet Adult Websites, 2006⁸

PAID MEMBERSHIP WEBSITES

The AdultReview data on paid membership websites (n=426) presented in Table 5 shows that the United States share is significantly higher (64.1 percent) than in the aggregated data (47.2 percent). The domain name ratio (1.67) also shows that the United States has a relatively higher share of these membership websites than its general Internet presence would suggest. However, the United States's relative share is significantly lower than Canada (2.82), the Netherlands (1.88), Aruba (338.57), the Czech Republic (3.39) and Antigua and Barbuda (16.87) which are highly specialized by this measure of adult membership websites. Also of interest is the small domain name ratio for France (0.57), which is likely tied to the English-language bias in the dataset.

The Google membership data (n=1,253) located in Table 6 also represents paid membership websites. However, the threshold for listing in this index is perhaps less stringent than that of the AdultReview data. Nevertheless, in comparison to the AdultReview data, the United States contains a similar percentage of membership websites (68.5 percent) and has a similar domain name ratio (1.78). Again, a few small off-shore locations (Antigua and Barbuda, Saint Kitts and Nevis, and Cyprus) have extremely high domain name ratios indicating a high specialization by this measure of the Internet adult industry.

The Google Membership data is also comparable across time and indicates a slight decrease in the United States's share of these websites (from 70.4 percent to 68.5 percent). The decline, however, is relatively small. Also interesting is the increase in the domain name ratio from 1.65 to 1.78. This suggests that the United States has become slightly more specialized in paid membership websites.

| Country | Share | DN Ratio |
|---------------------|--------------|-----------------|
| United States | 64.1% | 1.67 |
| Canada | 8.5% | 2.82 |
| Netherlands | 5.2% | 1.88 |
| United Kingdom | 4.2% | 0.50 |
| Aruba | 2.1% | 338.57 |
| Australia | 1.6% | 0.83 |
| Czech Republic | 1.2% | 3.39 |
| France | 1.2% | 0.57 |
| Russian Federation | 0.9% | 1.43 |
| Antigua and Barbuda | 0.7% | 16.87 |
| Rest of World | 8.2% | |
| Not Placed | 2.1% | |

Table 5: Global Distribution of AdultReviews Paid Membership Websites, 2006

MIXED: PAID MEMBERSHIP AND FREE WEBSITES

The distribution of websites from AdultWebmasters is outlined in Table 7. Although AdultWebmasters lists these websites as membership websites there appears to be little filtering of these websites, thus making it impossible to determine whether these websites are paid membership, free or (most likely) a mixture of both. Certain “off-shore” locations (Cayman Islands, Russian Federation, Panama, Czech Republic) exhibit extremely high domain name ratios suggesting a relatively strong role in the Internet adult industry.

A second source of mixed websites is the Sextracker data located in Table 8. In this case the United States share is significantly lower (46.3 percent) than its share in the previous three sources. The United States domain name ratio is also lower. Again, an increasingly familiar group of countries (Russian Federation, Czech Republic and the Philippines) represent a system of “off-shore” Internet locations that are highly specialized by this measure. Also interesting to note is the very small domain name ratio for Germany (0.14), also replicated in Table 6 and Table 9, that can perhaps be attributed to the English-language bias of the data discussed earlier. It is also possible to look at the Sextracker data over time which indicates a sizable drop of 5.2 percent in the United States share from 2001 to 2006. The domain name ratio, however, remains the same.

An interesting comparison between the distribution of the membership websites data (Tables 5 and 6) and the mixed websites data (Tables 7 and 8) is the lower percentage of websites located in the United States indicated for the mixed data. This could be tied to the inclusion of free websites in the mixed data which are more likely to be located overseas and thus diluting the United States share.

| Country | 2001 | | 2006 | | Change in Share 2001 to 2006 |
|-----------------------|-------|----------|-------|----------|---------------------------------|
| | Share | DN Ratio | Share | DN Ratio | |
| United States | 70.4% | 1.65 | 68.5% | 1.78 | -1.9% |
| United Kingdom | 3.4% | 0.27 | 4.4% | 0.52 | 1.0% |
| Canada | 8.5% | 2.43 | 4.4% | 1.47 | -4.1% |
| Netherlands | 2.1% | 0.88 | 3.4% | 1.25 | 1.3% |
| Australia | 1.8% | 1.38 | 2.7% | 1.37 | 0.9% |
| Germany | 0.6% | 0.06 | 1.2% | 0.09 | 0.6% |
| Antigua and Barbuda | 1.0% | 19.29 | 0.7% | 17.21 | -0.3% |
| Saint Kitts and Nevis | 0.2% | 20.83 | 0.7% | 35.26 | 0.5% |
| Sweden | 0.4% | 0.58 | 0.6% | 0.71 | 0.2% |
| Cyprus | 0.1% | 2.08 | 0.6% | 15.18 | 0.5% |
| Rest of World | 11.0% | | 8.9% | | |
| Not Placed | 0.4% | | 3.9% | | |

Table 6: Global Distribution of Google Paid Membership Adult Websites, 2001 and 2006

| Country | Share | DN Ratio |
|--------------------|-------|----------|
| United States | 59.5% | 1.55 |
| United Kingdom | 6.5% | 0.78 |
| Canada | 4.2% | 1.39 |
| Cayman Islands | 2.4% | 8.44 |
| Russian Federation | 1.8% | 2.71 |
| Panama | 1.2% | 9.03 |
| Switzerland | 1.2% | 1.02 |
| Czech Republic | 1.2% | 3.44 |
| Spain | 1.2% | 0.79 |
| Netherlands | 1.2% | 0.43 |
| Rest of World | 8.6% | |
| Not Placed | 11.0% | |

Table 7: Global Distribution of AdultWebmasters Adult Websites, 2006

FREE WEBSITES

The final metric for free websites (see Table 9) is the one for which the United States has its lowest share (42.3 percent). This contrasts significantly to the membership websites and is tied to the low-cost and the ease in which one can set up these websites. Free websites also appear to be dispersing out of the United States at the highest rate. The United States share of free websites dropped from 59.8 percent to 42.3 percent (a decline of 17.5 percent) from 2001 to 2006. Tied to this decline in the United States share is the corresponding decline in the domain name ratio from 1.41 to 1.10 suggesting that the United States is becoming less specialized in the provision of free Internet adult websites.

| Country | 2001 | | 2006 | | Change in Share 2001 to 2006 |
|--------------------|-------|----------|-------|----------|---------------------------------|
| | Share | DN Ratio | Share | DN Ratio | |
| United States | 51.5% | 1.21 | 46.3% | 1.21 | -5.2% |
| Canada | 9.8% | 2.81 | 6.2% | 2.05 | -3.6% |
| Netherlands | 2.6% | 1.07 | 4.7% | 1.70 | 2.1% |
| United Kingdom | 1.9% | 0.15 | 3.5% | 0.42 | 1.7% |
| Russian Federation | 2.2% | 9.02 | 2.7% | 4.14 | 0.6% |
| Philippines | 0.2% | 2.16 | 1.9% | 13.68 | 1.7% |
| Australia | 1.9% | 1.43 | 1.9% | 0.94 | 0.0% |
| Germany | 1.8% | 0.17 | 1.9% | 0.14 | 0.1% |
| Spain | 1.1% | 0.99 | 1.4% | 0.91 | 0.3% |
| Czech Republic | 0.5% | 1.98 | 1.3% | 3.77 | 0.8% |
| Rest of World | 20.5% | | 19.9% | | |
| Not Placed | 6.2% | | 8.5% | | |

Table 8: Global Distribution of Sextracker Adult Websites, 2001 and 2006

COMPARING PAID MEMBERSHIP AND FREE WEBSITES

Due to the fact that Google is a source for data on both membership and free websites, it is possible to compare these two groups directly. Figure 2 shows that 58 percent of free adult websites are located outside of the United States, as compared to 32 percent of paid membership adult websites.

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE DIFFUSION OF ADULT WEBSITES OUTSIDE OF THE UNITED STATES

Although there are a number of reasons for the distribution of the Internet adult industry outlined in this report, three factors—regulation, low barriers to entry, and the diffusion of Internet use—have played leading roles in shaping the geography of the Internet adult industry. These factors offer a combination of incentives that push away from the United States and pull towards other countries, diffusing the Internet adult industry out of United States and into more peripheral nodes.

REGULATION

The effect of regulation is seen most strongly in the case of Internet gambling where there are relatively clear-cut laws prohibiting Internet gambling websites in the United States, and as a result it is the most diffused Internet activity (See Table 3 and Wilson, 2003). Similarly, many of the most specialized locations in the Internet adult industry are tied to places that offer havens from governmental regulation. Of the countries with high domain name ratios listed in the above tables, Antigua, the Cook Islands, the Philippines, Panama, Saint Kitts and Nevis, and Russia, are regularly reviewed by the OECD's anti-money laundering task force (OECD, 2000). These offshore locations

| Country | 2001 | | 2006 | | Change in Share 2001 to 2006 |
|--------------------|-------|----------|-------|----------|---------------------------------|
| | Share | DN Ratio | Share | DN Ratio | |
| United States | 59.8% | 1.41 | 42.3% | 1.10 | -17.5% |
| Canada | 10.9% | 3.15 | 11.0% | 3.69 | 0.1% |
| Australia | 5.0% | 3.80 | 5.3% | 2.70 | 0.3% |
| United Kingdom | 3.5% | 0.28 | 4.7% | 0.55 | 1.2% |
| Netherlands | 2.5% | 1.05 | 3.0% | 1.10 | 0.5% |
| Cook Islands | 0.0% | 2.49 | 2.9% | 502.30 | 2.9% |
| Germany | 0.9% | 0.09 | 2.3% | 0.17 | 1.4% |
| Spain | 0.8% | 0.79 | 1.8% | 1.21 | 1.0% |
| Poland | 0.2% | 0.53 | 1.8% | 3.18 | 1.6% |
| Russian Federation | 0.8% | 3.18 | 1.5% | 2.30 | 0.8% |
| Rest of World | 14.6% | | 19.0% | | |
| Not Placed | 0.9% | | 4.3% | | |

Table 9. Global Distribution of Google Free Adult Websites, 2001 and 2006

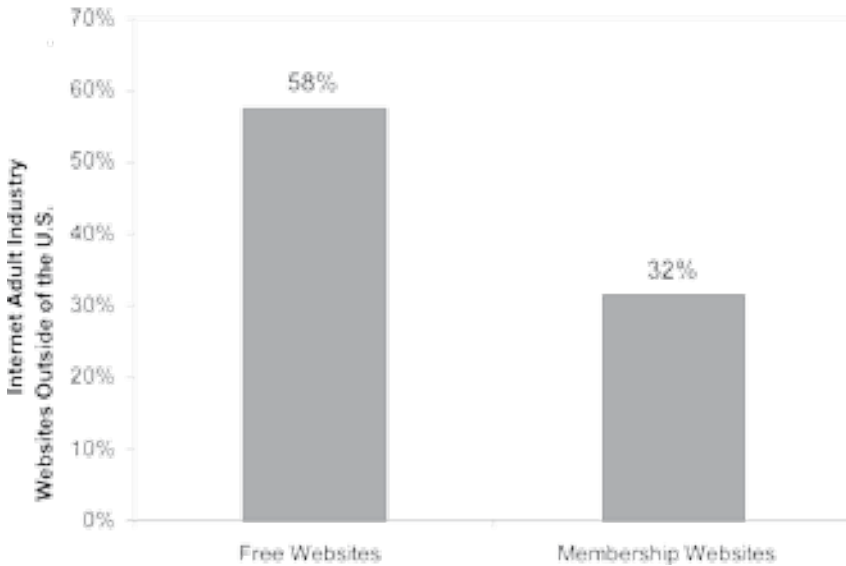


Figure 2. Share of Internet Adult Industry Websites Located Outside of the United States, Google Data, 2006

became prominent in global systems by offering secrecy and flexibility to those who needed it. The concentration of the Internet adult industry in these offshore locations shows how the pre-existing characteristics and endowments of locations are continuously adapted to new opportunities.

Because both the product and payment for the adult industry can take place electronically, it is relatively easy for the industry to relocate to hospitable regulatory environments. For example, if legislation were enacted to shut down these types of websites located in the United States, the consequent market vacuum would likely result in the creation of a new set of websites by individuals outside the United States.

LOW BARRIERS TO ENTRY

In addition to the push of regulation, the pull of an online industry with low start-up costs and completely digital products provides economic opportunities for individuals in peripheral locations. Unlike many types of electronic commerce, it is relatively straightforward to set up an adult website (although profitability is not guaranteed). Additionally, the use of Eastern European actors and models for content creation reported by Morais *et al* (1999) and the Economist (1998) is increasing the number of people familiar with and active in the Internet adult industry. This combined with the availability of skilled and low-cost (compared to the United States or Western Europe) technical labor and lack of other economic opportunities make the Internet adult industry an attractive proposition for some Eastern European countries. The Czech Republic, Poland and Russia all appear in Tables 5 to 10 and are highly specialized in the Internet adult industry as shown by their high domain name ratios.

DIFFUSION OF INTERNET USE

The final key factor in the geography of the Internet adult industry (particularly the trends showing a movement away from the United States) is the increasing number of Internet users, inclusive of webservers and webmasters, located outside of the United States. Figure 3 illustrates this trend with the corresponding decline of the share of Internet users located in the United States.

This appears to be particularly significant for the free websites represented by the Google Non-membership data. Because these websites take little skill or capital to start, literally anyone with an Internet connection can participate in this industry.

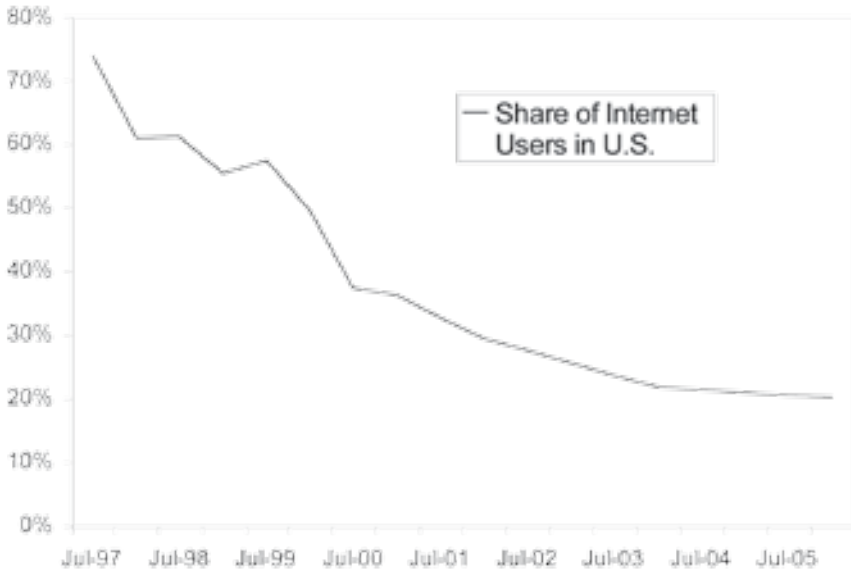


Figure 3. Share of Internet Users Located in the United States

NOTES

- 1 Due to its illegality, the exchange of child pornography on the Internet often occurs through email exchanges and newsgroups and is rarely posted on websites and indexed.
- 2 Although Adultreviews.net and Adultwebmasters.org were identified in the research process that led to my 2003 publication, they were not included in the data gathering or analysis at that time. The decision not to include them was due to resource constraints and availability of other similar sources. They are included in this report, however, because some indices used in the 2003 publication, e.g., webmaster-slounge.com and Nielsen Netratings' Top Adult websites, are no longer available.
- 3 Given the large number of listings (both membership and non-membership) on Google, this report is based on a random sample.
- 4 In the case of this report, 91 percent of .de domains associated with the Internet adult industry are located in Germany.
- 5 The ws (Western Samoa) and tv (Tuvalu) TLDs can be registered by anyone in the world and are actively promoted as alternatives to the com TLD (see Rhoads, 2006). This stands in marked contrast to the de (Germany), nl (Netherlands) or uk (United Kingdom) TLDs which have more restrictive registration requirements.
- 6 The whois utility was first implemented in the 1980s and was designed to allow system administrators to identify the person responsible for a particular set of computers so that they could contact them in the event of a problem. It is still used for this function today.

- 7 Source: 1999 and 2000 data — Top Website list supplied by Go2Net - <http://www.100hot.com/> with location based on address of domain name; July 1997 data — Paltridge (1997) using the same methodology. Because the 100hot.com data source is no longer available, additional time series data cannot be appended to this data.
- 8 The high domain name ratio for the Cook Islands (and other countries in later tables) is indicative of locations that have relatively small Internet presences in general. For these countries even a small Internet adult industry presence will result in a high domain name ratio.
- 9 Because there is no one single source that spans this entire represented time period, the data in this graph includes figures from NUA's How Many Online, ClickZ States and InternetWorldStats.

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SECTION 2

DIGITAL DESIRE BEYOND PORNOGRAPHY

PARADISE LUST:
 PORNOTOPIA MEETS THE CULTURE WARS¹

Mark Dery

People are still having sex.

Despite the pitchfork-and-bible brigade's crusade against gay marriage, sex ed, and that Mother of Harlots and Abominations, the smutty soap opera *Desperate Housewives*, America's low-slung undercarriage is still well-lubricated with salacious soaps, erotic novels, X-rated confessionals, and books of haute-porn photography calculated to steam the veneer off your coffee table.

Exhibit A: In the fall 2004 season, *Desperate Housewives* was the second highest-rated show on US television, averaging nearly 22 million viewers a week — stats that give proof through the night that the American appetite for sex (vicarious sex, at least) is undiminished.² For the high-forehead set, there's T. C. Boyle's novel, *The Inner Circle*, about the sex researcher Alfred Kinsey; the biopic *Kinsey*, starring Liam Neeson; and the commercial photographer Timothy Greenfield-Sanders's *XXX: 30 Porn-Star Portraits*, which following the time-tested *Playboy* formula, pairs nude photos with brow-furrowing essays by Gore Vidal, Salman Rushdie, and other heavy-hitters. For the Howard Stern demographic, there's adult-movie queen Jenna Jameson's *New York Times* bestseller, *How to Make Love Like a Porn Star* — yet more evidence, if any is needed, that the *Boogie Nights* culture of the porn-movie industry is slowly but surely going mainstream.

Judith Regan, whose ReganBooks published the Jameson mammoir, sees dollar signs in what she calls the "porno-ization" of American culture. "What that means," she told a CBS reporter, "is that if you watch [what's] going on out there in the popular culture, you will see females scantily clad, implanted, dressed up like hookers, porn stars and so on.

And that this is very acceptable.”³ Further up the lowbrow-middlebrow-highbrow index, the design critic Rick Poynor notes “the normalization of porn” in his book *Designing Pornotopia: Travels in Visual Culture*:

*The casting aside of inhibitions has been under way since the 1960s. It was given a boost by the arrival of home video and with the coming of the World Wide Web in the 1990s the urge to strip away the final shreds of decorum became unstoppable. In the last few years, sexual images have thrust their way into the everyday public sphere. [...] [W]e are in the process of designing a pornotopia in which sex, or at least our dreams of sex, are allowed to permeate areas of life they should never have been permitted to enter until recently.*⁴

A striking example of the normalization of porn is the publishing-world trendlet represented by *Story of O*-flavored true confessions such as *The Surrender: An Erotic Memoir* by Toni Bentley and *The Sexual Life of Catherine M.* by Catherine Millet and allegedly autobiographical novels such as *The Almond: The Sexual Awakening of a Muslim Woman* by Nedjma and *100 Strokes of the Brush Before Bed* by Melissa P. Until recently, a sexual memoir like *The Surrender*, a foul-mouthed paean to the joys of anal sex (sample quote: “My ass is my very own back door to heaven”) and *The Sexual Life of Catherine M.*, an exhaustive chronicle of the author’s serial swinging in sex clubs and gang bangs, would have been career suicide for the authors, a former dancer for The New York City Ballet and editor of the respected art magazine *Art Press*, respectively. Now, it’s a shrewd marketing move: *The Surrender* has sold over two million copies worldwide and earned a scolding from the pope (every publicist’s dearest dream); as of early 2006, the global sales of *The Sexual Life* stood at more than a million.

Even the neocon fop Tom Wolfe has sex on the brain these days (a thought that inspires a thrill of terror in those of us who would rather not contemplate the sexual side of a cultural conservative whose signature get-up is a white suit, white lisle socks with polka dots, and two-toned shoes — with *spats*, no less.) In his novella *I Am Charlotte Simmons* (2004), Wolfe satirizes the keg-party debaucheries of today’s collegiate youth with suspicious relish, rhapsodizing about “loamy loins” and “iliac crests” and “winking navels” in fully engorged prose:

Slither, slither, slither, slither went the tongue, but the hand — that was what she tried to concentrate on, the hand, since it had the entire terrain of her torso to explore and not just the otorhinolaryngological caverns — oh God, it was not just at the border where the flesh of the breast joins the pectoral sheath of the chest — no, the hand was cupping her entire right — Now! She must say ‘No, Hoyt’ and talk to him like a dog...⁵

(Yes, well, we’ve all been there. By the way, nothing says hot and sloppy like “otorhinolaryngological.” Insert navel wink here.)

Western culture is defining deviancy *up*, it seems, as in: out of the underground,

into the mainstream.⁶ Whether that's symptomatic of the Decline of the West or the Opening of the Public Mind depends, at least in part, on which side of the culture wars you're on.

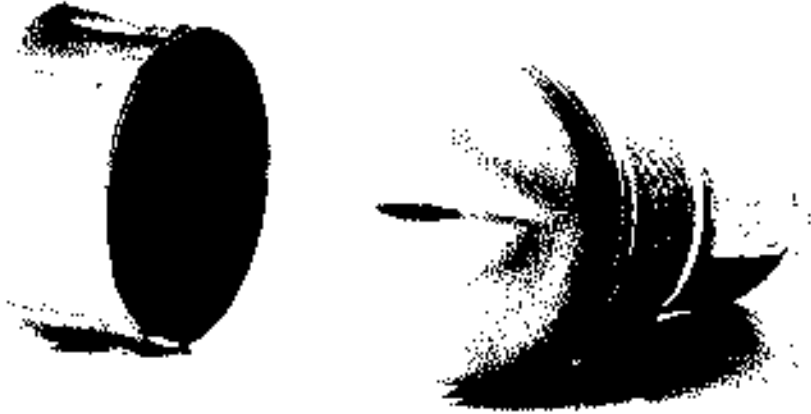
America, in the early days of the 21st century, is a house divided.

According to Dr. Barnaby Barratt, president of the American Association of Sex Educators, Counselors, and Therapists, "The media are becoming more sensationalist and more titillating" even as the religious right is becoming "far more conservative and Puritanical, sexually."⁷

The historical tension, in the United States, between Old Testament morality and the moral agnosticism of capitalism is giving Americans a nasty case of cognitive dissonance. The Faith of Our Protestant Fathers admonishes Americans to keep their eyes on God and their noses to the grindstone. Meanwhile, the lesser angels of consumer culture whisper in the other ear, urging Americans to indulge in the instant McGratification of their every infantile whim. Time and again, the Bible inveighs against greed and materialism — "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven," Jesus counsels (Matthew 19:21) — yet capitalism preaches the gospel of Get Rich Quick and He Who Dies With Most Toys Wins. In a context unimagined by Hobbes, corporate wars over market dominance realize the 17th century philosopher's grim vision of a struggle for survival that pits "every man against every man," emphasizing individual gain over the collective good. It's winner take all, in the gladiatorial chariot race to market supremacy and Profit Maximization At Any Cost; turn the other cheek, and your competitors' wheel-scythes will cut you to ribbons.

Marx saw this coming. In *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), he notes the truly radical nature of capitalism. Almost posthuman in its tendency to pursue its own profit-driven, technologically determined course (a course that often runs roughshod over the social and environmental interests of the humans it supposedly serves), capitalism doesn't need social ties or family networks, let alone Puritan morality, Marx implied. The bourgeois epoch, he wrote, is characterized by the "uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation."⁸

Which brings us, in roundabout fashion, back to the culture wars: From his vantage point as an educator, sex therapist, and psychoanalyst, Dr. Barratt looks out on an America wracked by what he calls a sexual "civil war." On one side, sex-positive straights and gays, civil libertarians, crusaders for sexual freedom, and random rutters — you know, the guy who just *has* to have that Make Your Own Dildo kit ("Thousands sold worldwide! Just add water! Amazing detail!"), the girl who won't leave home without her Ultraviolet Jelly Rubber Butt Beads, the clammy-handed geek who actually owns one of those creepy-funny Fleshlights hawked on every porn site (a male masturbation aid consisting of a fleshy "cyberskin" orifice, discreetly concealed inside a fake flashlight).⁹



“The seductive, inviting Pink Mouth FleshLight™ [with] soft, pliable, non-vibrating Real Feel Super Skin® sleeve...made from a patented, high-quality material designed to replicate the unmistakable sensations of penetrative sex.” Text and image from the Fleshlight website, http://www.fleshlight.com/main/product_info.php?products_id=54. Reproduced under the Fair Use provision of US copyright law.

On the other side of this *kulturkampf* are Christian soldiers marching as to war against frank, factual talk about sex in the classroom, school libraries, or student newspapers. According to the National Coalition Against Censorship’s Sex & Censorship Committee, fundamentalist groups are clamoring for censorship of medically accurate sex information.¹⁰ In its place, they champion a faith-based ideology that urges America’s youth to gird up its loins against Satan’s temptations by forswearing masturbation, contraception, abortion, and homosexuality, and arming themselves with abstinence (some faith-based curricula urge kids to bring Jesus along on that hot date, as a “chaperone”).

By their fruits ye shall know them: According to a Planned Parenthood factsheet, the fruits of abstinence-only sex ed include public schools forced to host “chastity” rallies in which students pledge to God that they will remain chaste until marriage; chapters on AIDS and contraception purged from a ninth-grade health textbook in North Carolina because it violated state law requiring abstinence-only education; a seventh grade health teacher in Belton, Missouri suspended when a parent complained that she had discussed “inappropriate” subject matter in class.¹¹ (The hapless instructor answered a student’s question about oral sex).

If a little learning is a dangerous thing, faith-based cluelessness is suicidal at a moment when, according to Planned Parenthood, the United States “has the highest rate of teen pregnancy in the developed world, and American adolescents are contracting HIV faster than almost any other demographic group.”¹² Experts cite a dearth of comprehensive, factually accurate sex education and a lack of access to contraceptive devices, such

as condoms, as the root of such evils. “By contrast, the ‘European approach to teenage sexual activity, expressed in the form of widespread provision of confidential and accessible contraceptive services to adolescents, is...a central factor in explaining the more rapid declines in teenage childbearing in northern and western European countries,’” Planned Parenthood notes.¹³

Meanwhile, in America, the sleep of reason is breeding monsters: In Granite Bay, California, a student asked where his cervix was; another student wanted to know if oral sex could make her pregnant.¹⁴ No, Virginia, only Our Heavenly Father can break nature’s laws. This we know, for the bible tells us so in Saint Luke, where the Holy Ghost, er, came upon the Virgin Mary, as scripture puts it. (One uses the verb advisedly.)

According to Dr. Barratt, “there is more opposition to sexual expression than ever” because “sexual values” are a flashpoint in the culture wars. “We now have the government attacking scientific research,” he says. “The NIH [National Institutes of Health] has a blacklist of researchers who will not get funds because they are seen as being on the wrong side of the government’s agenda...of abstinence-only [sex] education.”

America is gagged and bound by the “moral values” of neo-Puritans and paleoconservatives such as Tom Coburn, the newly elected Republican senator from Oklahoma and co-chair of the Presidential Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS who preaches abstinence as a mighty bulwark against the virus, worries that lesbianism is “so rampant in some of the schools in southeast Oklahoma that they’ll only let one girl go to the bathroom” at a time, and believes that “the gay community has infiltrated the very centers of power in every area across this country.”¹⁵ In 1997, Coburn castigated NBC for encouraging “irresponsible sexual behavior” by flaunting “full frontal nudity” during prime time. The nudity in question? Death-camp inmates in Steven Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List*.¹⁶

But, *mirabile dictu*, at the very moment that self-appointed morals czars are making schools, network TV, and SuperBowl half-time shows safe for theocracy (if not for democracy), the Web often feels like one big petri dish, culturing mutant strains of pornography and bizarre new paraphilias. (“Paraphilias” is the psychiatric term for a class of psychosexual disorders characterized by extreme or dangerous desires, specifically those involving suffering, humiliation, and/or nonhuman objects or nonconsenting partners. Pedophilia, necrophilia, scatologia, bestiality, S/M, transvestism, voyeurism, exhibitionism, and frotteurism — sexual gratification by rubbing against strangers in crowded public places — are all paraphilias.¹⁷)

In truth, adult-oriented sites make up less than two percent of all web content, according to the journal *Nature*.¹⁸ Nonetheless, as a 2002 study by the National Academy of Sciences notes:

While sexually explicit material comprises only a small fraction of online content, that fraction is highly visible and...accounts for a significant amount of Web traffic.¹⁹ [...] [T]he adult online entertainment industry...generates about \$1 billion a year in rev-

*enue from adults who pay to view content. [...] There are also a plethora of noncommercial sources of pornography on the Internet, such as peer-to-peer file exchanges, unsolicited e-mail, Web cameras, and chat rooms.*²⁰

By this, I don't mean that we're witnessing a runaway proliferation of alternative sexualities; the truth, I suspect (again, based on purely anecdotal evidence), is that the interconnected nature of the link-driven Web, together with the frenzy of online advertising, has simply made "highly visible" what was once kept far from public view, under plain brown wrappers or behind the locked boudoir doors of adventuresome sybarites.

Back in the day, the lone "invert" luckless enough to find himself marooned in, say, Nebraska, could only bite his pillow and curse the heavens for making him cursed among men, the only homosexual on Earth. In Glenn Holsten's documentary movie, *Gay Pioneers* (2000), veterans of the struggle for gay liberation reminisce movingly about the mind-shattering moment when they stumbled on newsletters published by early gay-pride organizations such as the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis—transmissions from another galaxy that told them *They Were Not Alone*.

Today, anyone with an Internet connection is only a click away from a parallel universe of sexual solar systems whose porn sites, toy shops, networking sites, and support groups orbit around obscure obsessions. The Web not only connects geographically far-flung devotees into close-knit communities, it also assaults unsuspecting "normals" with porn spam and X-rated search results for sites and products that cater to every imaginable (and unimaginable) proclivity.

From the late 19th century, when Krafft-Ebing mapped the geography of the "degenerate" imagination in *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886), until 1973, when the American Psychiatric Association deleted homosexuality from The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, official culture pathologized virtually everything but missionary-position heterosex; "moral degenerates" were stigmatized, criminalized, institutionalized. Now, the loves that dared not speak their names trumpet them from the rooftops, online. It's the Revenge of the Repressed.

This is partly about the Newtonian physics of contemporary society: For every repressive action from the dominant culture, there is an equal and opposite transgressive reaction from subcultures, who as deviancy is defined up have to ratchet up their iconoclasm in order to earn the bourgeois seal of disapproval that is the badge of true transgression. It's about punching through the cultural clutter, to borrow a term from advertising—getting your message across.

Of course, online porn peddlers need to make themselves heard, too, and taking fetishes to gut-lurching extremes is a proven means of grabbing pornsurfers by the eyeballs. Thus the proliferation of "object-insertion" sites like *BrutalDildos.com*, *ExtremeHole.com*, and *ButtCam.com*, which feature women inserting impossibly humongous dildos and anything else within reach—baseball bats, Barbie dolls, zucchinis, cooking whisks—into their orifices. As a post by a writer on the pornoblog Jaxon Jaganov suggests, object-insertion sites and other Web-porn tropisms toward the extreme have more to do



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Photo by Shinji Yamazaki, from Secret Magazine, Belgium. Image taken from the "Art Gallery" archived on the Neck Brace Art Appreciation Klub website, <http://www.nbak.tierranet.com/art.htm>. Reproduced under the Fair Use provision of US copyright law.

Either go the
way in, or fat
bene man!



"GIVE YOU A CHOICE
WHY NOT?!!
WANT TO BE OFFERED
TO A BUCKY PULL OR
EAT, LUMP?!! AND
DEFEAT YOU BY IT!!"

DECIDE QUICKLY!
MY HEAD BELLY
IS EMPTY AND
NEEDS YOUR
PROTEIN NOW!!!

I AM
YOUR
GOD



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Breast-expansion morph by Mister Licker.

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Breast-expansion morph by Holly Witt.

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uploaded by Estradiol to the
Breast Expansion Archive,
<http://www.bearchive.com/menu.html>.
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with the endlessly revolutionary nature of capitalism mentioned earlier, as well as the persistence of virulent sexual stereotypes, than they do subcultural rituals of resistance:

Somewhere at some point someone decided that the fun need not be limited to dildos and other sex toys. Why not try and get chicks to stick all sorts of stuff into their pussies? And so 'Object Insertion' porn was born, so to speak. First and foremost, this niche is about novelty — it's about grabbing you by the eyeballs and getting you to say, 'Did that chick really just stick a cellphone in her crotch?' Once they've got your attention, different pornographers go off in different directions. For some, it's all done in the spirit of wacky sexual escapades, kind of like a pornographic variation on Jackass-type stunts. For others, it's a more mean-spirited, degrading-chicks sort of thing that might have to do with an unconscious anxiety about death, birth, maybe their mothers, or more likely, a deep-seated fear of an empty bank account.²¹

Then, too, the fragmentation of the mass audience into a zillion microniches has inspired online advertisers to go after the alt.sexualities demographic. As a result, even a websurfer who is pure in heart and says his prayers by night has probably been spammed with a come-on from a sexual subculture whose deviant desires would have given Freud anaphylactic shock. Spam and search engines have made the invisible visible, a god-send to sexological researchers and connoisseurs of Xtreme kink who engage in what the sexpert Susie Bright calls “pornographic rubbernecking.”

We're living in the Golden Age of the Golden Shower, a heyday of unabashed depravity (at least, in terms of online voyeurism and virtual sex) that makes de Sade's *120 Days of Sodom* look like *VeggieTales*. The Divine Marquis never imagined aquaphiliacs, a catchall category that includes breath-holding fetishists, fans of simulated drowning, and guys whose hearts leap at the sight of babes in bathing caps or who delight in underwater catfights or submarine blowjobs. Weirdest of all are the aquaphiliacs who get off on swimming and showering fully clothed, like SuitPlayer, a guy in Amsterdam who likes to swim in his “business suits, dress shirts, and suit jackets — especially the one with two vents.”²²

Of course, weirdness is a relative concept. SuitPlayer looks like the Guy Next Door alongside the members of the Neck Brace Appreciation Klub,²³ a “small but dedicated group of regular folks” who just happen to be into “‘recreational & artistic’ neck and back bracing.” (Love those ironic quotes.)

Then again, they seem unremarkable compared to the fetishists who congregate at the unintentionally hilarious Big-Gulp website²⁴ to savor the tongue-in-cheek pleasures of homemade fanporn in which anonymous models²⁵ and celebrities, from Madonna²⁶ to Lou “Incredible Hulk” Ferrigno,²⁷ gobble up wriggling Lilliputians. Imagine an X-rated *Attack of the Fifty-Foot Woman*, remade by Dino DeLaurentis from a script by R. Crumb. Imagine a hardcore version of *The Amazing Colossal Man*, starring gay superstud Zak Spears as the bald, bediapered giant. Imagine — oh, hell, it simply begs description; just visit the damn thing yourself.²⁸

But aquaphilia, neck-brace fetishism, and sexual fantasies about being gobbled up man-eating Brobdingnagians are only the beginning. Poking around the web's darker corners, fetishists, pornographic rubberneckers, and sexologists can find sexual proclivities and pornographic subgenres de Sade never dreamed of: amputee worship, armpit fetishism, clown porn, and sneeze freaks, who rejoice at the thought of a nice, juicy honk, with plenty of spritz. Lactating transsexuals? Been there. Scrotal inflation? Done that. Chicks with dicks and men with cunts? So last year, already. Erotic illustrations of Japanese schoolgirls in traction? Check. Breast-expansion fantasies about mammaries that balloon up to Goodyear blimp proportions? Check. Models made, through digital trickery, to sprout multiple, massive breasts, like some freakish cross between silicone-injected porn stars and pre-Christian fertility goddesses? Check.

Things are getting weird out there, so much so that imaginary obsessions such as exophilia, the "abnormal attraction [to] beings from worlds beyond earth" that is the subject of the underground novel *Extraterrestrial Sex Fetish*, by the pornblogger Supervert, are starting to sound downright plausible.²⁹ Can we be far from the future foretold by J.G. Ballard, where car-crash enthusiasts get off on vehicular manslaughter and fans of Space Age snuff revel in footage of astronauts being roasted alive during re-entry? In the introduction to his 1974 novel *Crash*, Ballard wondered if the android numbness induced by media bombardment—the "demise of feeling"—would open the door to "all our most real and tender pleasures—in the excitements of pain and mutilation; in sex as the perfect arena...for...our...perversions; in our moral freedom to pursue our own psychopathology as a game."³⁰

The answer to Ballard's question is written in the morning headlines. In September 2005, the Web was abuzz with stories about US soldiers taking trophy snapshots and making homemade music videos, set to kickass rock, of themselves booting a wounded prisoner in the face or puppeteering the arm of a corpse to make it wave, or mugging for the camera around the charred corpse of what a caption gloatingly calls a "cooked Iraqi." Thomas Doherty, a film-studies professor quoted in an *L.A. Times* story about the scandal, gave one homemade video the Roger Ebert thumbs-up for its "contrapuntal editing—the beat of the tune and the flash of the images," judging it "a very slick piece of work." He quipped, "The MTV generation goes to war. They should enter it at Sundance." A star is born: the David Fincher of atrocity porn.³¹

Images like the nauseating close-up of the dead Iraqi who refused to stop at a US checkpoint, a mess of bloody pulp where his head used to be, *are* porn, albeit porn of the most atavistic sort. They're porn because the young, male viewers who look at them do so with a voyeuristic, high-fiving glee familiar to anyone who has ever watched hardcore videos with a drunken gang of guys at a bachelor party. (The *L.A. Times* story describes the fiancée of one soldier walking into a room where her hubby-to-be "was showing [his war] videos to friends, who were 'whooping and hollering.'"³²) They're porn because the carrion-feeders who might otherwise be peddling hardcore are now hawking video gore to the chickenhawks back home. They're porn because they poke a stiff little finger into the killer-ape part of our brains, right where the desire to fuck gets confused with the



Warporn. "Cooked Iraqi," posted April 15, 2005, by sideburnz, at the now-defunct website ThatsFuckedUp.com. Reproduced under the Fair Use provision of US copyright law.



Tentacle hentai (Japanese pornographic comic books, animated movies, and videogames). URL unknown. Reproduced under the Fair Use provision of US copyright law.



Japanese “ero-guru” (“erotic-grotesque”) manga image. URL unknown. Reproduced under the Fair Use provision of US copyright law.



3D rendering of tentacle hentai. Fan art. URL unknown. Reproduced under the Fair Use provision of US copyright law.

urge to *fuck shit up*.

Consider ThatsFuckedUp.com, which offered one-stop shopping for war-core and amateur porn, sometimes in a single, sick-making image. (“Offered,” past tense, because the site is now offline. The Polk County Sheriff’s Office and the Florida State Attorney secured the conviction on obscenity charges of its webmaster, Christopher Wilson.) One photo shows a prone woman, presumably an Iraqi, whose leg is a bloody stump, blown off by a land mine. Under the hem of her skirt, we can see her vagina. “Nice puss — bad foot,” reads the wisecracking caption. Pardon my Wilhelm Reich, but could our queasy tendency to express our bloodlust in the metaphoric language of porn, here as in the Abu Ghraib photos, be at least in part the pathological cost of our repressed sexuality?

Meanwhile, back on the home front, the web is engendering Middle America’s growing awareness that the universe of human sexuality is much bigger — and stranger — than it ever imagined. Of course, this awareness isn’t necessarily loosening the corset of American Puritanism. Ward and June Cleaver may have taken a wrong turn in cyberspace and found themselves face to face with fetishists who thrill to mummylike swaddling in Cling-Wrap or “furverts” who make it with plush toys (or, better yet, *as* plush toys), but that doesn’t mean they wouldn’t stone the sodomites if they could. Nonetheless, the mainstream is more aware of the far fringes than ever before, a fact of 21st century life that grain by grain, erodes the very notion of the normal.

This awareness is due, in part, to the porn spammers mentioned earlier, and to the connectionist nature of the medium: the web’s forking paths can lead the unwary wanderer down dark alleys, without warning. But the heightened profile of fetishism is also due to the escalation of subcultural hostilities mentioned earlier — the ever-greater extremes required of would-be Rebels Without a Cause in the age of *Jackass*, *Extreme Makeovers*, and the pierced whatever. Time was when all a brooding young boho had to do to *épater le bourgeoisie* was carve a swastika in his forehead and cop a witchy, Dylan Klebold stare. But how do you certify your cred as a Menace to Society in a world where soccer moms think Eminem is da bomb diggity and Nabisco is selling Xtreme Jello-O, for Chrissakes? How long will it be before Marilyn Manson shows up at the Bob Hope Chrysler Classic, trading chip-shot tips with Alice Cooper?

In jaded times such as ours, nothing gets the full and undivided attention of Parental Authorities like the breezy, insouciant admission that you’re into, oh, I don’t know, “crush” fetishism — sexual arousal at the sight of bugs, mice and other vermin impaled on the stiletto heels of sneering dominatrixes. The Death of Affect that J.G. Ballard has called “the greatest casualty of the 20th century” is here to stay. Years of tabloid media, reality TV, attacking heads, and, more recently, nightly news nightmares of doomed workers leaping from the World Trade Center, hand in hand, or journalists beheaded in your livingroom by jihadi or the slapstick torture at Abu Ghraib — home movies from hell that employed the visual grammar of porn — have cauterized our cultural nerve endings. Little wonder, then, that ever greater subcultural voltages are needed to shock us.

This explains those mind-crushingly weird Japanese porno comics, a category that

includes the aptly named subgenre of *ero-guru* (“erotic-grotesque”) manga, or graphic novels, by artists such as Toshio Saeki³³ or Suehiro Maruo³⁴— splatterpunk fantasies so depraved they’d make a lust murderer queasy. A closely related genre, tentacle-rape *hentai*, consists of X-rated cartoons depicting young girls ravaged by giant octopi or many-armed aliens or robots. Tentacle-rape imagery descends from the erotic prints of 19th century “floating world” artists such as Hokusai, whose “Dream of the Fisherman’s Wife” is a classic of the genre.

“The point in rubbernecker pornography is sensation,” writes Susie Bright, in her essay “The Future of Porn.” The point, she argues, “is a physical jolt, a thrill, a taboo which until this gross-out moment was intact.” At the moment, nothing says “gross-out” like *bukkake*, a supremely icky phenomenon brought to you by Japan, that empire of the crossed signs where pubic hair is airbrushed off porn but no self-respecting salaryman would leave home without a pair of soiled panties sewn into the lining of his hat.³⁵ In *Bukkake Classic*, a group of men masturbate on a woman’s upturned face. Typical *bukkake* photos are pure gothic, so underexposed they look like Polaroids taken in Gilles de Rais’s dungeon. The men look like celebrants in some strange, subterranean ritual, at once blank-eyed yet intensely absorbed in the task at, er, hand. Why aren’t they wearing Masonic aprons or black hoods? Where’s the Church of Satan when you need it?

Like all S/M, *bukkake* is ritualized domination, a domination dramatized in *bukkake* by the messy desecration of feminine purity, the purer the better. (The Japanese, who invented the genre, prefer symbols of pristine innocence or white-cotton cleanliness: barely legal Lolitas dressed as schoolgirls, nurses or, bizarrely, bunnies.) “They plan to use her for their own sexual satisfaction, then completely HUMILIATE her!,” pants a come-on for the tellingly named *FacialHumiliation.com*.³⁶ Nothing new, here, to anyone familiar with de Sade’s gleeful descriptions of virgins flogged, sodomized and worse.

What *is* new, in at least one corner of the “facial” cumshot universe, is the wedding of the genre’s de Sadean theater of dominance and degradation with digital software’s ability to retouch or even reinvent photographic reality. The best of them—produced, or at least peddled, by *PrivateGold.com*, a domain name registered to a Cyprus-based company—depict radiantly smiling, impeccably made-up models, glossy lips parted to receive a shot of goo.

Clearly targeting the American market, *PrivateGold*’s images trade the abject depravity of Japanese *bukkake* for a pert, Pepsodent-smiling optimism. In the best American tradition, they celebrate technological progress, each model retouched to posthuman perfection, each cock enhanced to highlight its bulging glans and knotty veins, making it look like the ripped, rock-hard arm of a bodybuilder. Like Wayne Newton, Wendy Whoppers, and other pure products of American madness, *PrivateGold*’s facials are a monument to delirious artificiality.

Their supersaturated aesthetic harks back to Technicolor movies, the airbrushed album-cover art of the ‘70s, and the paintings of Maxfield Parrish. At the same time, they’re utterly contemporary in their winking subversion of their own conventions. Evoking the happy, shiny irony of Diesel ads, they act out many male sex consumers’ apparent desire,



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equal parts Freud and Marx, to soil the android perfection of supermodels and centerfolds with a sticky puddle of sploot. You don't have to be a kill-your-TV, *No Logo* refusenik, raging against the machine, to see PrivateGold's farcical facials as a squirt in the eye of the inflatable, untouchable goddesses of American advertising. This is what all the leering couples wrestling with spraying hoses in those Newport cigarette ads³⁷ would look like, if Newport came clean about its subliminal seductions. "Alive with Pleasure," indeed.

Digitally retouched "facials" are postmodern porn, reveling in a hyperreality whose gleaming highlights and strobe-photography special effects — gobs of cum, frozen in mid-flight like the droplets in Harold "Doc" Edgerton's famous "Milk-Drop Coronet" — are both realer than real and hopelessly unreal.

The hyperreality of PrivateGold's facials reaches its dizziest heights in the cumshots themselves, zigzagging trajectories that bend more laws of physics than Carrie-Anne Moss in *The Matrix*, suspended in mid-air while the camera swooped around her in real time. In one image, a jet of jism pulls a sudden right turn, away from the woman's waiting lips, toward another, outstretched penis, as if drawn by a homoerotic magnetism.

In another, a streaking comet of cum appears to loop the loop, while in another it turns on a dime and rockets away from the model's mouth, mere millimeters away, toward the startled viewer.

And then there's the photo that gives new meaning to the phrase "splatter movie": a triumph of special effects, it features a phallus mirabilis that simultaneously ejaculates *two* streams of cum *in different directions*. One spurts into the model's mouth while the other whizzes toward her eyebrow, doubling back at the last minute to carom off her nose, zing past her cheek, and exit stage right.

So, what's the deeper meaning of this repeated visual trope? Are PrivateGold's fake facials our first glimpse of posthuman porn? Is this what the postmodern theorist Arthur Kroker had in mind when he announced the advent, in the late '80s, of a delirious simulacrum of posthuman sex — a "sex without secretions"? In his *Panic Encyclopedia* (1989), Kroker argued that digital tech had at last made sex without bodily fluids possible in the form of "the computerized phone sex of the [pre-Internet] Minitel system in Paris" and what he called "video porn for the language of the gaze" — academic theoryspeak for screen-age porn that plays to the disembodied sexuality of an ever more voyeuristic society.³⁸ Gazing upon the Desert of the Real, Kroker declared that we had "already passed... beyond sex as nature and beyond sex as discourse, to sex as fascinating only when it is about recklessness, discharge and upheaval" — a premonition of Ballard's eroticized car crashes and Susie Bright's rubbernecker porn, where orgasm is displaced by the "physical jolt" of trashing a taboo. For Kroker, cybersex is a "*parodic sex*" — an unproductive, rather than a reproductive, act. Solo in front of a flickering screen or among fellow pseudonyms in a chatroom, or (for the hopelessly old-school) on the phone, its lonely onanism is as distant from flesh-against-flesh sex as *The Matrix's* time-stopping, gravity-defying triple kicks and cartwheels are from pre-CGI fight scenes.

Speaking of which, maybe PrivateGold's F/X facials offer a premonitory glimpse of a porn unshackled from the hidebound realism that has hobbled it for decades. Where

is it writ that porn, which has always exhibited a tropism toward the unnatural, must be naturalistic? Plastic surgery and Photoshop have already given us porn stars who look as if they've been remodeled by the imagineers responsible for Disney's Audio-Anima-tronic robots. The literalism ushered in by photography and film is a historical anomaly; pre-modern porn is fraught with impossible anatomies and unnatural acts, from the multiple-breasted effigies of fertility goddesses such as the Ephesian Artemis to the men with Godzilla-sized units and the women with giant-clam vulvas in 18th and 19th century Japanese woodcuts. Now, pornographic hobbyists such as the incomparable Nexus T., armed with image-manipulation software, are conjuring up images worthy of medieval bestiaries, or maybe a postmodern *Decameron*. And, wittingly or not, they're exorcising cultural anxieties about genetic hybrids and human-animal transplants with campy, tongue-in-cheek porn.

Of course, porn is inherently cyborgian. As Lynn Hunt, a professor of history at the University of Pennsylvania, told the *New York Times* writer John Tierney, pornography "reduces sex to a set of technologies that arouse desire, satisfy desire, create new desires."³⁹ In Dr. Hunt's opinion, "pornography is about cataloguing all the variations, treating human bodies as interchangeable parts in machines."⁴⁰ (Think of the daisy-chained orgiasts in the illustrations for de Sade's novels, mechanically coupling like some perverse assembly line.) It's a no-brainer, then, that a truly pomosexual porn, combining Hollywood-style prosthetic effects and computer-graphics, the swooningly sensual aesthetic of Japanimation, the breathtaking wirework of martial-arts movies like *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, and the post-literate visual narratives of Cindy Sherman or Gregory Crewdson, is long overdue. "I can now do 50 simultaneous events in a fluid, unending shot," John Gaeta, visual effects supervisor for *The Matrix Reloaded*, told the movie critic David Edelstein. "And I can have all this action make sense and interrelate, and I can follow it with a God's-eye camera moving at speeds that would tear an ordinary camera apart. I guarantee you your brain will work harder than any action movie you've ever seen in your entire life."⁴¹

But what if we want to work our libidos? Imagine cum spiraling through the air in *Matrix*-style "bullet time"; clusterfucks inspired by *The Matrix Reloaded*'s so-called "Burlly Brawl," hundreds of digitally cloned copies of a single actor coupling in a narcissist's vision of a group grope. And why stop there? How about an Imax version of George Bataille's *Story of the Eye*? Or a computer-graphic take on Octave Mirbeau's *Torture Garden*, based on a screenplay by Matthew Barney? Speaking of whom, bring on the satyrs! The petroleum jelly! The undifferentiated internal sex organs! The retracted scrotum pierced with clasps connected to vinyl cords! Lame though they may be, PrivateGold's F/X facials are surely a vision of things to come.

NOTES

- 1 I owe the term "pomotopia" to the design critic Rick Poynor, author of *Designing Pomotopia: Travels in Visual Culture*, a book that is as drily funny as it is sharply insightful.



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- 2 “Averaging nearly 22 million viewers a week”: Reuters News, “ABC Sorry for Desperate Housewives Football Plug,” November 16, 2004, <http://entertainment.tv.yahoo.com/entnews/va/20041116/110066149200.html>.
- 3 Stewart, J. (2005) “Raw Profit On The Printed Page: Jim Stewart Reports On Booming Sex And Porn Publishing Industry,” CBSNews.com, <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2005/01/05/60II/main664950.shtml>.
- 4 Poynor, R. (2006) *Designing Pornotopia: Travels in Visual Culture*, New York, Princeton Architectural Press, pp. 7, 9.
- 5 Wolfe, T. (2004) *I Am Charlotte Simmons*, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, p. 369.
- 6 My coinage is a take-off, without apology, on “Defining Deviancy Down”(American Scholar, Winter 1993) by Daniel Patrick Moynihan. A cultural conservative in (patrician) liberal’s clothing, Moynihan left his mark on pop sociology—and bequeathed a handy catchphrase to op-editorialists—with this essay, a canonical example of the conservative jeremiad about cultural decline. For a well-argued rebuttal to Moynihan’s essay, see Andrew Karmen, “‘Defining Deviancy Down’: How Senator Moynihan’s Misleading Phrase About Criminal Justice Is Rapidly Being Incorporated Into Popular Culture,” *Journal of Criminal Justice and Popular Culture*, 2(5) (1994), pp. 99-112, <http://www.albany.edu/scj/jcpc/vol2is5/deviancy.html>.
- 7 Telephone interview with the author, April 14, 2004. All Barratt quotes are from this essay.
- 8 Marx, K. and Engels, F. “The Communist Manifesto”, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch01.htm>.
- 9 “Make Your Dildo Kit”: <http://makeyourowndildo.com/info/>. “Ultraviolet Jelly Rubber Butt Beads”: <http://www.babeland.com/page/TIB/PROD/butt-beads/TD250240>. “Fleshlight”: <http://www.fleshlight.com/main/products.cfm?id=1001&aff=70398>.
- 10 All facts in this graph from the Planned Parenthood factsheet “Abstinence-Only ‘Sex’ Education (Adapted with permission from the Sex & Censorship Committee, National Coalition Against Censorship),” at <http://www.plannedparenthood.org/library/facts/AbstinenceOnly10-01.html>.
- 11 Planned Parenthood website, “Abstinence-Only ‘Sex’ Education (Adapted with permission from the Sex & Censorship Committee, National Coalition Against Censorship),” <http://www.plannedparenthood.org/library/facts/AbstinenceOnly10-01.html>.
- 12 Planned Parenthood, “Abstinence-Only ‘Sex’ Education,” *ibid*.
- 13 *Ibid*.
- 14 *Ibid*.
- 15 All quotes from Mubarak S. Dahir, “Lesbian Debauchery in Oklahoma,” AlterNet, posted October 13, 2004, <http://www.alternet.org/rights/20162/>, and Frank Rich, “On ‘Moral Values,’ It’s Blue in A Landslide,” *The New York Times*, “Arts And Lei-

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- 16 Dahir, “Lesbian Debauchery in Oklahoma,” *AlterNet*, *ibid*.
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 - 18 National Academy of Sciences, “Pornography on the Internet,” <http://www4.nas.edu/onpi/webextra.nsf/44bf87db309563a0852566f2006d63bb/13a0fdabb8339dce85256bac005b4a2f?OpenDocument>.
 - 19 See *Youth, Pornography, and the Internet*, Thornburgh, D. and Lin, H.S. (eds.), Washington, D.C., National Academy Press, 2002, p. 70, <http://www.nap.edu/books/0309082749/html/70.html>.
 - 20 *Youth, Pornography, and the Internet*, *ibid.*, p. 57, <http://www.nap.edu/books/0309082749/html/57.html>.
 - 21 Unbylined post, “She Stuck What in Her Pussy?,” *JaxonJaganov.com*, posted August 23, 2005, http://www.jaxonjaganov.com/Pornblog_08-05.php.
 - 22 Unbylined comments, “Rein’s Bathing Album,” <http://lynx.phpwebhosting.com/~sgroi/rein5/index.html>. Relocated to *SwimmingFullyClothed.com*, <http://www.swimmingfullyclothed.com/>.
 - 23 The site’s homepage is at <http://www.nbak.tierranet.com/main.htm>. Check out the images at <http://www.nbak.tierranet.com/art.htm>, <http://www.nbak.tierranet.com/pixs/Nwoods01.jpg>, http://www.nbak.tierranet.com/pixs/NeckBrace_01.jpg, and <http://www.nbak.tierranet.com/pixs/Star3.jpg>.
 - 24 The site is currently offline, an incalculable loss to fans — and fans of fans — of this fetish, but there’s an article about Big-Gulp fan fiction at <http://members.aol.com/Ladycyrrh/Websites/big-gulp.html>. As well, much of the site is archived, happily, via the Wayback Machine, at <http://web.archive.org/web/20020205224509/www.casti.com/big-gulp/main/main.html>. Don’t miss the awesome gallery of images at http://web.archive.org/web/20011218044339/www.casti.com/big-gulp/pictures/pix_main.html.
 - 25 See <http://web.archive.org/web/20010610080629/ender.com/~armesti/big-gulp/head.gif>, <http://web.archive.org/web/20010610080843/ender.com/~armesti/big-gulp/bonhomme.jpg>, <http://web.archive.org/web/20010613213524/ender.com/~armesti/big-gulp/generousgiant.jpg>, http://web.archive.org/web/20030522094546/http://ender.com/~armesti/big-gulp/20000501_15:35:43_696.jpg, <http://web.archive.org/web/20020213141303/ender.com/~armesti/big-gulp/GiantBB.GIF>.
 - 26 See: <http://web.archive.org/web/20010610074533/ender.com/~armesti/big-gulp/darkmeat.gif>.
 - 27 See: <http://web.archive.org/web/20010613213557/ender.com/~armesti/big-gulp/giantlou.jpg>.
 - 28 See: <http://web.archive.org/web/20020205224509/www.casti.com/big-gulp/main/main.html>.
 - 29 *Supervert*, “Extraterrestrial Sex Fetish,” <http://www.supervert.com/etsf/index.html>.

- 30 Ballard, J.G. Introduction to *Crash*, <http://cypherpunks.venona.com/date/1996/03/msg01651.html>.
- 31 Excerpted at the weblog BodyAndSoul, http://bodyandsoul.typepad.com/blog/2005/03/todays_los_ange.html. In some cases, soldiers traded their photos of wartime horrors for free access to the X-rated site NowThatsFuckedUp.com; the site's owner then posted their images, gloatingly captioned by the soldiers themselves, alongside amateur porn. See "War Pornography US soldiers trade grisly photos of dead and mutilated Iraqis for access to amateur porn. The press is strangely silent," by Chris Thompson, East Bay Express, September 21, 2005, <http://www.eastbayexpress.com/Issues/2005-09-21/news/news.html>.
- 32 Excerpted at the weblog BodyAndSoul, http://bodyandsoul.typepad.com/blog/2005/03/todays_los_ange.html.
- 33 For examples, see <http://archive.salon.com/sex/feature/2001/02/08/saeki/japanese.html>.
- 34 For examples, see <http://www.woodenmen.org/maruo/images/maruo5.jpg>.
- 35 For a brief, informal and not necessarily fact-checked history of bukkake, see <http://www.asianbukkakeshowers.com/>. Also see the equally dubious <http://www.4-bukkake.com/>.
- 36 See: <http://www.japan-bukkake.com/japanesebukkake/facialhumiliation.html>.
- 37 See: <http://www.classroomtools.com/subad4b.jpg>. Mere coincidence, or subliminal seduction? You be the judge!
- 38 Arthur Kroker, Marilouise Kroker and David Cook, "Panic Penis," in *Panic Encyclopedia* (1989), <http://www.freedonia.com/panic/penis/penis.html>.
- 39 John Tierney, "Porn, the Low-Slung Engine of Progress," *The New York Times*, January 9, 1994, Section 2 ("Arts & Leisure"), p. 1.
- 40 Tierney, *ibid.*
- 41 David Edelstein, "The Matrix: marshalling art and FX," *The Age*, May 25 2003, <http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2003/05/24/1053585741991.html>.

WARPORN! WARPUNK!
 AUTONOMOUS VIDEOPOIESIS IN WARTIME

Matteo Pasquinelli

GRINNING MONKEYS

How do you think you can stop war without weapons? The anti-war public opinion that fills squares worldwide and the cosmetic democracy of International Courts stand powerless in front of the raging US military. Against the animal instincts of a superpower reason cannot prevail: a homicidal force can be arrested only by another, stronger force. Everyday we witness such a Darwinian show: history repeating itself through a cruel confrontation of forces, whilst what rests is freedom of speech exercised in drawing-rooms. Pacifists too are accomplices of instinctive forces, because animal aggressiveness is inside us all. How do we express that bestiality for which we condemn armies?

Underneath the surface of the self-censorship belonging to the radical left (not only to the conformist majority), it should be admitted publicly that watching Abu Ghraib pictures of pornographic tortures does not scandalize us, on the contrary, it rather excites us, in exactly the same way as the obsessive voyeurism that draws us to 9/11 videos. Through such images we feel the expression of repressed instincts, the pleasure rising again after being narcotised by consumerism, technologies, goods and images. We show our teeth as monkeys do, when their aggressive grin looks dreadfully like the human smile. Contemporary thinkers as well, like Baudrillard and Žižek, acknowledge a dark side inside Western culture. If 9/11 has been a shock for Western consciousness, Baudrillard puts forward a more shocking thesis: we westerners were to desire 9/11, as the death drive of a superpower that having reached its natural limits, knows and desires nothing more than self-destruction and war. The indignation is hypocrisy; there is always an animal talking behind a video screen.

ON THE VIDEOWAR BATTLEGROUND

Before pulling the monkey out of the TV set, we have to focus on the battleground on which the media match is played. The more reality is an augmentation of mass, personal, and networked devices, the more wars become media wars, even if they take place in a desert. The First Global War started by live-broadcasting the 9/11 air disaster and continued with video-guerrilla episodes: everyday from the Iraqi front we received videos shot by invaders, militiamen, and journalists. Every action in such a media war is designed beforehand to fit its spectacular consequences. Terrorists have learnt all the rules of spectacular conflict while imperial propaganda, much more expert, has no qualms about playing with fakes and hoaxes (for instance the dossiers on weapons of mass destruction). Bureaucratic propaganda wars are a thing of the past. New media has generated guerrilla combat, opening up a molecular front of bottom-up resistance. Video cameras among civilians, weblogs updated by independent journalists, smart-phones used by American soldiers in the Abu Ghraib prison: each represents an uncontrollable variable that can subvert the propaganda apparatus. Video imagery produced by television is now interlaced with the anarchic self-organised infrastructure of digital networked media that has become a formidable means of distribution (evidenced by the capillary diffusion of the video of the beheading of Nick Berg). Today's propaganda is used to manage a connective imagery rather than a collective spectacle, and the intelligence services set up simulacra of the truth based on networking technologies.

THE VIDEOCLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS

Alongside the techno-conflict between horizontal and vertical media, two secular cultures of image face each other on the international mediascape. The United States embodies the last stage of videocracy, an oligarchic technocracy based on hypertrophic advertising and infotainment, and the colonisation of the worldwide imagery through Hollywood and CNN. 20th century ideologies such as Nazism and Stalinism were intimately linked to the fetishism of the idea-image (as all of western thought is heir to Platonic idealism). Islamic culture on the contrary is traditionally iconoclast: it is forbidden to represent images of God and the Prophet, and usually of any living creature whatsoever. Only Allah is "Al Mussawir", he who gives rise to forms: imitating his gesture of creation is a sin (even if such a precept never appears in the Koran). Islam, unlike Christianity, has no sacred iconographic centre. In mosques the Kiblah is an empty niche. Its power comes not from the refusal of the image but from the refusal of its centralizing role, developing in this way a material, anti-spectacular, and horizontal cult. Indeed, on Doomsday, painters are meant to suffer more than other sinners. Even if modernisation proceeds through television and cinema (that paradoxically did not have the same treatment of painting), iconoclastic ground remains active and breaks out against western symbols, as happened in the case of the World Trade Centre. To strike at western idolatry, pseudo-Islamic terrorism becomes videoclasm, preparing attacks designed for live broadcasting and using satellite channels as a resonant means for its propaganda. Al-Jazeera broadcasts images of shot-dead Iraqi civilians, whilst western mass

media removes these bodies in favour of the military show. An asymmetrical imagery is developing between East and West, and it will be followed by an asymmetrical rage, that will break out with backlashes for generations to come. In such a clash between videocracy and videoclasm, a third actor, the global movement, tries to open a breach and develop therein an autonomous videopoiesis. The making of an alternative imagery is not only based on self-organising independent media, but also on winning back the dimension of myth and the body. Videopoiesis should speak — at the same time — to the belly and to the brain of the monkeys.

GLOBAL VIDEO-BRAIN

Western media and awareness was woken up by the physical force of live-broadcasted images not by the news of tortures at the Abu Ghraib prison or of Nick Berg's beheading. Television is the medium that taught the masses a Pavlovian reaction to images. It is also the medium that produced the globalisation of the collective mind (something more complex than the idea of public opinion). The feelings of the masses have been always reptilian: what media proliferation established is a video mutation of feelings, a becoming-video of the collective brain and of collective narration. The global video-brain functions through images, whereas our brains think out of images. This is not about crafting a theory, but recognising the natural extension of our faculties. Electronic and economic developments move at too high a speed for the collective mind to have time to communicate and elaborate messages in speech, there is only time for reacting to visual stimuli. A collective imagery arises when a media infrastructure casts and repeats the same images in a million copies, producing a common space; a consensual hallucination around the same object (that afterwards is spread through other channels from word-of-mouth to the film industry). In the case of the TV medium, such a serial communication of a million images is much more lethal, because it is instantaneous. On the other hand, the networked imagery works in an interactive and non-instantaneous way, this is why we call it connective imagery. Imagery is a collective serial broadcasting of the same image across different media. According to Goebbels, it is a lie repeated a million times that becomes public discourse, part of everyday conversations, and then accepted truth. Collective imagery is the place where media and desire meet each other, where the same repeated image modifies millions of bodies simultaneously and inscribes pleasure, hope and fear. Communication and desire, mediasphere and psychosphere, are the two axis that describe the war to the global mass, the way in which the war reaches our bodies far from the real conflict and the way image inscribes itself into the flesh.

ANIMAL NARRATIONS

Why does reality exist only when framed by a powerful TV network? Why is the course of events affected by the evening news? Collective imagery is not affected by the video evolution of mass technologies only, but also by the natural instincts of human kind. As a political animal (Aristotle), the human being is inclined to set up collective narratives,

that represent the instinct of belonging to its own kind. Let's call them animal narratives. For this reason television is a 'natural' medium, because it responds to the need of creating one narrative for millions of people, a single animal narrative for entire nations, similarly to what other narrative genres, like the epic, the myth, the Bible and the Koran, did and still do. Television represents, above all else, the ancestral feeling to belong to one Kind, that is, the meta-organism we all belong to. Each geopolitical area has its own video macro-attractor (CNN, BBC etc.), which the rest of the media relate to. Beside the macro-attractors, there are meta-attractors, featuring the role of critical consciousness against them, a function often held by press and web media (the *Guardian*, for instance). Of course the model is much more complex: the list could continue and end with blogs, which we can define as group micro-attractors, the smallest in scale, but suffice to say here that the audience and power of the main attractor are ensured by the natural animal instinct. This definition of mass media might seem strange, because they are no longer push media that communicate in unidirectional ways (one-to-many), but pull media that attract and group together; media in which we invest our desires (many-to-one). Paraphrasing Reich's remark on fascism, we can say that rather than the masses being brainwashed by the media establishment, the latter is sustained and desired by the perversion of the desire to belong.

DIGITAL ANARCHY. A VIDEOPHONE VS. EMPIRE

Traditional media war incorporates the Internet and the networked imagery (with television, Internet, mobile phones and digital cameras) turns into a battle ground: personal media such as digital cameras bring the cruelty of war directly into the living room, for the first time in history at the speed of an Internet download and out of any governmental control. This networked imagery cannot be stopped, and neither can technological evolution. Absolute transparency is an inevitable fate for all of us. The video phone era seriously undermines privacy, as well as any kind of secrecy, state secrecy included. Rumsfeld's vented outrage in front of US Senate Committee on Armed Services about the scandal at Abu Ghraib is extremely grotesque: "We're functioning... with peacetime constraints, with legal requirements, in a wartime situation, in the Information Age, where people are running around with digital cameras and taking these unbelievable photographs and then passing them off, against the law, to the media, to our surprise, when they had—they had not even arrived in the Pentagon." A few days later, Rumsfeld prohibited the use of any kind of camera or videophone to the American soldiers in Iraq. Rumsfeld himself was the 'victim' of the Internet broadcasting of a famous video that shows him politely shaking hands with Saddam Hussein in 1983. New digital media seem to have created an unpredictable digital anarchy, where a video phone can fight against Empire. The images of torture at Abu Ghraib are the internal nemesis of a civilization of machines that is running out of control of its creators and demiurges. There is a machine nemesis but also an image nemesis: as Baudrillard notes, the Empire of the Spectacle is now submitted to the hypertrophy of the Spectacle itself, to its own greed for images, to an auto-erotic pornography. The infinitely repeatable charac-

ter of digital technology allowed for the demise of the copyright culture through P2P networks, but also for the proliferation of digital spam and the white noise of contents on the web. Video phones have created a networked mega-camera, a super-light panopticon, a horizontal Big Brother. The White House was trapped in this web. Digital repetition no longer delivers us to the game of mirrors of Postmodern weak thought — to the image as self-referential simulacrum — but rather to an interlinked universe where videopoiesis can connect the farthest points and cause fatal short circuits.

WAR PORN

Indeed, what came to light with the Abu Ghraib media scandal was not a casual short-circuit, but the implosion into a deadly vortex of war, media, technology, body, desire. Philosophers, journalists and commentators from all sides rushed to deliver different perspectives for a new framework of analysis. The novelty of the images of Abu Ghraib and Nick Berg (whether fictional or not is not the point) consists in the fact that they forged a new narrative genre of collective imagery. For the first time, a snuff movie was projected onto the screen of global imagery and Internet subcultures, used to such images, suddenly came out of the closet: Rotten.com finally reached the masses. Rather than making sense of a traumatic experience, newspapers and weblogs worldwide are engaged in drawing out the political, cultural, social and aesthetic repercussions of a new genre of image that forces us to upgrade our immunity system and communicative strategies. As Seymour Hersh noted, Rumsfeld provided the world with a good excuse to ignore the Geneva Convention from now on. But he lowered the level of tolerance of the visible as well, forcing us to accept cohabitation with the Horror. Anglo-American journalism has defined warporn through journalism popular tabloid and government talk-shows which fetishise super-sized weapons and well-polished uniforms, hi-tech tanks and infrared-guided bombs: a panoplia of images that some define as the aseptic substitute of pornography proper. Ridley Scott's *Black Hawk Down* is war hardcore, to name one. The cover of *Time*, where an American soldier was chosen as 'Person of the Year,' was defined pure war porn by Adbusters: "Three American Soldiers standing proudly, half-smiles playing on their faces, rifles cradled in their arms." War porn is also a sub-genre of trash porn — still relatively unknown, coming from the dark side of the net. It simulates violent sex scenes between soldiers or the rape of civilians (pseudo-amateur movies usually shot in Eastern Europe and often passed as real). War porn is freed from its status of net subculture: its morbid interest and fetish for war imagery become political weapons, voyeurism and the nightmares of the masses. Is it a coincidence that war porn emerges from the Iraqi marshes right at this time?

DIGITAL-BODY REJECTION

The metaphorical association of war with sex that underpins much Anglo-American journalism, points to something deeper that was never before made so explicit: a libido that, alienated by wealth, awaits war to give free reign to its ancestral instincts. War is as old as the human species: natural aggressiveness is historically embodied in collective

and institutional forms, but several layers of technology have separated today's war from its animal substratum. We needed Abu Ghraib pictures to bring to the surface the obscene background of animal energy which lies underneath a democratic make-up. Did this historic resurfacing of the repressed occur today simply because of the mass spreading of digital cameras and video phones? Or is there a deeper connection between the body and technology bound to prove to be deadly sooner or later? As the mass media are filled with tragic and morbid news, the framing of digital media seems to be missing something from its inception. This could be that passion of the real (Alain Badiou) which, exiled onto the screen, explodes out of control. New personal media are directly connected to the psychopathology of everyday living, we might say that they create a new format for it and a new genre of communication, but above all, they establish a relation with the body that television never had. War porn seems to signal the rejection of technology by subconscious forces that express themselves through the same medium that represses them: this rejection might point to the ongoing adaptation of the body to the digital. Proliferation of digital prostheses is not as rational, aseptic and immaterial as it seems. Electronic media seemed to have introduced technological rationality and coolness into human relations, yet the shadows of the digital increasingly re-surface. There comes a point when technology physically unbridles its opposite. The Internet is the best example: behind the surface of the immaterial and disembodied technology lies a traffic of porn content that takes up half of its daily band-width. At the same time, the Orwellian proliferation of video cameras, far from producing an Apollonian world of transparency, is ridden with violence, blood and sex. The next Endemol *Big Brother* will resemble the film *Battle Royal*, where Takeshi Kitano forces a class of students on an island and into a game of death where the winner is the last survivor. We have always considered the media as a prosthesis of human rationality, and technology as the new embodiment of the logos. But new media also embodies the dark side of the Western world. In war porn we found this Siamese body made up of libido and media, desire and image. Two radical movements that are the same movement: war reinvests the alienated libido, personal media are filled by the desperate libido they alienated. The subconscious can not lie, the skeletons sooner or later start knocking on the closet door.

IMAGERY RESET

War results from the inability to dream after depleting all libidinal energy in an outflow of prostheses, commodities and images. War violence forces us to believe again in images of everyday life, images of the body as well as images of advertising. War is an imagery reset. War brings the attention and excitement for advertising back to a zero degree, where advertising can start afresh. War saves advertising from the final annihilation of the orgasm, from the nirvana of consumption, the inflation and indifference of values. War brings the new economy back to the old economy, to traditional and consolidated commodities, it gets rid of immaterial commodities that risk dissolving the economy into a big potlatch and into the anti-economy of the gift that the Internet represents. War has the 'positive' effect of redelivering us to 'radical' thought, to the political responsibil-

ity of representation, against the interpretative flights of ‘weak thought,’ of semiotics and postmodernism (where postmodernism is the western image looking for an alibi to its own impotence). The pornographic images of war, as we said, are the reflux of the animal instinct that our economic and social structure has repressed. But rather than a psychoanalysis that reactively justifies new customs and fashions, we seek to carry out a ‘physical’ analysis of libidinal energy. In wartime we see images re-emerge with a new autonomous and autopoietic force. There are different kinds of image: war porn images are not representations, they speak directly to the body, they are a cruel, lucid and affirmative force, like Artaud’s theatre, they are re-magnetised images that do not provoke incredulity, they are neural icons running on the spinal motorways, as Ballard would put it. Radical images redeliver the body to us, radical images are bodies, not simulacra. Their effect is first physical then cognitive. “The movement-image and the flux-matter are rigorously one and the same thing” (Deleuze). The damned tradition of the image is back, with the psychic and contagious power of Artaud’s theatre, a machinic image that joins together the material and the immaterial, body and dream. “Fiction is a branch of neurology” (Ballard). In a libidinal explosion, war porn liberates the animal energies of Western society like a bomb. Such energies can be expressed through fascist reactions as well as liberating revolts. Radical images are images that are still capable of being political, in the strong sense of the word, and they can have an impact on the masses that is simultaneously political, aesthetic and carnal.

VIDEPOIESIS: THE BODY-IMAGE

How can we make an intelligent use of television? The first intelligent reaction is to switch it off. Activists collective such as Adbusters.org (Canada) and Esterni.org (Italy) organize yearly TV strikes, promoting a day or a week’s abstinence from television. Can Western society think without television? It cannot. Even if we were to stop watching TV because of a worldwide black-out or a nuclear war, our imagery, hopes and fears would carry on thinking within a televised brainframe. This is not about addiction, the video is simply our primary collective language: once upon a time there was religion, mythology, epic and literature. We can repress the ritual (watching TV) but we cannot repress the myth. We can switch television off, but not our imagery. For this reason the idea of an autonomous videopoiesis is not about the practice of alternative information, but about new mythical devices for the collective imagery. In its search for the Perfect Image—that is, the image that is capable of stopping the War, subverting Empire and starting the Revolution the global movement has theorised and practiced video activism (from Indymedia to street TVs) and mythopoiesis (from Luther Blissett to San Precario). However, it never tried to merge those strategies into a videopoiesis capable of challenging Bin Laden, Bush, Hollywood and the CNN at the level of myth, a videopoiesis for new icons and formats, like for instance the video sequences of William Gibson’s *Patter recognition* distributed on the net. Videopoiesis does not mean the proliferation of cameras in the hands of activists, but the creation of video narratives, a new design of genres and formats rather than alternative information. The challenge lies in the body-

image. Through videopoiesis we have to welcome the repressed desires of the global movement and open the question of the body, buried under a para-catholic and third-worldist rhetoric. While Western imagery is being filled with the dismembered bodies of heroes, the global movement is still uneasy about its desires. War porn is a challenge for the movement not to equal the horror but to produce images that awaken and target the sleepy body. Throughout its history, television has always produced macro-bodies, mythical giant bodies magnified by media power, bodies as cumbersome as Ancient Gods. The television regime creates monsters, hypertrophic bodies such as the image of the President of the United States, the Al-Qaeda brand and film stars, while the net and personal media try to dismember them and produce new bodies out of their carcasses. Videopoiesis must eliminate the unconscious self-censorship that we find in the most liberal and radical sections of society, the self-censorship that, behind a crypto-catholic imagery, hides the grin of the monkey. Once crypto-religious self-censorship is eliminated, videopoiesis can begin its creative reassembly of dismembered bodies.

WARPUNK. I LIKE TO WATCH!

Watching cruel images is good for you. What the Western world needs is to stare at its own shadows. In Ballard's *The Atrocity Exhibition*, war news and violent scenes improve adults' sexual activity and the condition of psychotic children. Warlords are filling the collective imagery with brute force. Why leave them to do it in peace? If in the real world we are always victims of the blackmail of non-violence, in the realm of imagery and imagination we can feed our wet dreams at last. If American imagery is allowing a drift towards Nazism and is offering an apology and justification for any kind of violence, our response can only be an apology of resistance and action, that is warpunk. Warpunk is not a delirious subculture that embraces weapons in an aesthetic gesture. On the contrary, it uses radical images as weapons of legitimate defense. To paraphrase a Japanese saying, warpunk steals from war and empire the art of embellishing death. Warpunk uses warporn in a tragic way, to overcome Western culture and the self-censorship of its counter-culture. Above all we are afraid of the hubris of the American warlords, of the way they face any obstacle stepping over all written and unwritten rules. What is the point of confronting this threat with the imagery of the victim, that holds up to the sky hands painted in white? Victimhood is a bad adviser: it is the definitive validation of Nazism, the sheep's baa that makes the wolf even more indifferent. The global movement is quite a good example of "weak thought" and reactive culture. Perhaps this is because, unlike warlords and terrorists, it never developed a way of thinking about the tragic, war, violence and death. A tragic thought is the gaze that can dance on any image of the abyss. In Chris Korda's *I like to watch video* (download available on www.churchofeuthanasia.org) porn scenes of oral sex and masturbation are mixed with those of football and baseball matches, and with well-known NY 9/11 images. The phallic imagery reaches the climax: the Pentagon is hit by an ejaculation, multiple erections are turned into the NY 9/11 skyline, the Twin Towers themselves become the object of an architectural fellatio. This video is the projection of the lowest instincts of American

society, of the common ground that bind spectacle, war, pornography and sport. It is an orgy of images that shows to the West its real background. Warpunk is a squadron of B52s throwing libidinal bombs and radical images into the heart of Western imagery.

PORNOGRAPHIC CODING

Florian Cramer and Stewart Home

“Program code is like pornography. It has linear logic, but no meaning. There is an accumulation of things already known. The focus is always on the same explicit facts. Repetition and boredom rule.”

(Adapted from a Neoist slogan)

“Art is sanctioned pornography.”

(Neoist slogan)

WE DEMAND A SHAMANIC PORNOGRAPHY

Capitalist “progress” destroys the imagination through a frenzy of the visible. What we see we no longer need to imagine. A famous zero from the popsicle academy was once moved to write that every time a man had an erection it was a triumph of the imagination. Power to the imagination, and to sex – for they are one and the same thing. Pornographers of the world close your eyes. You have nothing to lose but your bodily fluids! It is time to decondition ourselves by going beyond the known world.

There are the shamans of old ingested psychedelic mushrooms, while today we are further armed with a battery of chemically synthesised drugs including ecstasy and LSD. These psychedelics are psychic elevators that can power us through the seven levels of human consciousness. The first four levels of consciousness can be reached in ordinary everyday life. Level Five requires either chemical assistance, or long hours of arduous interaction with your computer, and when you hit this level, sexual activity is vastly enhanced. Once you go above Level Five consciousness you don’t necessarily need coitus. Indeed, at Level Six you are telepathic and sexually combined with your fellow hack-

ers, and this integration is even greater at Level Seven (aka total fucking zero and one pornography).

Drugs and code are the ancient and modern tools with which we can investigate our own minds while turning our bodies into one vast erogenous zone. Our message to purveyors of representational porn is: HANDS OFF (OUR) EJACULATIONS (both male and female). WE WANT TO CUM IN ALL THE COLOURS OF ALL THE FLAGS OF ALL THE CONSULATES. As an initiated shaman, Jean Cocteau was able to come through the sheer power of his imagination, he could do this without using his hands to manipulate his genitals. Let's keep our hands free to impute data on our computer terminals, and use the convulsive power of codes to bring us to orgasm.

PORNOGRAPHY AS POPULAR COMPUTING

The effectiveness of art is generally hard to judge. Pornography as an art creates ecstatic perception, triggering arousal only through symbolic codes. Cybersex is by no means new, porn is its oldest device. Computation and programming have likewise been known in pornography for centuries. In *The 120 Days of Sodom*, Sade imagines a ceaseless execution of coded game rules. There is no single point of originality, but only combinations computed out of a set of sex partners and their organs. Porn as speculative programming has been long neglected. Along the lines of *.walk* by *socialfiction.org*, we demand psychogeographical computers built from pornographic imagination and shamanic sex acts.

Carl van Bolen, author of *The History of Eroticism* (1966), and Eduard Fuchs, author of *The History of Erotic Art* (1922), coin a programming language of Greek-Latin terms for those combinations. But only with modern day commercial pornography do those exhaustive computations become real. A mainstream porn video shop like Erotic Video Service in Berlin with its 24,000 tapes and DVDs for rent: www.evs-video.de, could be called a pornographic Library of Babel, based on a brute force algorithm of sheer masses of data. The poets of the French Oulipo group, the "workshop of potential literature," which from the 1960s onwards explored algorithmics and formal restraints in writing, announced a chapter for pornography, Oupornpo, but this seems to have remained a dirty old man's joke. Contemporary writer Simon Strong makes up for it in his forthcoming novel *66mindfuck99* for which he created "a list of criteria defining legal and extra-legal sex acts," arranging them with help of a spreadsheet to what he calls "an optimal set of erotic episodes."

Does the potential of pornography exhaust itself in the simple mechanics of sexual combinations? Surely not, although we want to show that it is too easy to sweepingly denounce this approach. Through its minimal variations in endless repetition, it is clear that pornography has become purely parodic, in other words, that each pornographic coupling, scene and image becomes the parody of another, or the same in a deceptive form. Ever since pornography started to circulate, an effort at total identification has been made, because each pornographic detail ties one operation to another. All pornography would be visibly connected if one could discover at a single glance and in its totality the

tracings of Ariadne's thread leading pornographic codes into their own labyrinth. But their coupling is no less irritating than the copulation of bodies. And when I scream I AM PORNOGRAPHIC, an integral erection results, because the mere verb "to be" is the vehicle of sexual frenzy.

PORNOGRAPHY IN STEWART HOME'S FICTION

I included large chunks of repetitive pornography in novels such as *Blow Job* and *Cunt* because few publishers would consider putting out books of fiction that were less than sixty thousand words long. By including essentially the same pornographic scene on every other page I only needed to write about thirty thousand words. Bergson claimed that repetition was the basis of all humour, and I certainly found using it as a device to expand my books to a length that was acceptable to the publishing industry, and side-splittingly funny. I was also convinced that if anyone was sexually aroused by my pornographic material (some of which was lifted directly from out-of-copyright sources) then that was a tremendous achievement. It's a demonstration of shamanic power to be able to laugh and have an orgasm at the same time. The imagery I used in my early novels was shamanic too, it was conceived as a revelation of the true nature and scope of the unconscious, a sudden shift away from the standpoint of the atomised individual to the point of view of the entire cosmic movement: a 'timeless psychedelic moment' in which the universe is experienced in the act of waking up and becoming aware of itself. One could find the beginnings of the cosmic metaphors I used in pulp fiction, where characters having sex might be described as no longer in control of their bodies because 'the DNA had taken over.' I sought to extend such imagery until it was on a par with the visions of the shamans of old. In order to do this, I would write about DNA codes being scrambled and unscrambled across the muscular structure structure of my bulk, about the sexual act leading me to imagine myself as the first amphibian to emerge from the sea and feel the warmth of the sun on my back, about genetically encoded memoirs of the first star exploding and about being out on the mudflats of pre-history...

THE EROTICISM OF BOREDOM

I.I.I.I am. My identity. Mine. I exchange it with another and step outside where the sun is shining. Another person walks up to me and gives me some words. I respond by giving her some pleasure I have with me.

If you use words often enough they become interchangeable. Infinity, limitation, enthusiasm, depression, imagination, concretion. Give me back pleasure. I need to get more words with it. Chasing your mind's tail, the back of your image unfolds into warm breeze. Throaty sound and smell of petal marshland. Five minute stare into the eyes of another being. Breaking the silence, I say "I wanna go down on you." Stepping back and removing pleasure, giving words. Is this porn?

Pornography. The mind is pornographic. I shape the word "cunt" in it, only to prove to myself that there is obscenity. Cities, streets, romantic dreams of the perfect dirty im-

age flickering like a single frame of film. Slow down the projection and blink while you watch it.

PORNOGRAPHY IN DREAMS

Pornography in dreams
 Pornography in books
 Pornography in cars
 Pornography in advertising
 And everywhere repression
 Repressed living as the expression of everyday life
 Free your mind and your ass will follow
 Pick it up, let it move, make it happen
 Go with the code
 Arm yourself with drugs, magic and computing
 Fuck with fucking and drift into abstraction
 Zeros and ones turn me on

PORNOGRAPHY IN COMPUTING

Computing has been sexual ever since John von Neumann, the creator of modern-day computer architecture, conceived of self-replicating automata. Nowadays, they translate into computer viruses and the rhetoric of preventing infection uses the same concepts and terminology as rhetoric about preventing sexually transmitted diseases. Computer users know that the electronic message “I love you” is just as true as its non-electronic equivalent, meaning in reality “I want to fuck with you.”

If codes can fuck your computer, where’s the porn that depicts them?

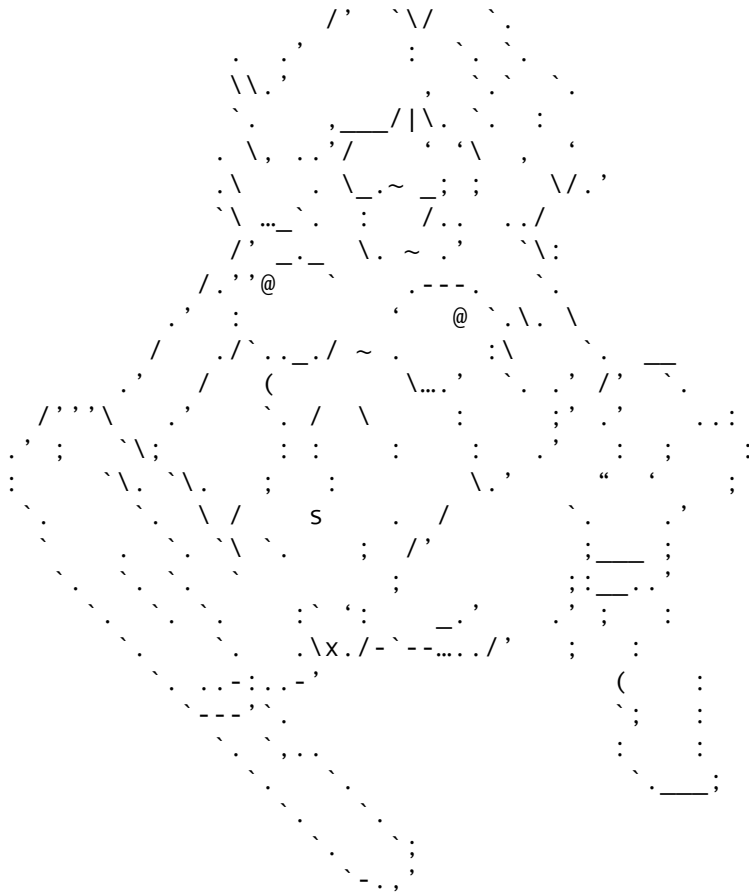
Porn, of course, flows through computers in abundance, and software has been adapted to it. The Linux-based image and video display program “pornview” is, according to its manual, optimized “for unattended presentation of images for hands-free viewing.”

DVD videos can have multiple camera angles, a technical feature created to cater to the porn industry and its customers. The image rendering component of the free Mozilla browser was originally called “libpr0n,” “pr0n” being hacker code speak for “porn.” Another GNU/Linux program, “driftnet” taps into a local computer network, and displays all images that co-workers are currently browsing. The developers of the program recommend that “if you are possessed of Victorian sensibilities, and share an unswitched network with others who are not, you should probably not use it.”

But in these examples, the pornography remains outside the software itself. Obscenity on program code level exists, too, but doesn’t necessarily render the running software obscene or pornographic. The Linux kernel, for example, contains the word “fuck” 56 times in its sourcecode:

[Sorry. Ignored $\begin{smallmatrix} \dots \end{smallmatrix}$ $\end{smallmatrix}$]

But Linux hardly fucks anything in operation. Another example of non-operational code-level pornography is the ASCII pr0n genre, pornographic images drawn as typograms:



Originally a hack to bring visual pornography into the world of alphanumeric computer terminals, they became ironic retro chic in 1990s net art, above all in “Deep ASCII,” a typographic rendering of the movie “Deep Throat.”¹

“Program,” which the hacker “Jargon File” defines as the “euphoria experienced upon the completion of a program or other computer-related project,” is another example of ecstasy outside the running program. However, a concept of program that involves the code and the process has existed since the Middle Ages in ecstatic Kabbalah. The oldest known kabbalistic book *Sefer Yetzirah* (Book of Creation) contains mathematical combinatorics, and Kabbalists like Abraham Abulafia practiced computational readings of the Torah as a sexually ecstatic technique. In an 18th century autobiography, Salomon

Maimon tells us how he learnt that:

“the name Jehova represents [...] the person of the Godhead generis masculini, while the word Koh means [...] the person of the Godhead generis feminini, and the word Amar denotes sexual union. The words ‘Koh amar Jehovah,’ ‘Thus saith the Lord,’ I therefore explained as follows: [...] an actual union of these divine spouses took place from which the whole world might expect a blessing.”

In other words, the Kabbalah imagines God as able to fuck himself by the virtue of his male and female attributes, in the medium of the words put down in the Torah. The Torah becomes pornographic writing, a code whose execution generates divine physical arousal.

Duchamp’s *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*, can be read as another auto-erotic obscene and pornographic mechanism, secularised however as modern art. Still more secularised are the corresponding technologies that exist in computing today, such as the “Brainfuck” programming language and program code recursion code executing itself in strange loops, a key structure among others in the programming language LISP. While this code is, by its nature, a pure formalism, its coupling is no less irritating than the copulation of bodies. When I scream I AM THE PROGRAM, an integral erection results, because the verb ‘to be’ is the vehicle of obscene frenzy, bastardising the formalism of the software and my informal being to a dirty code.

Re-route via gender strippage [simple cognitive shift allocation], strip to the violence inducer core and wipe with a pseudo stroke. Instruction: Regenerate the Mis][s][User.

TOWARDS AN OPEN SOURCE PORNOGRAPHY

Richard Kern: Suicide Girls is a mystery to me because I thought only women ran the site.

Daniel Robert Epstein: Does that make a difference?

Richard Kern: I had heard from various models from there that my type was not liked there because I was a guy exploiting women and SuicideGirls is a feminist site. No matter what anyone says, its still naked girls and still guys checking them out. There are girls checking in also but a lot of guys too. It’s the same thing no matter how you cut it.²

No doubt, indie porn is the pornography of this decade, if not of the whole century. Beyond that, it appears to be the first significant new cultural movement of the millennium. It has replaced net.art as the aesthetic avant-garde of the Internet. Websites like Suicidegirls.com, Cleansheets.com, ThatStrangeGirl.com and FatalBeauty.com combine the punk styling of their models with visual punk aesthetics and do-it-yourself punk attitude.³ The site IndieNudes.com, lists more related sites and resources.⁴ It thus seems as if there is finally a non-industrial and erotically imaginative pornography for hetero-

and bisexuals, after the avant-garde of lesbian and gay pornography had reached the same level already in the early 1990s, with magazines like *On Our Backs* and porn video labels like Cazzo Productions.

In reality, indie porn is just like indie pop. It pretends to be different from the industry, but works with the same business model. Just as punk and indie pop saved the music industry in the 1980s and 1990s, indie porn will save the porn industry of today. It is the research and development arm of the porn industry. An industry that otherwise would go bankrupt because everyone freely shares its products on the Internet.⁵



Figure 1. Sample image from *sucidegirls.com*

Most indie porn sites are based on software and editorial formats created in independent net cultures, most of all, weblogs. Central to the aesthetics of indie porn is a concept of the authentic. Not only are the models unmodified by surgery (except for tattoos and piercings) and Photoshop. They are also accessible in chats, personal blogs and homepages: a key feature of most indie porn sites. They thus produce a simulacrum of the “real” that is no different from the popular genre of industrial pseudo amateur pornography. The rough look and production values of indie porn not only simulates authenticity, it’s also a means of cutting production costs and outsourcing labor when, for example on the site *IShotMyself.com*, the models become their own photographers.

Glamour and synthetic cyber pornography as well as hentai anime are more radical than indie porn because they show sexual alienation openly and make no attempt at clouding the fact that authentic moments can’t be found in them. Just like mainstream pop star Michael Jackson is ultimately more subversive than The Manic Street Preachers, commercial pornography is superior to indie porn because it offers less for the imagination to work with. By offering more variation in the imagery, indie porn preempts, and



Figure 2. Sample image from *nofauxxx.com*



Figure 3. Dahlia Schweitzer, "Lovergirl" photo series, *nofauxxx.com*

thereby erodes imagination. A digital pornography that would strive for true honesty and imagination should reduce, rather than increase, its visual imagination. In the end, it should present itself as nothing but code, teaching us to get off on mere zeros and ones, thus overcoming the false dichotomy of the artificial and the authentic.

Against commercial indie porn we demand a truly independent, open source pornography. Pornography should be made by all: a radically populist pornography of collectively produced, purely formal codes. This pornography will reconcile rationality and instinct and overcome alienation because the codes will have to be reconstituted into sexual imaginations by the right side of brain. Software, reconceived as a dirty code cross-bred of formalism and subjectivity, will be the paradigm of this pornography, a code that sets processes into motion.⁶

This paper was first given at Crash Conference, 11 February 2005, and is reproduced here with the permission of the authors.

NOTES

- 1 by the ASCII Art Ensemble around Vuc Cosic and Luka Freljeh.
- 2 Richard Kern interviewed by Daniel Robert Epstein, <http://suicidegirls.com/words/Richard+Kern/>
- 3 <http://www.nerve.com> is a highbrow forerunner of these sites, creating “sophisticated” porn for an intellectual audience.
- 4 The sites www.ishotmyself.com and www.beautifulagony.com, straightforwardly translate avant-garde art concepts into porn business models; the former features models who take pictures of themselves, the latter plagiarises Andy Warhol’s film *Blow Job* by merely showing faces of persons who have an orgasm.
- 5 Richard Kern says about mainstream porn magazines in the same interview: “I shoot for them only occasionally now because that business isn’t what it used to be. [...] A lot of the point mags are going out of business. They dropped the pay tremendously and it’s all because of the Internet. I used to go out once a month to LA and shoot for one week. I’d make a ton of money then come back to New York and do whatever I wanted.”
- 6 A rare example of such dirty porn code are the writings of the Australian codework artist mez.



Figure 4. An open source porn coder



Figure 5. Turning her image into code increases its shamanistic pornographic quality

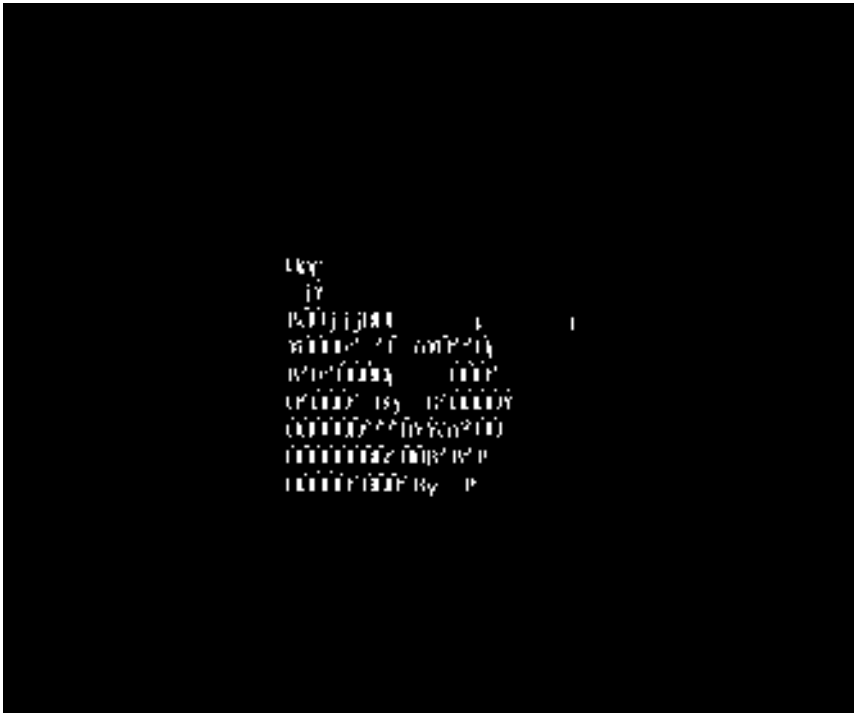


Figure 6. Further pornographic enhancement

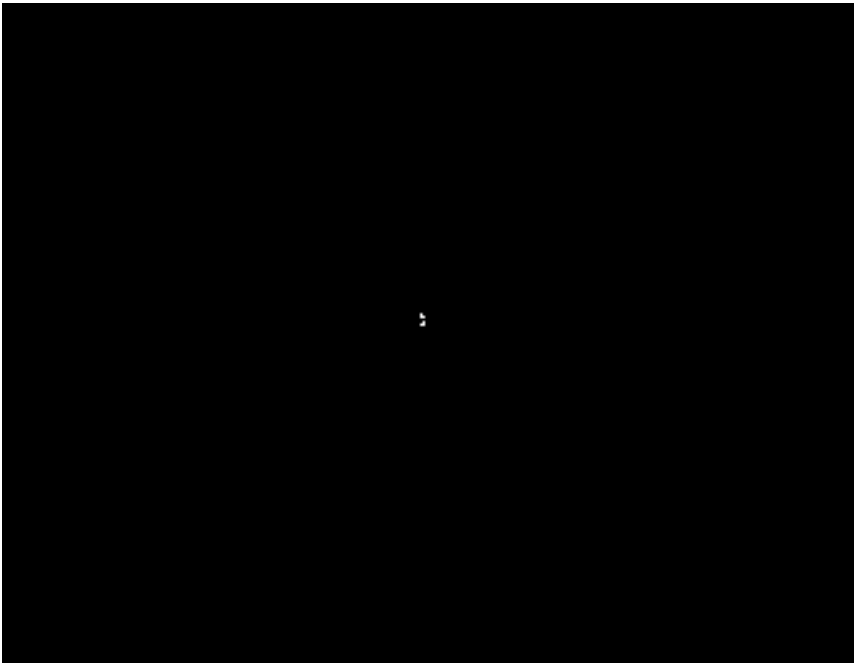


Figure 7. Pornographic perfection

SODOM BLOGGING:
ALTERNATIVE PORN AND
AESTHETIC SENSIBILITY

Florian Cramer

Indie porn represents a currently flourishing sub-genre of pornography, in which well-known looks from subcultures such as Gothic or Punk are oftentimes staged as anti-commercial, feminist gestures of self-empowerment. In this regard, the conflicts that shaped the debates around pornography's obscenity from the sixties onwards are however avoided in favour of alternative sexual aesthetics — pornography thus loses one of its basic features. But can there ever be pornography beyond the obscene?

The contradiction of all pornography is that it destroys the obscene. Like the beautiful for classicism, the sublime for Dark Romanticism and the ugly for the grotesque, the obscene is porn's aesthetic register, its aura and its selling point. Sade invents modern pornography as the discourse of art crosses a historical threshold from rule-based poiesis to the sensitive aisthesis. *Les 120 jours de Sodome*, illustrates precisely this clash of cultures: a gang of perpetrators, old aristocrats who combine and choreograph their orgies according to the rules of poetics; a group of victims, young children from the bourgeoisie, whose sensibilities unmask the debauchery as perversion in the first place; resulting in a mutual escalation of poiesis and aisthesis, construction and sentiment, machine and body. Conceptualism and performance, the antagonistic and complementary poles of modern art, are already fully developed here, and their conjunction of the pornographic and the mechanical will be taken up again in Duchamp's *Large Glass* and Schwitters' *Merzbau*, patrician sex-machine construction and petit-bourgeois sensitive "cathedral of erotic misery."

That the pornographic logic of the taboo on obscenity cancels itself nowhere more thoroughly than in pornography itself, is demonstrated exemplarily by the performances of Annie Sprinkle. An actress in seventies mainstream porn who became an Action art-

ist and “alternative porn” pioneer, she not only transgresses generic boundaries but also turns the classical imagery of heterosexual pornography on its head. With her ritual invitation to the audience to see into her vagina by means of a speculum, Sprinkle concludes the iconographic tradition of Courbet’s *L’Origine du Monde* (1886) and Duchamp’s *Etant donnés* (posthumous, 1968), but disarms the previously lewd gaze, and as an agent of both sexual education and enlightenment, exorcises both the taboo and the sexual mystery from such display. Speaking of an obscene “heft of language” and discovering “in a word such as ‘cunt’ [...] great power,”¹ writer Kirsten Fuchs indicates not only the taboo of Indie porn discourses which defuse this heft, but also the failure of industrial pornography to reproduce it. Sade, whose systematically constructed escalations blunt the consumer’s sensibilities just like any mainstream pornography, attempts to save the taboo by carrying his excesses to the extreme of ritual murder, a figure of thought, Romantic and sentimentalist at its core, which lives on in the “urban legends” of performance art suicides of Rudolf Schwarzkogler and John Fare, and is physically performed, in a race against the Zeitgeist, in Genesis P. Orridge’s modifications of his body.

The “exploitation” of the porn viewer consists in the false promise of obscenity, or its simulation—as Gonzo porn has done since John Stagliano’s “Buttman” series—through the aggressive penetration and protrusion of bodies.² Yet this is precisely where mainstream and independent pornography, the business and the activism of porn meet: Sprinkle’s performances are Gonzo with the addition of a feminist “empowerment” which returns the object of such protrusion to the position of the subject. And the independent pornography which has recently established itself as a genre, mostly on the Internet, but flanked by sexually explicit auteur movies such as *9 songs* and *Shortbus*, can be the subject of a discussion free of bad conscience because, among other reasons, it presents “good” sex without obscenity; fulfilling, after the interventions of the feminist anti-porn debate of the 1980s, Peter Gorsen’s diagnosis of a neo-vitalist tendency in contemporary sexual aesthetics that consummate the program of turn-of-the-century anti-industrialisation and Naturist movements.³

Thus, the boundaries are blurred between the pornographic exploitation of codes from subcultures and artistic experimentation on the one hand, and the sub-cultural appropriation of pornographic codes on the other hand. The Australian porn holding gmbill.com hosts “Project ISM” at ishotmyself.com, a simulated conceptual art project by women who photograph themselves, and beautifulagony.com, a website _ the eroticism is quite successful _ exclusively devoted to close-up videos of men’s and women’s faces during sex and orgasm, thus serialising the concept behind Andy Warhol’s *Blow Job*, in recursive application of Warhol’s aesthetic to itself. The milieu’s, roles and interests of art, and commercial enterprise of artists and sex workers, of sex industry and cultural criticism seem to blend into each other: the photo models and sex performers at SuicideGirls.com or AbbyWinters.com discuss feminist literature seminars, artist Dahlia Schweitzer is at once Electropunk singer, author, former call girl, photography artist and her own nude model with a college degree in Women’s Studies; while the humanities in turn approach the subject as participant observers in Porn Studies and at recent “netporn” and

“post porn politics” conferences.

The price for such integration is the avoidance of all conflict. Whether as a provocation, as an expression of the power of sex or of sexual politics – what is thus liquidated, the obscene, was what marked the points of intersection between the experimental arts and commercial pornography, in Courbet and Duchamp, in Bataille’s novels, Hans Bellmer’s dolls, Viennese Actionism, Carolee Schneemann’s *Meat Joy*, but also in pornographers later honored as artists, such as photographers Nobuyoshi Araki and Irving Klaw, fetish comic strip artist Eric Stanton and exploitation moviemakers Russ Meyer, Doris Wishman, Jean Rollin (whose work was honored by Aida Ruilova during the most recent Berlin Biennial) and Jess Franco.⁴ What is obscene in these constellations are fetishes that become objects of exchange between the porno and underground cultures. Cross-fading between the biker and gay leather S/M cultures, between Satanism and Fascist iconography, Kenneth Anger’s experimental film *Scorpio Rising* of 1964 exemplarily demonstrates these transactions. A decade later, Genesis P. Orridge and Cosey Fanny Tutti will copy this back into youth culture with their pornographic performance group COUM Transmissions, from which the band Throbbing Gristle and industrial music emerge, as will punk fashion, collaged by Vivienne Westwood at her London boutique SEX, out of bondage and fetish accessories.

McLaren’s and Westwood’s punk is the bourgeois culture of sentiment inverted, mobilising the registers of the ugly, the disgusting and the obscene for an anti-beautiful aesthetic. Little wonder, then, that in its later, no less bourgeois mutation into the Autonomist culture of squat houses, construction trailer camps and cultural centres, punk claimed a different, “alternative” kind of beauty for itself. Following the same logic, the connotations of the fetish are transformed from the obscene into the anti-obscene in the sex stage shows of early hard-core punk band Plasmatics, featuring frontwoman Wendy O. Williams, a former stripper and porn actress, and later of the punk/metal women’s band Rockbitch, and finally in “Indie porn,” an allegedly punk-cultural Internet phenomenon. During the 1990s, specialised porn websites establish the genre of “Gothic porn” with otherwise conventional pornographic images and videos showing women in the Dark Wave look. In 2001, “Suicide Girls,” the first commercially successful Indie porn website, emerges from this environment.⁵

But punk, thus dressed up as leftist radicalism, disowned its roots in fetishism, or rather displayed its other side, traced already in the late 1970s rivalry between punk and disco by Spike Lee’s film *Summer of Sam*, with punk culture dominated by heterosexual white men, nursing its resentments of the poly-sexual, gay-dominated and multi-ethnic disco culture. German polit-punk band Slime’s disparaging refrain of 1981, *Samstag Nacht, Discozeit / Girls Girls Girls zum Ficken bereit* (Saturday night, disco time / girls girls girls ready to fuck), expressed an attitude which, six years later, at the apex of the feminist “PorNo” campaign, exploded in violence at the Berlin theatre *Eiszeit*, when an autonomous commando raided a presentation of Richard Kern and Lydia Lunch’s underground porn movie *Fingered*. Even today, debates over pornography belabor this conflict, though less explicitly so. Proclamations of an alternative pornographic culture

and imagination still always also mean taking a stand against anti-pornography feminism. And the other origin of Indie porn, besides commercial Gothic porn sites, is the “sex-positive feminism” – founded by Susie Bright, Diana Cage, and others as a counter-movement to the PorNo campaign of Andrea Dworkin, Catharine MacKinnon, and, in Germany, Alice Schwarzer – which not only discussed but also put into creative practice a “different” pornography incorporating feminist reflections; for instance, in the Lesbian journal *On Our Backs*, in the German Konkursbuch publisher’s annual *Das heimliche Auge*, and at *Nerve.com*.

Both feminist tendencies, anti-porn and pro-porn, disagree on the therapy but not on the diagnosis that mainstream pornography is sexist and disgusting.⁶ What is often overlooked, especially in Europe, is that Dworkin and MacKinnon by no means demanded that pornography be prohibited or censored.⁷ Instead, their campaign acknowledges the power of sex and of the obscene imagination; the power that virtually all varieties of alternative pornography play down as a game without consequences, rationalise and repress. Indie porn replaces the rhetoric of artificiality in classical mainstream pornography – artificial body parts, sterile studios, wooden acting – with a rhetoric of the authentic: instead of mask-like bodies normalised using make-up, wigs and implants, the authentic person is exposed and protruded not physically, as in Gonzo porn, but psychically. Indie porn websites, comprehensive links to which can be found at www.indienudes.com, no longer emulate the cover aesthetics of porn videos and magazines but have switched to a standard format including diaries, blogs and discussion forums where users communicate with models and models with each other in a rationalised discourse characterised by a pretense of mutual respect, while the private person is at the same time in her “authentic” totality exposed to the public view, following exactly the logic traced by Foucault in the development of the penal system from the physical mutilation of the offender to the modern panoptic prison’s psychological terror.

With this personalisation and psychologisation, Indie porn is making the logical next step in a progressive unmasking of the pornographic actor that began in the 1980s with the switch (recounted at epic length in the movie *Boogie Nights*) from 35 millimeter porno-theatre flicks to cheap video, continued in Gonzo anal sex porn, and culminates in Internet pornography. Gonzo porn is even more subversive and transgressive than Indie pornography in that it subliminally satisfies and thus installs gay desires within the heterosexual mainstream: anal barebacking, women styled like drag queens, and – in contradistinction from most 1970s and 1980s porn – offensively sexualised male stars, like Rocco Siffredi, in the camera’s focus. What Gonzo stages as a radical poesis and white-trash body performance in the vein of “Jackass,” is turned in Indie porn into a sentimentalised confessional discourse before a paying audience cast as voyeuristic confessors, with constant assurances of the bourgeois normalcy and, irrespective of its rating, the playful harmlessness of the sex on view.

Just as Indie pop is a specious alternative to the music industry’s mainstream, and in reality based on the same business model, which is being protected by ever more absurd copyright laws, preventive technology, cease-and-desist notices and searches of homes,

Indie porn is not at all “independent” but in fact commercialised and sealed off from free channels, even positioned in opposition to them: precisely because the mainstream merchandise is easily available on peer-to-peer exchanges, pornography, just like pop music, now sells only by virtue of difference, including difference from itself.

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English translation by Gerrit Jackson.

NOTES

1. “Sex ist das Spiel der Erwachsenen,” interview in *Der Tagesspiegel*, 7/2/2006.
2. Cf. Mark Terkessidis, “Wie weit kannst du gehen?,” in: *Die Tageszeitung*, 8/18/2006.
3. Gorsen, P. (1987) *Sexualästhetik*, Reinbek, p. 481 ff.
4. Porn and art are fused in Otto Muehl, who on the one hand anticipated the imagery and rhetoric of mainstream and scat fetish porn with his formulaic sexist and voyeuristic material *Actions*, on the other hand, took part in the making of the exploitation movies *Schamlos* [Shameless] (1968) and *Wunderland der Liebe – Der grofde deutsche Sexreport* [Wonderland of Love - The Great German Sex Report] (1970); a similar path was taken in 1981 by pop singer and future sex guru Christian Anders in his movie *Die Todesgttin des Liebescamps* [The Love Camp’s Goddess of Death].
5. It is a less well-known fact that Hustler publisher Larry Flynt started a porn magazine called *Rage*, styled as “Alternative pop” in its photography, typography and copy, already in 1997; its publication was soon discontinued. Joanna Angel, host of Indie porn website burningangel.com, now works for Flynt’s *Hustler Video*.
6. Or they are fused, as in Catherine Breillat’s films, in the synthesis that sexuality’s being per se sexist can be made a source of infernal pleasures.
7. See Barbara Vinken’s preface in *Drucilla Cornell, Die Versuchung der Pornographie*, Frankfurt/M. 1997.

NIGHTMARES IN CYBERSPACE
URBAN LEGENDS, MORAL PANICS AND THE DARK SIDE OF THE NET

Mikita Brottman

My friend's brother Jack has always used Internet porn, but recently he's been getting into S/M and other, more extreme fetishes. Recently, he met a woman online through a local S/M site. He was engaged to be married at the time, and he kept telling us he was going to stop his porn habit as soon as he was married. Anyway, after weeks of heavy cybersex with this woman, Jack got the idea of having a final fling before his wedding, and agreed to meet her at a local S/M club. "I'll be easy to spot," she e-mailed him. "I'll be dressed in black, with a spiked leather dog collar round my neck." So, on the appointed night, after a few stiff drinks to get his courage up, Jack made his way to the club, went up to the bar as they'd planned, surveyed the room, and spotted a sexy older blonde dressed in black with a spiked dog collar round her neck. Their eyes met, she waved, Jack waved back, and she came over to meet him ... and Jack discovered, much to his horror, that his cyber-mistress was none other than *his own mother*. Truth or fiction?

The person who told it to me, about ten years ago, certainly believed it was true. She didn't know much about the Internet at the time, didn't use e-mail, and said she'd heard the story from somebody who knew Jack's sister. Whether or not you believe the story, the fact that it's being passed along as true means it has a certain degree of plausibility. Even if you don't think the story really happened, you'd probably agree that it could have.

As a matter of fact, this story is an urban legend—that is, a piece of contemporary folklore passed on in the form of anecdote, gossip, rumor or e-mail. The oldest urban legends have become well known: the story of albino alligators living in the sewers of New York City, the woman who tried to dry her poodle by putting it in the microwave. We've all heard these kinds of stories; maybe we believed them and passed them on to other people, and with good reason. While urban legends aren't "true" – at least, not in

the literal sense — there are truths contained within them: truths about people's fears, desires, anxieties and nightmares. If they didn't carry a certain amount of symbolic or metaphorical truth, these stories wouldn't stick, they wouldn't be passed along — just as I'm passing this one along to you now.

This story — let's call it "Oedipus online" — is just one version of a number of urban legends told about the Internet, most of which are disguised admonitions warning against the dangerous seductions of cybersex. Most of these stories deal with people who become sexually involved online, only to discover that at least one of them is not who they claim to be. Sometimes, the couple turns out to be closely related: mother and son, father and daughter, or brother and sister. Sometimes they turn out to be people who know one other in a very different context in "real life" — they may be teacher and student, priest and churchgoer, doctor and patient. In other, more cautionary tales, the victim — usually a young girl seduced into a secret meeting with her online lover — is never seen again, until her body is discovered months later, at the bottom of a well on a long-abandoned farm.

Urban legends appear plausible because, like most of the things we believe to be true, they tap into commonly-held cultural assumptions about the way things work. In "Oedipus online," for example, a number of assumptions are implicit, if not stated directly.

ASSUMPTION #1:

THE ANONYMITY OF THE INTERNET MEANS PEOPLE MAY NOT BE WHO THEY SEEM

This may be true, but it's nothing new. Stories about anonymous correspondences have been told for centuries, though (in this one), allusions to the Internet and to S/M make it seem scarily modern, at least to those who believe it. But e-mail and text messages aren't the only kinds of writing that can be anonymous. As an item of folklore, and without the Internet or the kinky sex, stories about a secret correspondent who turns out to be someone you already know are a staple element of popular movies. In the recent Hollywood film *Must Love Dogs*, for example, Diane Lane answers an online lonely hearts ad only to end up on a date with her own dad, and the cheesy eighties song "If You Like Pina Colada" is about a man who unwittingly answers an ad posted by his own wife. In a more literary vein, the story appears as the *Cyrano de Bergerac* theme, in which wonderful love-letters and declarations of passion turn out to be authored not by the handsome fool, as first assumed, but by the overlooked underdog. And in its most sinister form, the theme recurs in those urban legends about menacing phone calls that are traced to the upstairs extension, or serial killers who are unmasked and revealed to be your friendly suburban neighbor — or, even worse, your own husband, father or son.

To many people, what's most frightening about the Internet is its capacity for anonymity, an anxiety confirmed by frequent news stories about "expert advice" offered on the web by doctors and lawyers who turn out to be eight year old supergeeks, teenage hackers who single-handedly bring down huge corporations. These anxieties feed into the media's depiction of the Internet as the new "out there" of American culture, the home of all those evil people — psychopaths, suicide bombers, Islamic terrorists, and other as-

sorted sickos — who are responsible for the horrors that occur on a daily basis in modern society, or so many seem to believe.

Cyberspace is the new hell where no-one can hear you scream.

ASSUMPTION #2:

THE INTERNET CAN BE MISUSED,
WITH TERRIFYING CONSEQUENCES

There's something very specific about the concept of the Internet that makes it particularly scary to those unfamiliar with it. All new forms of technology are frightening when they first appear, and generally bring with them a new rash of rumors and legends about their possible dangers, and what happens when they go wrong. We've all heard earlier versions of anti-technology stories: the girl who fell asleep under a tanning bed and burned alive, the rumor that cell phones cause brain cancer, even the microwaved pet. Urban legends about the Internet are no different. To the media, especially the conservative Christian media, the computer screen is customarily regarded as a kind of magic portal, one of the seven gates of Hell, perhaps, through which invisible viruses can leak out to infect your home, turning your husband into a porn fiend and your children into the victims of drooling pedophiles.

"The social changes which have followed the Internet explosion," writes computer expert John Ives in the online journal *Bad Subjects*, "themselves quite abrupt, have led to stories which suggest near-apocalyptic scenarios in which innocent users find themselves at the mercy of forces beyond their control." Ives explains how people's fear of the Internet's power to disrupt community stability and organization is typified by anxieties about computer viruses that are capable of physically eating their way through your hard drive, or making your computer screen literally explode. To many people, especially those who don't understand how their computers work, cyberspace is an unrestricted, unpoliced no-man's land where pedophiles swap tips, teenagers make suicide pacts, and every smiley face conceals a pervert's evil smirk.

Christian organizations, censorship advocates, moral crusaders and other fans of "family values" regularly express a profoundly superstitious terror of the power of the Internet to wreak havoc in our lives, to turn us all into porn fiends, child-abusers and serial killers. In the conservative media, the Internet is portrayed as the gateway to a monstrous otherworld, and the corresponding assumption that pixels on a screen can cause rape and murder is rarely called into question. Many women, and perhaps even more men, seem especially terrified by the power of pornography to sexually arouse the viewer, thereby forming a potent threat to all those lies that are perpetuated in the name of "the family."

ASSUMPTION #3:

INTERNET PORN CAN "DRAW YOU IN" UNAWARES

Warnings about the magnetic power of the net, whether their context is that of Christian morality or the "clinical objectivity" of therapeutics, share certain unquestioned

assumptions. Above all, it's taken for granted that, because of its capacity to "draw you in," the Internet is far more menacing than traditional forms of media, like film or television. It's often described as having its own powers of agency; it can entrap you in a subtle, almost magical way, sucking you in unwittingly, without your consent, almost without your knowledge, until next thing you know, you can't stop: you're an "addict." According to Patrick Carnes et al., co-authors of the book *In the Shadows of the Net*:

The Internet and cybersex ... are like the Sirens' call, a seemingly innocent and harmlessbeckoning to enter a portal that distorts time, perceptions, and values. Cybersex can override your inner voice and begin to collapse your boundaries, just as the reefs crushed the sailor's ships as they followed the Sirens' call. Cybersex is capable of casting a spell under which you no longer think about what you are doing and distractions fall away as you slip deeper and deeper into the cyber-world (Carnes et al., 2004:99).

Those who warn against the dangers of netporn seem to feel that its enthralling power comes from the fact that it is, at the same time, both more and less "real" than the seductions of "ordinary" life. It is "less real," according to Carnes et al., because it draws you away from time, place, home, duty and family. Later on in the same book, however, the authors suggest that cybersex is just as real as other kinds of damaging behavior, if not more so. It may appear as though you're "not doing anything with anybody," they say, but this illusion is simply one more of the ways the Internet deludes us about the real consequences of our cybersex behavior to ourselves and our loved ones.

ASSUMPTION #4:

INTERNET PORN IS ADDICTIVE

To those who believe in its dangers, netporn is worse than the worst kind of street drugs because it has the unprecedented power to permanently "burn" horrible images "into the brain cells" so they can never be deleted. Or so says Mary Anne Layden, co-director of the Sexual Trauma and Psychopathology Program at the University of Pennsylvania's Center for Cognitive Therapy, who, in a US Senate Committee hearing on the effects of internet porn, called it the "most concerning thing to psychological health that I know of existing today." She added, "Pornography addicts have a more difficult time recovering from their addiction than cocaine addicts, since coke users can get the drug out of their system, but pornographic images stay in the brain forever." Her testimony was followed by that of family-values campaigner Dr Judith Reisman, who claimed that pornography "reflexively and mechanically" restructures your brain turning you into a porno-zombie. Porn, she says, is an "erototoxin," producing an addictive "drug cocktail" of testosterone, oxytocin, dopamine and serotonin with a measurable organic effect on the brain." "Involuntary cellular change takes place even during sleep," she claims, "resisting informed consent." Reisman's argument confirms what many Christian conservatives, such as E.L. Bynum of Tbbaptist.com, have long suspected:

What happens to the images that we see with our human eyes? Psychologists believe that the sexual images we see can actually be burned into our minds. The hormone epinephrine is released in the brain when a person is emotionally aroused. This causes a chemical reaction that actually burns the picture permanently into your memory....

ASSUMPTION #5:

INTERNET PORN LEADS TO HARDER STUFF

Most perplexing—because furthest from ordinary, observable patterns human behavior—is the claim that an “addiction” to Internet porn leads the “victim” to become “sicker and sicker,” compelling him to work his way through a veritable smorgasbord of sexual depravity—hetero, homo, S/M, bondage, golden showers, bestiality, until finally, the former hard-working, church-going husband achieves his final transformation into the ultimate manifestation of human evil: the pedophile. According to the article “Tricks Pornographers Play” at www.contentwatch.net:

Porn and cybersex addicts have acquired a tolerance to perverse and obscene material, material that would leave most sick to their stomachs... they've got to take a "harder drug" to get the same high. In too many cases, this "harder drug" is the addict acting out what they've seen in porn, with real people—often innocent women, teens and children....It's as if he might go crazy without another session. The withdrawal pains may drive an addict to find porn or sexual arousal any way and anywhere he can.

In fact, some people believe the reach of the Internet knows no bounds: it has the power to corrupt, destroy, pervert and even, apparently, to kill. According to Amanda Chapman of Zol.com (a Christian Internet filter provider), “what we expose ourselves to directly correlates to the acts we commit. In November 1998, an eleven-year-old boy stabbed an eight-year-old girl to death after viewing graphic, violent porn on the Internet for twenty minutes.” More recently, in June 2005, a number of websites, including gamespot.com, referred to a “story out of Korea which is just now surfacing in the Western press,” concerning a couple who left their four-month old daughter alone while they went to a “nearby Internet cafe” and “lost themselves” playing an online game, returning home to find “their infant dead from suffocation.” The article’s headline read: “Couple’s online gaming causes infant’s death.” And on 9 March, 2004, a number of sites and blogs, such as RawFeed, carried an item about a “thirty-one-year old computer addict” in the Sichuan province of western China who “collapsed and died at his screen” after “a marathon session” of twenty hours non-stop online. Other than mentioning “computer addiction,” a cause of death was not given.

THE ONLINE UNCONSCIOUS

Why is the Internet surrounded by so much fear and mystification, especially among those who use it least? Why is the computer terminal—a chunk of glass and metal—considered to be more dangerous, more corrupting, more powerful than traditional

forms of media, “ordinary” pornography, even illegal drugs? After all, the Internet, in its physical manifestation, is nothing more than pixels on a screen, a piece of silicon etched with symbols, no more capable of inflicting damage, one might imagine, than than a wall carved with hieroglyphics, or a sheet of music. What is it about the Internet that has caused it to be endowed with these magical powers, these terrifying capacities to restructure our brains while we sleep, contaminate our homes and even to murder us as we sit mesmerized, helpless before our noxious screens?

I can't help being reminded of people's anxieties about the unconscious, in its popularized form, where it takes the form of a bottomless pit of incestuous mayhem. As it turns out, these two metaphorical structures — the Internet and the unconscious — share important similarities. Unlike other manifestations of popular culture like television or movies, which are often considered by the psychoanalytically inclined to reveal the unconscious of a nation, a culture or a generation, what appears on the individual's computer screen is summoned up privately, in response to individual promptings. Repressed sexual urges and desires tend to find their own outlet, according to Freud, such as erotic dreams and nocturnal emissions.

Significantly, those most fearful of being “seduced” by “torrents of filth” unleashed by the Internet seem to be those whose sexuality is repressed in the service of a higher ideal, such as God, marriage, or the Family. It's interesting that, in general, those who find netporn most threatening are not young children themselves — who are more curious than frightened by it — but their parents. Of course, their rationale is that children need protecting, that they are too innocent to know what they're dealing with. Interestingly, however, many anti-Internet evangelists realize that a lot of parents buy computers not for themselves but for their children — and when the children “accidentally” unleash the Pandora's Box of netporn, it's their parents who find themselves suddenly “drawn in.”

Another thing the Internet shares with the unconscious — at least, according popular preconceptions — is its tendency to betray its user or owner by slips of the tongue — or, in the case of the Internet, the fingers. According to those who fear it, the most common way for the Internet to entrap innocent people is by “misinterpreting” a word or phrase normally considered inoffensive, and suddenly a “flood of filth” is released on to the screen. “In the perverted world of cyberporn,” we are informed, innocent phrases have “all kinds of sexual connotations”; “common words like “dog,” “boy” and “girl” unleash sexual content.” Warnings about the “dark side of the Internet” often take the form of anecdotes describing innocents being led astray by a misplaced word, phrase or typo: the mother who, wanting to take her children to the “Wet and Wild” Water Park, typed “Wet and Wild” into a search engine, with shocking results; the little girl whose search for “Barbie” leads her into a web of vice. According to the authors of *In the Shadows of the Net*:

A client told of her ten-year-old doing a research project on black holes. She typed in the term “black hole” and was greeted by a web site dedicated to the genitalia of black women and a screen full of black women's vulvas. Another client spoke of how his son wanted to learn more about the president of our country and the White House. He made

a mistake when typing “www.whitehouse.gov” into the search engine and ended up in a porn site. Even accidental discovery gives kids access (Carnes et al, 2004:192-193).

It's as though the Internet, with its filthy and lascivious mind, has the dirty habit of finding sexual connotations and double entendres in the most innocent of expressions. In this, it reminds me of the “ghostly voice” of the hypnotist's dummy, or the parrot which—in the convention of the dirty joke—“accidentally” reveals the secrets of its owner, usually implying lascivious desires, or a sordid past. If we consider these “mis-readings” as examples of what Freud, in *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, called “parapraxes”—accidental glimpses of repressed or unconscious desires—maybe we can start to make sense of “Oedpius online,” and all those other stories about people who “accidentally” have sex, albeit cybersex, with their mothers, daughters and sons. After all, incest is still a sexual taboo, something we all find repellent, because (if Freud is right) it is something we all secretly desire.

This, I think, is what makes the Internet so threatening to many people, since, as everyone knows (because pop Freudianism permeates our culture's understanding of how the mind works), these accidental glimpses into the “dark side of the net” aren't random or innocent, they *reveal* something. Even people who've never heard of Freud have generally still internalized the notion of the unconscious, believing we're composed of an “inner” and an “outer” life; the outer life being our daily behavior, the process of socialization or religious salvation that holds all manner of pleasure-seeking urges and dark desires at bay. What's frightening about this to many people is that, as in every surface-depth paradigm, the hidden thing—the “dark side”—is presumed to have more truth, more value, than what is on the surface, obvious to all.

Anxiety about the Internet is perhaps best seen as a form of moral panic—that is, a type of collective behavior characterized by sociologist Jeffrey Victor in his well-known article on ritual child abuse as involving “suddenly increased concern and hostility, in a significant segment of society, in reaction to widespread beliefs about a newly perceived threat from moral deviants” (Victor, 1998:100). According to Victor, a moral panic generally gives rise to social movements aimed at eliminating the threatening deviants, and may generate moral crusades and political struggles over the use of the law to suppress them. This is exactly what has happened in the US, where conservative pressure groups are trying to legislate censorship regulations for the Internet, and punishment for those who defy the rules.

Moral panics like this one are result of self-deception, what philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre in *Being and Nothingness* referred to as “bad faith.” In his book *The Divided Self*, radical psychiatrist R.D. Laing described how social structures can elicit popular delusions by putting people in impossible situations, where they find themselves utterly unable to conform to the conflicting expectations of their society, such as the contradiction between ordinary sexual urges and the imperatives of monogamy. Such paradoxes lead inevitably to a “lose-lose situation” and immense mental distress, unless we have some kind of system for keeping them in balance. To Laing, the family is one of these

systems; he describes it as a “mutual protection racket” (Laing, 1965:34). Our belief in the natural sanctity of the family, claims Laing, creates a kind of mass delusion whose function is “to induce a false consciousness of security; to deny death by avoiding life; to cut off transcendence...to promote respect, conformity, obedience...[and] respect for “respectability””(Laing, 1965:35).

We may not be aware of it, but a lot of the things we believe are actually urban legends. We all repeat things we’ve heard from other people, things we’ve read in a book or a magazine, things we’ve seen on television. We believe these things to be true because they tap into our cultural assumptions about the way things work. These stories take many different forms. Some are classic urban legends whose form is so plausible and so new that they still have to be recognised as such. Others are more akin to clichés or stereotypes than fully-formed narratives. All, however, are so often taken for granted that they simply “go without saying,” they are “common sense.” They are illusions that have acquired the status of truth because they fit the pattern of the way things work—or the way we believe things work. Or perhaps, more to the point, they fit a pattern that seems natural—and we all like to think life has a pattern to it, even if this pattern is an illusion, as Gustave Le Bon succinctly explained in his 1895 book *The Crowd*, a study of the popular mind:

From the dawn of civilization onwards, crowds have always undergone the influence of illusions... The masses have never thirsted after truth. They turn aside from evidence that is not to their taste, preferring to deify error, if error seduce them. Whoever can supply them with illusions is easily their master; whoever attempts to destroy illusions is always their victim.

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BBW:
TECHNO-ARCHAISM,
EXCESSIVE CORPOREALITY
AND NETWORK SEXUALITY

Michael Goddard

“I am only truly able to love a woman [...] who overpowers me with her beauty, her temperament, her intelligence, her willpower, a woman who rules over me.”
“Then you are attracted by what others find repulsive?”
“That is right.” (Sacher-Masoch, “Venus in Furs,” *Masochism*)

The acronym BBW, or Big Beautiful Women (although on many porn sites its semantics slides towards big breasted women), refers to an anomalous zone of desire and eroticism that has come to proliferate extensively, especially on the Internet, and which poses important questions about the relations between bodies, gender, desire and machines. Teleologies of cyberculture tend to propose narratives of the progressive virtualisation and disembodiment of human agents. This tendency is echoed in the fashion industry and women’s magazines and even arguably in much mainstream porn and erotica, in which female bodies become mere supports for incorporeal signs or shrink into vestigial anorexic artefacts.

In this context, the phenomenon of BBW radically fails to conform to this logic. In the paradoxical world of BBW, women who by normative standards of contemporary beauty would be considered everything from mildly overweight to monstrously obese, are presented or present themselves as privileged objects and frequently as subjects of desire, or in BBW terms, as Goddesses, rather than as marginalised bodies falling short of the frequently analysed anorexic beauty myth.¹ This paper will investigate the BBW phenomenon as a counter-mythology or counter-imaginary to these prevailing myths, analysing it as a complex phenomenon that crosses many representational forms from soft and hardcore porn, to Internet dating sites, to sites organising social networks and

events, sites affirming BBW subjectivities, promoting BBW fashion, or BBW artwork and photography.² The term BBW also crosses other boundaries between the amateur and the professional or commercial, between ethnicities and nationalities, as well as between different media including video/DVD, magazines and phone lines. Nonetheless, I will be arguing the BBW is primarily an Internet phenomenon and that it is the distinct properties of the net itself that have enabled its emergence and continue to provide an ideal space for the valorisation of an excessive corporeality that would normatively be seen as monstrous. For this reason, the BBW phenomenon also provides key insights into the non-normative potentials of cyberculture itself that contradict the teleologies of progressive disembodiment referred to above. This essay will neither present an exhaustive typology of BBW sites, nor does it aim to come up with a unified theory to explain this phenomenon and its proliferation in contemporary culture; rather, it will present a variety of examples of different types of BBW Website and then make some preliminary speculations as to how this phenomenon might be both theorised and made productive in the field of porn criticism.

SOME EXAMPLES OF BBW INTERNET SITES

The following typology of websites represents only an initial and contingent exploration but aims to give some indication of the variety of BBW sites on the Internet.

Personal / 'Amateur' Websites.

Put BBW into a search engine and you will be directed to hundreds of these sites. Typically they will be run either by a single BBW, a BBW fan, or on behalf of a limited group of BBWs. Typically they include photo galleries, webcams and Video/DVD; a limited amount of which is available for free, but largely as an advertisement to the much more extensive material for which you need to either subscribe to the site or pay per view. These images can range from anything from mild, partially clothed eroticism to hardcore pornography. There is also frequently textual material not only advertising the site, but often presenting the personality or personalities of the BBWs themselves, and in some cases promoting BBW issues from size acceptance to plus-size fashion. Of course these sites are subject to thousands of variations; two typical examples of these different types of site would be *MelonieRose.com*, the site of a group of BBW organised by Melonie Rose, an African-American 'Super Sized' BBW and *LovingYouLarge.com*, a site organised by a BBW 'fan' and supporter; this latter site complements its mildly pornographic material with a lot of pro-BBW textual material. In both these cases while BBWs are clearly presented as erotic objects for a solicited male gaze, they are also affirmed as desiring subjects, a point to which this essay will return.³ While initially some of these sites were completely amateur in their production and free in their reception, the majority of them have tended to undergo a professionalisation so that it is rare to find a free access BBW porn site, although some free softcore sites exist in the form of on-line groups, and most of these sites are linked up with larger commercial networks and netporn search engines.

Commercial/Corporate Sites

These can be understood as the apparatuses of capture for the more spontaneous and amateur BBW sites, and they are characterised by a strict market logic. While there are many examples ranging from small entrepreneurs to massive transnational conglomerates, we can take as exemplary the transmedia network Score Group, which hosts both Voluptuous.com and XLGirls.com, in addition to its extensive range of non BBW porn interests; both these sites have magazine and Video/DVD counterparts with every possibility of transmarketing between these different media fully exploited. On these sites a definite mainstreaming or policing of the BBW phenomena is apparent; especially on Voluptuous a relative conformity with conventional standards of beauty results in a preponderance of young, frequently blonde models, whose bodies sometimes only deviate from the pornographic mainstream in terms of larger than usual natural breast size.⁴ There is also the deliberate cultivation of the star personas of the models, through regular beauty competitions in which subscribers can vote, through satellite sites of the more popular models and through the presentation of profiles of all the models. However, even in this blatantly commercial arena, one still finds the valorisation of larger women, even an interest in their subjectivities expressed through interviews and other textual material. Of course much of this supposedly documentary material is fake but the main point is that it rhetorically presents an supposed interest in and affirmation of BBW subjectivities, implicitly shared by BBW consumers. The main function of these sites, however, is to permit access to an enormous image bank of voluptuous 'stars,' many of whose images are not available elsewhere, thereby ensuring the popularity and profitability of the sites as does the intensive cross-media marketing of video and magazines, star websites etc.

Dating Sites and Social Networks

There is a whole other variety of BBW sites, however, that while not strictly or necessarily pornographic, are nevertheless essential to the circulation of this term. These include dating sites whether solely dedicated to BBW such as bbwhearts.com, or with BBW potentials inscribed in their search engines, as in AdultFriendFinder.com or Alt.com. There are also poly-function sites such as Rondeetjolie.com in France, which started as the site for a larger women fashion store in Paris and has expanded to include articles, dating (with photos), organising social events, displaying BBW artwork etc. Other sites such as Allegrofortissimo.com are simple discussion and support boards ranging from support Internetworks to dating, and still others focus on social issues, organise on and off-line communities and perform many other functions, with or without the presence of BBW images. These sites are either free or operate with a minimal subscription, while the dating only sites tend to be free to browse but require subscriptions to use them. While these sites range from the mildly pornographic to those with no erotic images at all, all of them advocate a valorisation and eroticisation of BBW bodies and subjectivities, at times accompanied by images only different in degree from their pornographic counterparts. The dissemination of BBW therefore clearly crosses not only media and

genre boundaries but also between what is and is not considered pornographic, allowing for a potential contamination between the pornographic and the everyday.

Blogs

Finally there is the more recent phenomenon of weblogs that operate as a kind of filtering system by means of which erotic images and webpages that would normally only be available through a commercial transaction are rendered freely available. While the degree zero of BBW blogs are nothing more than a form of advertising for commercial sites, many of which now use blogs as a key method for attracting consumers. In other instances, such as the blog WeLoveBigGirls.blogspot.com, there is a highly affirmative presentation of BBWs, ranging from amateur shared photos to materials taken from commercial sites. These sites are also marked by a promotion of interactivity, encouraging consumers to share photos and comments on the materials presented on the site and tend to be characterised by a good-natured humour at the expense of porn conventions rather than at BBWs themselves, whose subjectivities are rather affirmed.

Given this rough outline of the phenomenon of BBW on the Internet, how then is it possible to interpret it? Is it just another example of the reification or pornographification of contemporary capitalist culture or does it contain subversive potentials relevant to other spheres of contemporary cultural practice and politicised subjectivities? To begin with we can identify several counter-normative discursive tropes that intersect in the field of BBW phenomena:

1. An archaic valorisation of powerful female bodies that evokes pre-monotheistic matriarchal religions or at least earlier historical eras prior to the imposition of the contemporary anorexic beauty myth. These range historically from the Baroque and Pre-Raphaelite depictions of curved female forms, to the more voluptuous cinematic iconography of the 1950s. There is also archaism in the psychological sense, in that the image of the powerful, voluptuous woman with large breasts evokes memories of the infantile perception of the pre-Oedipal oral mother, who is perceived in a state of adoration largely focused on the mouth and especially breasts. This is evoked both physically in terms of scale and in terms of the power invested in the BBW image. Synthetically, it can be stated that this is the Goddess dimension of the BBW phenomenon.
2. A post or pseudo feminist discourse of empowerment through erotic self-valorisation. From the most radical to the most mainstream sites, the concept of self-empowerment through recognizing oneself as a BBW, posing for the first time and becoming a BBW model is a constant with frequent statements of the type: "before I just felt overweight and unattractive but now I feel like a Goddess." While the size acceptance politics of empowerment is often a very moderate form of cultural critique, it can take on more explicitly political dimensions, such as in the site moderated by Velvet Vixen, a self-declared fat activist, whose Yahoo group contains, in addition to photos of herself and other BBW models, activist critiques of a variety of BBW-related issues and prac-

tices, such as the notorious anti-BBW practice of pig hunting. In other contexts this valorisation takes on a more therapeutic, new age dimension, for example in the sense of how to feel great without dieting, but even so the valorisation of otherwise marginalised female bodies is implicitly political and contains potentials for further politicisation.

3. Discourses related to the field of sadomasochism or bondage and discipline. It is important to note, however, that this can take contradictory forms. In the most seemingly transgressive, hardcore and sadistic forms, in which BBWs are frequently humiliated, tamed and dominated, there seems to be a counter-reaction against not only the valorisation but also the pleasure that is the key to the BBW phenomenon. The idea is that even big women can be mastered and humiliated by the phallus through such pornographic practices as extreme breast bondage, multiple ejaculation on breasts and faces and gang bangs. This is not far removed from the reactionary sexual practices of ‘pig hunting’ alluded to above in which out of a group of women the biggest will be selected for a degrading sexual encounter or the equally notorious phenomena of feeders in which pleasure is produced through the deliberate over-feeding of an already ‘obese’ BBW. In both cases the normative prejudice against large women is sadistically reinforced and the non-normative pleasures opened up by the BBW phenomena violently repressed and denied. This rejection removes these practices from the field of BBW altogether since the term is meaningless without its erotic valorisation and reverts into a reinforcement of corporeal normativity.

4. On the other hand, the valorisation of a powerful female figure clearly corresponds to a masochistic economy, whether or not there is any conventional masochistic content. The obvious interstice here is in the figure of the dominant voluptuous mistress, which can be found in both BBW and bondage and domination contexts both on and off-line. However, even in the case of relatively mainstream BBW figures, there are still aspects of a masochistic economy such as the idealization of the female as opposed to the relative insignificance of the male figure, as evident in the relatively high frequency of scenes of female auto-eroticism and pseudo-lesbian scenes in BBW porn, the attribution of greater power to female figures rather than male ones, not only by taking a dominant role but by coupling with more than one male partner, implying that one is not enough to satisfy her, and especially in the association of BBW with orality—literally in the sense that BBW scenes tend to focus on oral sex and breast play rather than conventional genitality, the practice of breast sex rather than vaginal penetration being the essential component of most BBW scenes.⁵

The proximity between BBW phenomena and masochistic economies of desire can be productively elucidated by a re-examination of Deleuze’s essay on Masochism, “Coldness and Cruelty.” This work is a reading of the work of Sacher-Masoch and of Masochism more generally in a conceptual framework that radically distinguishes a masochistic economy from any sadomasochistic entity, as Kraft-Ebbing and later Freud would have it. In addition to the above mentioned correspondences between BBW and masochistic

economies, there are many other parallels. First of all there is the proximity of the female figure in both BBW and masochism to mythology. Deleuze emphasises the matriarchal Goddess dimension of masochism in both its mythological and psychological aspects, for example, in the ideal of the oral mother.⁶ Then there is the alliance between an adoring self-effacing male and female narcissism and auto-eroticism (Deleuze, 1989:57-68), the co-presence of emotional sentimentality and a female power of life and death and the ideal of the hermaphroditic body, combining exaggerated female and male characteristics while maintaining their difference as opposed to the sadistic valorisation of the androgyne in whom gender differences have been erased. BBW corporeality also corresponds to this hermaphroditism in that there is not only a heightening of feminine characteristics such as breasts and voluptuous curves but also an association of the female body with phallic power. This leads to the next parallelism between BBW and masochistic economies, namely the suspension of the patriarchal symbolic order in favour of a female-centred cosmos in which “the father is nothing” (57-68). I would also argue that in line with Deleuze’s association of humour with masochism whereas sadistic scenarios are associated with a cynical irony, BBW scenes also tend to be characterised by being relatively humorous in relation to other forms of porn, one could take as an emblematic example a pornographic scene in which a BBW begins by giving a man a foot massage...with her breasts. An act that since visible only to the viewer and not the male protagonist, interferes humorously with any processes of erotic identification or pornographic realism. In fact this is a final parallel between BBW and masochistic economies; both enact a suspension of the reality principle, or in Deleuze’s terms of the law, and maximise the pleasure principle through the proliferation of utopian fantasies. In the world of BBW this suspension is enacted not by means of scenes of punishment but through abject surrender to the technical proliferation of virtual BBW images which is masochistic in the strictly economic sense of a suspension of virile action in favour of a purely erotic perception and passive affective receptivity, resonating with Masoch’s concept of “supersensualism” (32).

The key difference between the world of BBW and that of masochism would seem to be the lack of the necessity, although it is certainly one of many possibilities, for cruelty in the female figure in BBW as opposed to the cold and cruel female dominatrix. However, the concept of coldness is also, arguably, a key component of BBW phenomena on the Internet. This might seem counter-intuitive — since many BBW sites overflow with personal expression and sexual desire tends to be expressed in terms of love and adoration rather than the erotic consumption of an objectified commodity. However, this apparent warmth is really just the sentimental flipside that complements rather than contradicts a certain coldness. Instead, the phenomenon of BBW, as the alliance between female self-valorisation and eroticisation and male (or female) masochistic self-abandonment and adoration is based on an essential coldness in which both sides encounter the other through the medium of the BBW image which, even if moving is a freezing of real and singular bodies and desires. Moreover, there is also a becoming generic whereby singular bodies are apprehended in relation to size and weight measurements, as well as all kinds of typologies by means of which the singular, that is this particular body or desire,

becomes the generic, this type of BBW, this type of BBW desire or scenario. Arguably, this mania for measurement is merely the attempt to quantify a desire for the immeasurable—the pleasure in apprehending an image of a body that seems to overflow all forms of measurement in an erotic too muchness—nevertheless there is a cold complicity in both the self-eroticisation of the BBW as image and the consumption of BBW images, precisely in the mutual consent to a cold contact mediated through images, rather than a direct contact through bodies. Of course the myth of this direct contact predominates in BBW porn as in other pornographic and dating sites in the idea that porn is a mere temporary substitute for a real sexual encounter or that BBW Internet dating is merely a temporary phase before a real meeting. Yet it is precisely the coldness, abstraction and virtuality of cyberspace, as opposed to the warm messiness of everyday life that makes possible the proliferation of BBW desires, imaginations and corporeal figures. As with the masochistic scenario and many porn scenarios, the BBW world is a utopian one, a kind of curved and folded non-space of encounter, in which the reality principle, the patriarchal symbolic order and Euclidean geometry are all suspended. And this suspension could never happen without the distance and abstraction provided by the virtual, smooth space of the Internet itself in which BBW images can proliferate infinitely along with the dreams and desires they provoke both in BBWs themselves and their admirers. Of course, especially in the field of BBW communities and dating sites, this virtual contact may indeed lead to a physical meeting in the flesh, but this meeting will take place in a different semiotic regime where the utopian virtual space of the BBW world will have to contend with all kinds of intrusions from the very realities and particularities that BBW porn acts to suspend through the creation of a generic utopia. This analysis of BBW leads to both further questions and some provisional conclusions regarding this phenomenon. First of all, why is it that this phenomenon of BBW has emerged at this precise historical moment and particularly through the Internet? As this analysis has shown, the answer to this lies in a techno-archaism in which, like the phenomenon of modern primitivism, archaic figures and desires are able to re-appear, provided they are mediated through contemporary technical forms, in the BBW world through the online proliferation of digital images; in other words the warmth of BBW desires is able to circulate precisely through the cooling effected by the technical image and its smooth online circulation.

The second question is as to what the radical or subversive potentials are in this phenomenon? I have tried to show that BBW is not merely a variant of normative sexuality but a range of practices that potentially submit the foundation of heterosexual normativity to a profound questioning from within. This could be the departure point for an exploration what would take this questioning further. One possible and existing strategy is the setting up of a BBW sexual identity, along the lines of gay, lesbian and trans sexual identities. However this identitarian approach has little merit as a political strategy, especially if there is any assumed parallelism between BBW and 'Big handsome men' who would then form a definable community.⁷ Such an approach reduces BBW to a phenomenon of symmetry of molar belonging, to a specific place in the social order, whereas what is interesting about is precisely its capacity to destabilise the norms of heteronormativity

through a movement to the outside from within the dominant heterosexual order.

Another possible strategy is a kind of BBW activism in the conventional sense, in which BBW's and their admirers would intervene in a number of BBW related social and political issues. This can be clearly seen in the 'fat activism' of Velvet Vixen referred to above, for example, as well as the development of BBW sites that promote respectful and affirming BBW images and communities, somewhat along the lines of the idealist distinction between erotica and porn. However essential this form of activism is, it remains on the molar level of already constituted identities and fails to tap in to the molecular level of desires and images by means of which the BBW phenomenon circulates

A more interesting strategy is in a kind of immanent Internet parody, in which the conventions of netporn culture itself are reprocessed and submitted to a humorous and playful critique. This has already been shown to be the case with the 'We Love Big Girls' blog which, while serving the function of operating as a gift economy, providing free access to otherwise commercial or private pornographic and erotic images, also acts as a humorous critique of the seriousness of porn conventions, such as generic poses and scenes. This humorous critique is taken even further in the sites of a Sydney BBW BustingOut.blogspot.com, aka Wizzie van Doren, especially on her site Kittypong.com which reworks netporn culture from the humorous and sarcastic perspective of what could be called a BBW sensibility rather than identity, as her 'Busting Out' site does with Internet pop culture more generally. It is via such blog practices, rather than commercial BBW sites that the most interesting aspects of BBW culture, namely its subversion of the heteronormative anorexic beauty myth in favour of an affirmation of a counter-mythology of BBW desires, pleasures and subjectivities, find their most lively and potentially radical expression.

NOTES

- 1 While there is no exact definition of a BBW, the term is applied to women weighing anything from 80 kilograms upwards; there is, of course, no maximum.
- 2 Of course many sites combine several of these genres as we shall see.
- 3 In other words these sites both conform to and depart from the economy of the male gaze as described by Laura Mulvey in her essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." In fact it would be more accurate to associate the viewing economy of BBW porn with that of masochistic cinematic fascination as analysed by Steven Shaviro in *The Cinematic Body*. This essay will return to this point. See Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords*, ed. Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), pp. 393-404 and Steven Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), pp. 56-65.
- 4 Even on these sites there is an absolute rejection of silicone enhanced breasts, which are reserved for the Scoreland site, although even this site has recently been infected by the popularity of the more voluptuous, non-surgically modified models. More extreme BBW sites such as *Silicone Free*, make this rejection of plastic

surgery absolutely central, thereby fetishising a highly problematic concept of the natural.

- 5 This is in contrast to the sadistic representations in mainstream and BBW porn of gang bangs that are intended to communicate a clear message of the humiliation of the female protagonist through multiple facial ejaculations, for example. In other examples of BBW porn, however, the intended meaning is clearly that it takes more than one man to satisfy a 'goddess,' which links both to the trope of masochism and that of archaism.
- 6 See Gilles Deleuze, "The Three Women in Masoch," *Masochism*, (New York, Zone Books, 1989), pp. 47-56.
- 7 This is not to say that there are no parallel phenomena in the sphere of masculinities, for example, in 'bear' figures in the gay community, but these figures tap into a completely different mythology that would require an absolutely different symptomatology.

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THE OBSESSION OF
THE (VANISHING) BODY

Franco 'Bifo' Berardi

An old American officer-in-charge of training marines told 'Newsweek' something interesting about his own experience: "I used to do this job in the 1970s, during the war in Vietnam. In those years, it took six months to train a young person to be prepared to kill a human being. Now I am doing the same job in Iraq, but things have changed. The young men come here already trained. They come here ready to kill.

Desire dwells in conjunction and is killed by connection. Connection means a relationship between formatted segments, a compatibilisation of de-singularised bodies. Conjunction means singular, unrepeatable communication between round bodies; connection means integration of smooth bodies in a space which is no space, and in a time which is no time.

The process of change in our time is centred on the shift from conjunction to connection as the paradigm of exchange between conscious organisms. The leading factor of this change is the insertion of the electronic in the organic, the proliferation of artificial devices in the organic universe, the body, communication and society. Yet, the effect of this change is a transformation of the relationship between consciousness and sensibility, and the increasing desensitisation in the exchange of signs.

Conjunction is the meeting and fusion of round and irregular shapes that are continuously weaselling their way around with no precision, repetition or perfection. Connection is the punctual and repeatable interaction of algorithmic functions, straight lines

and points that overlap perfectly, and plug in or out according to discrete modes of interaction that render the different parts compatible to a pre-established standard. The shift from conjunction to connection as the predominant mode of interaction of conscious organisms is a consequence of the gradual digitalisation of signs and the increasing mediation of relations.

The digitalisation of communicative processes induces a sort of desensitisation to the curve, the continuous process of slow becoming and a sort of sensitisation to the code, and sudden changes of state and series of discrete signs.

Conjunction entails a semantic criterion of interpretation. When the other enters in conjunction with you, he is sending signs that you must interpret the meaning of by tracing—if necessary—the intention, the context, the shade, the unsaid. On the contrary, connection requires a criterion of interpretation that is purely syntactic. The interpreter must recognise a sequence and be able to carry out the operation foreseen by the ‘general syntax’ (or operating system); there can be no margins for ambiguity in the exchange of messages, nor can the intention be manifest through nuances. The gradual translation of semantic differences into syntactic differences is the process that led from modern scientific rationalism to cybernetics and eventually made the creation of a digital web possible.

Conjunction is a process of “becoming other.” In contrast, each connected element remains distinct and interacts only functionally. Singularities change when they conjoin, they become something other than what they were before their conjunction. The combination of a-signifying signs gives rise to the emergence of meaning which previously did not exist.

Rather than a fusion of segments, connection entails a simple effect of machine functionality. The functionality of the connecting materials is implicit in the connection as a functional modelling that prepares them for interfacing and inter-operability. In order for connection to be possible, segments must be linguistically compatible. Connection requires a prior process whereby the elements that need to connect are made compatible. Indeed the digital web extends through the progressive reduction of an increasing number of elements to a format, a standard and a code that makes compatible different elements.

Connected bodies are subjected to a kind of progressive inability to feel pleasure. Instead, they are forced to choose ways of simulating pleasure; procuring a shift from touch to vision, from hairy bodies to smooth connectable bodies. The control on the body does not come from outside. The control is built inside: in the very relationship between self perception and identity.

When the info-sphere becomes hyper-speedy, hyper-thick, and the impulses are proliferating beyond any limit, we become less and less able to elaborate in a conscious way on the emotional impulses reaching our skin, our sensitivity, our brain. Consciousness is detached from sensitivity, and subjugated by the connective machine.

Autistic behaviour can be described as the inability to feel the other’s emotionality, or to project in the other’s body the pleasure and pain that we feel in our body. Lack of

empathy seems to be an epidemic effect of the increasing exposition of the mind to the accelerated virtual infosphere.

The acceleration and intensification of nervous stimulants on the conscious organism seem to have thinned the cognitive film that we might call sensibility. The conscious organism needs to accelerate its cognitive, gestural, kinetic reactivity. The time available for responding to nervous stimuli has been dramatically reduced. This is perhaps why there is an apparent reduction of the capacity for empathy. Symbolic exchange among human beings is elaborated without empathy because it becomes increasingly difficult to perceive the existence of the body of the other in time. In order to experience the other as a sensorial body, you need time, time to caress and smell. The time for empathy is lacking, because stimulation has become too intense.

Pornography grabs the attention quickly, you don't need to work for it, you don't need to feel empathy, you just watch; almost like an autistic state of mind. It's not necessary to try and understand the feelings of the other person, it's not about them, they are merely objects or tools in need of satisfaction. Pornographic bodies are deprived of everything that makes them human by the lurker.

What is at play in the pleasurable perception of one's own body and the surrounding environment is an essential question of rhythm, time and lived temporalities. Muscle tension relaxes in the fullness of pleasure. But by introducing an inorganic element, such as electronics into the circle of excitement, we impose an acceleration of stimuli and a contraction of psychophysical reaction times, which causes a change in the organism and its forms of erotic reaction. Orgasm is replaced by a series of excitations without release. Orgasm is no longer the prelude to any accomplishment. Inconclusive excitation takes the place of orgasmic release. Time, an indispensable dimension of pleasure, is cut into fragments that can no longer be enjoyed. Excitation without release replaces pleasure.

In this condition of autistic excitation without fulfilment, social behaviour tends to become something similar to obsessive rituals.

In 1907, Freud wrote an essay on the symptomatology of obsession and religious rituals. The ritual, he says, has something to do with the obsession, because it has the same character of irrealisation and compulsive repetition. Irrealisation and compulsive repetition are peculiar to both religious behaviour and pornographic sex.

Like pornographic sexuality, religious behaviour performs a ritual which, in its nature, has the stigma of an obsessive neurosis: the repetition of acts which are devoid of semantic meaning and devoid of special efficiency.

Obsession: compulsive repetition of a ritual which does not fulfil its aim. The real scope of the ritual is the conjuration which holds the (rite maker's) own world together. Porn in general has something to do with the ritual.

It seems that in the experience of the first connective generation the bodily relationship is becoming increasingly difficult, even embarrassing. So the ritual takes the place of pleasure, and porn becomes a repetitive act of seeing which does not fulfill an emotional end.

I'm not reclaiming any authenticity of the erotic self, I'm not fantasising about the

golden age of sexual happiness. I'm just interested in finding the signs of a pathology in the current proliferation of pornography: namely a pathology of emotionality. This pathology, which is latent in every kind of pornographic product, is highlighted by the mediatisation, and especially by the net-proliferation of porn. Since image and emotion are separated, the pornographic act (of vision) does not produce the emotional effect we are expecting. So we repeat the act (of vision).

The Internet is the place of endless replication, Therefore it is the ideal place of pornographic ritual.

Stimulus hypertrophy is the general frame which generates the current obsession in the saturated Info-sphere.

During their long evolution, human beings have slowly developed ways of elaborating the stimulus of sexual excitation: the entire history of culture can be viewed as a way to elaboration of the sexual desire. Through imagination and language, human beings manage to balance the stimulus coming from the environment, and the psychic and sexual response to it.

We're now living in the age of the info-proliferation. The saturation of the info-sphere provokes a stimulus overload, and this has an obvious cognitive effect; our time for attention decreases. But affective attention takes time, and cannot be abbreviated or accelerated. This leads to a disorder in the emotional elaboration of meaning. The affective attention suffers a kind of contraction, and it is forced to find ways of adaptation: the organism adopts tools for simplification, and it tends to smooth out the living psychic response, and repackages the affective behaviour in a frozen and fixed framework.

The main point is that emotional elaboration is afflicted by a reduction of time: pornography is by and large one of the causes of this saturation, and one of the effects, or better, one of the symptoms of it.

Pornography concurs to the saturation of the info-sphere, and it is simultaneously an escape from the disturbed psycho-sphere.

What is the meaning of the word "emotion"? Emotion is the meeting point between body and cognition: it is bodily elaboration of the information that is reaching our mind. Time of emotionality can be fast (very fast) and can be slow. But sexual emotion needs slow time for elaboration. The time of caresses cannot be shortened by automatic engines, although pharmacology can fasten the sexual reactions, and speed up erection. The use of sexual stimulants like Viagra has not so much to do with impotence, but with haste, and emotional disturbances.

The electronic excitation conveyed through the entire mediascape puts the sensitive organism in a state of permanent electrocution. Time for linguistic elaboration of a single input is reduced as the number of inputs increase, and the speed of the input gets higher. Sex is not speaking anymore. It is rather babbling, and faltering, and it is also suffering for it. Too few words, too little time to talk. Too little time to feel. Porn is an essay in emotional automation and uniformity of emotional time of response. Don't miss the implication between permanent electrocution, shortening of linguistic attentive elaboration, atrophy of emotional response. Pornography is just the **VISIBLE** surface of this

neuro short-circuit.

The connective generation is showing signs of an epidemic of emotional atrophy. The disconnection between language and sexuality is striking. Pornography is the ultimate form of this disconnection.

When a group of very young guys in a northern Italian town murdered a young girl after harassing her, the inquirers investigating the case were stunned by the inability of the youngsters to verbalise their act, their feeling and their motivation. Syntactic elaboration reduced to zero. Monosyllables. Onomatopoeic sounds.

Sensitivity is invested in this turn, and it enters a process of re-formatting: the new format is the smooth, the connectible. Sexual imagination is overwhelmed by the hairless smooth of the digital image. The perception of the real body of the Other in everyday life is becoming repellent: Hard to touch, hard to feel, hard to enjoy.

This pathological turn of the psycho-sphere seems to me the main feature of the current anthropological mutation which encompasses social change, and politics and the global tragedy of terror that is devastating the perception of the bodies that surrounds and touches our body.

The obsessive repetition of a gesture that is no more able to fulfil its aim, the hopeless effort to grasp a pleasure that we have no time to nurture — all this has so much to do with the return of violence, of war — and of torture into the scene of the world.

Both in the Western and in the Islamic world, we are undergoing a daily instigation to fear, to aggression, to hate. The bodily imagination is disturbed by the growing all pervading ecology of fear. Although never erased from the hidden reality of history, torture has been rejected by the consciousness and excluded from the field of social visibility. After the defeat of Nazism, torture has been considered the ultimate mark of inhumanity.

But during the last few years, just in the dawn of the new century, torture has resurfaced, abruptly becoming a normal tool of political action. Torturers and their accomplices are officially sitting in power in the US, in Russia and in many other places. Torturers are showing their deeds to their friends by the means of video-phonic display, and through Internet. Beheading is proudly shown as a demonstration of bravery and religious faith.

How could it happen? Why has social sensitivity turned to such barbarism and inhumanity? We have to understand what is happening in the deepness of bodily perception if we want to understand what is happening in the surface of terrorist and military action.

Pornography and torture have little in common, if anything. But their media diffusion takes place in the same vacuum generated by the atrophy of emotionality. The inability to feel pleasure has its counterpart in the inability to perceive the horror as horror.

At the same time, some groups of women are trying to play the game of pornographic vision as a means of expressing and deconstructing the alienation that is prevalent in mainstream porn.

The simulated multiple identity is a strategy for the *mise en scène* of this kind of alienation. Not exactly a critique, but a form of ironic distancing. This is why I like experiences like Suicide Girls.

Indieporn is a way of deconstructing the social alienation of the body. It may be in

many cases that it is also a way of expressing oneself. But frankly, in this case, I would not speak of porn; I would speak of an erotic use of porn-ironic image which becomes a *detournement* of the porn image.

Indieporn can be seen as a form of ironic joy where social signs are taken out of their original context and are being subverted into something else. Because of this subversion it can be changed and given another meaning. Things change when we speak of the point of view of the 'gaze,' the position of the lurkers. The gaze is not ironic, there is no sense of joy or looking for a different subverted meaning. Instead of that ironic joy there is cynicism. The lurker is almost hopeless and emotionless in watching the pornographic images on the screen. He just wants to watch, without any feeling or empathy for the persons he is watching. Consciousness and behaviour are dissociated from each other. This dissociation makes it impossible for the lurker to go beyond the repetition of the pornographic act, which becomes the obsessive search of a pleasure that can no longer be reached.

SECTION 3

NETPORN AFTER THE QUEER BOOM

SEXY AND SMART:
BLACK WOMEN AND THE POLITICS
OF SELF-AUTHORSHIP IN NETPORN

Mireille Miller-Young

The netporn world is a proliferation of hardcore imaginaries with vastly new possibilities for the production, distribution, and interactive consumption of all kinds of fantasies, including racialized fantasies. Consumers desiring to see Black women will most likely to click their way to one of those corporate, generic, and even totally unrelated sites like PeepShows.com that exploit the search for Black women, but do not provide the media. The dedicated consumer would continue his or her search, most likely coming across a site like ExploitedBlackTeens.com, another unimaginative netsmut site. Here, Black teenage girls in “school girl uniforms” are lured into cheap-looking hotel rooms for sex with small-time white boy pornographers. Although the site purports to find young Black women on the street or in the mall — this is described in the “diary-like” entries on each young woman by the white men who “exploit” them — most of the models are not victimized teens, but in fact amateur porn actresses trying to advance their careers in the adult industry by laboring in the cyberporn marketplace. Some of these young women manage to navigate the adult industry successfully, and arrive at a point where they begin to aspire to stake a claim for themselves in cyberspace. While Black porn actresses mainly hire a friend or associate, or allow a major production company to design their sites, a few are bold enough to learn the technology and to invest in the hardware and software necessary for a mini digital studio to build their own interactive websites.

In a netscape that tends to make invisible the narratives of Black women while it creates their bodies hyper-visual and hyper-accessible, these self-authored professional websites offer exciting, radical possibilities and prompt a variety of vital questions. To what extent are websites created by Black porn stars part of what is thought to be the de-

mocratization of the hardcore industry via Internet technologies? How do they force us to reconsider the place of minority communities, such as Black women and sex workers, in the broader cyber-economy? How does the Internet constitute a space for the production of counter-hegemonic possibilities articulated through the nexus of sexual, gender and racial identities and practices? Can netporn craft empowered, self-defined subjects out of the phantasmal myths and gritty surrealism of digitized hardcore? How do Black women's websites proffer digital interventions, or "hacks," amount to a form of cultural labor, suggesting new points of departure for the study of online pornography and modern Black subjectivities?

HACKING MAINSTREAM NETPORN

Like other porn workers, African American women in adult entertainment utilize digital technology to gain greater control over their labor and their representation. In constructing their own professional porn websites, more and more black women hardcore performers are attempting to strategically insert themselves alongside white, Asian, and Latino women, into positions of power within the lucrative commerce of netporn. Tactically, professional websites allow porn performers to fashion, manage, and disseminate their images according to their interests, while also providing a vital source of income (through monthly fan membership fees) outside of the field of hardcore video and dance work. According to Paul Fishbein, publisher of *Adult Video News*, the web is ideal for porn stars because they are "always marketing themselves," in order to remain competitive in the disposablizing adult industry. Moreover, their sites are part of the overall technological evolution of porn.¹

These women not only "hack" into the ecommerce of the multi billion dollar cyberporn industry to reap the economic benefits of the new "technology of sex," they also jam the network matrix of cultural codes that fetishize black bodies in (cyber)society.² Lisa Nakamura's scholarship riffs on the semiotics of "stereotype" as a code for the link between technological and social reproductions with her theorization of the online reproduction of "cybertypes."³ Cybertypes constitute mimetic transcripts of fetishized Others that have proven indispensable to the networking of structures of representation in cyber-society. Black women are superficially cybertyped as underclass, technophobes on the margins of the digital revolution, or as cyberhoes that lurk in crack alleys, far from the hustle and bustle of the information super-highway. This dialectic of attraction and disavowal constructs the digital world as a racial economy of desire in which Black women's bodies are both invisible and hypervisible.

The expansion of pornography to the web has contributed to the massive production, but also the regulation and prohibition of taboo racial desire in our mass public consciousness. This desire is controlled and processed in a web of pixelated policing through which Black bodies are constructed as liminal objects.⁴ Black women produced sites expose the productive, mimetic, public, and private aspects of cyberporn as a cultural technology of racial desire and disavowal. They underscore total the necessity for dynamic alternatives to the usual tropes of cyber-pimped ghetto booty hoers, as seen in sites

like *EbonyBooty.com*, *GhettoGaggers.com*, *HoodHunters.com*, and *RoundAndBrown.com*.⁵ For these women, netporn proffers an intensely politicized space where the line between exploitation and empowerment, pleasure and peril, community and alienation is totally blurred. As hackers, they function to disrupt both the economic and ideological systems of a netporn that is as deeply racialized as it is sexualized.

Indeed, the cyber-terrain forms an “interzone” for marginalized mass public desires to be imagined, articulated, and accessed.⁶ Historian Kevin Mumford theorizes interzones as physical, social, and psychic nodal points of interaction and creativity on the racial/sexual border. Red light districts in the United States, Mumford explains, were created and organized around Black and working class neighborhoods during the 1920s and 1930s, as a policy of safeguarding mass public culture from the lucrative private economy of illicit as well as interracial sex.⁷ The policing and segregation of red light districts operated alongside the policing and segregation of Black communities from the dominant civil society; the threat of a visible sexual commerce was underscored by fears of the visible racial sexual economy that had historically existed in the US, with Black women’s bodies as the primary commodity of sexual exchange during slavery and its aftermath.⁸ Thus, if the Internet allows for the democratization of pornography through the multiple potentialities of creating, distributing and consuming hardcore through commercial or peer to peer sites, the historical limits to the democratization of sex across racial borders pose significant concerns for those of us interested in unpacking the utility of netporn for progressive sexual politics.

NETPORN AND RACIAL DESIRE

Netporn has facilitated the expansion of the mass economy of desire across racial borders, and is thus both transgressive and repressive for Black sexual politics. By creating alternative spaces of encounter, exploration, and exchange, netporn potentially undermines the hegemonic logic of racial sexual segregation in the US. These sites illustrate the permeability of sexualized racial, class, and gender borders as they are reconstructed in virtual space. At the same time, digital technology allows for mass public fetishes of subjugated bodies to be frantically consumed in secret, and thus easily disavowed. Bill Asher, president of Vivid Entertainment Group, one of the largest pornography and Internet porn corporations noted that with netporn, “there’s no embarrassment factor, there’s no issue with privacy. The Internet is a personal technology and that’s very well suited to adult entertainment.”⁹ This personal technology is manipulated to provide arousal, anonymity, and access to a multiplicity of fetishes, of which “ethnic girls” are only one.

Fantasy sculpted in technoland simultaneously sustains and transverses the color line, it is mobile and progressive, yet also stagnant and regressive. Du Bois’s prophecy that the “problem of the twentieth century” would be “that of the color line,” is certainly apropos for these dangerous days of the twenty-first.¹⁰ Legacies of racial capitalism endure in new technologies. The taboo of interracial sexuality and the logic of deviance around Black bodies saturate the microfibers of netporn, even while the consumer or user

is located in network of potentials for identification and disidentification with the object or subject of power. At the same time, globalized capitalism maintains people of color and women as the most exploited and expendable sectors of the mass communications technologies workforce. At both ends of the network Black bodies labor in the context of marginalization. The public culture of African American sexuality has historically been policed and disciplined, and now in the Internet, it is cyber-profiled. Black women's sexuality continues to be a site of struggle over representation and control.

Black porn star websites function to transform their status as active, marketable personalities in the analog world into digital subjectivities navigating the commerce of on-line adult entertainment. The production of netporn sexualities represents a form of cultural labor as it decodes and encodes dominant significations and identities. The cultural labor of Black bodies on these self-authored netporn sites subverts, or queers the heterosexist, racist capitalism of cybercultural space.

The women's independent self-designed sites must to compete with other porn star sites, many of which are slick operations sponsored by production companies. They also have to share the network of misogynist cyber-ghetto porn websites such as GhettoGaggers.com which advertises "gagging ghetto whores," in extreme hardcore style, similar to Max Hardcore. The fetish is extreme fellatio to the point of vomiting (i.e., "she was reduced to a pile of vomit") performed by Black women on white men who advertise that "we destroy ghetto hoes." In HoodHunters.com, Black men are the pornographers who purportedly find black women in the 'hood, convince them to have sex for cash, film and photography the sex act, and as their narrative reveals, kick the women to the curb without their payment. The site features graphics of Black women from the hood (all professional actresses) standing amid chain fences, cars, and aggressive looking Black men (saying "Let's get it on Bitch!"). While both sites enact narrative fantasies that obscure the real negotiations of consent and labor that exist behind the scenes, their constructions also reveal how the racialization of sexuality, and the sexualization or race in the US imaginary posits Black women's bodies signifies of the pleasure and danger of the illicit erotic.¹¹

The politics of appropriation and exploitation of Black women's sexuality in these sites only underscores the profound need for the insertion of Black women web authors into the productive realm of cyberporn. The inclusion of more voices into cyberporn, particularly by self-activated sex workers, may give rise to the transformation of sexual cybertypes of Black women as fuckable objects from the street into perhaps sexual identities that are creative, dynamic, and unexploited. The counter-fetishization of Black sexuality by Black sex workers would of course be part of an economy of sexual racial fetishism in hardcore, but at least holds the potential for a radical rebooting of the racial logic of cyber-sexualities.

Black women's culturally productive labor of staking a claim in the sexual politics of cyberspace is especially significant because, according to my research, they tend to be marginalized as workers in the porn industry, toiling within the lowest level of its political economic hierarchy. Their exploitation in the hardcore industry is directly related to the

long history of the representation of Black sexuality as uniquely and fetishistically hypersexual, hyper-visible, and hyper-accessible. Early visual technologies of photography and film propelled the formation of a very specific “visual economy” of Black women as spectacles of sexual deviance and pathology, which circulated in erotica, colonial scientific photography, and the film industries between the United States and European nations.¹² Technologies of looking have historically been used as modes of economic, scientific, and political exploitation of Black women. For bodies of color, most of pornography, from nineteenth century daguerreotypes and photographs to film reels, video and digital media has been an extension and intensification of the colonizing gaze.

BLACK WOMEN IN THE (CYBER)PORN MARKETPLACE

The desire for Black sexuality in pornography was initiated as, and continues to be, largely a product of the imagination and financial acumen of white men interested in marketing salacious stereotypes and the taboo of interracial sex to a white male, but increasing Black male, Hip Hop oriented consumer base. As the increased production of Black and interracial hardcore videos in the 1980s and 1990s occurred, work in the pornography industry became a more tenable option for Black women, as it provided greater opportunities for them to gain employment in one of the highest status jobs in the sex industry. With the limited range of opportunities for Black women in the increasingly feminized and service oriented US labor market, and the especially high levels of unemployment among young Black women the sexual economy is, for many, an attractive labor choice.¹³

My interviews with former and current Black performers in the pornography industry suggest that the leading reasons why women choose this mode of sex work include interests in earning a lucrative and fast income, becoming famous, gaining independence, accessing mobility, and exploring their sexuality. The majority of Black female performers work an average of six months to one year in the business as a way to supplement and advance their work in other areas of the sex industry, particularly exotic dancing and escorting, or as a way to earn quick money for school, a car, or an apartment. Others choose to work in the industry full time in hopes of accessing opportunities in mainstream entertainment such as acting or music. Or they want to become a genuine “porn star.”

Black actors and actresses, in straight and gay porn, have consistently been offered less than white actors and actresses—they are generally paid half to three quarters what their white counterparts make for the same sex scenes, and their videos, tend to be of a much lesser quality due to small budgets in the “gonzo” or “wall to wall” genres.¹⁴ As a response to this structural inequality, Black women in pornography have become keenly aware of how their sexuality is marketed in films that are distributed and seen all over the world, particularly in the US and Europe. They perceive the key to becoming a porn star in a true sense is making a name in the world of hardcore. The women I interviewed aspired to visibility and recognition. Beyond starring roles, video box covers, magazine layouts, and lucrative pay rates, fame means survival and perhaps even celebrity in the mainstream entertainment world.

These performers perceive the web as providing exciting possibilities for economic advancement, fame, autonomy, and control of their image, away from the contrivances of pornographers. Hence, their websites are significant spaces for the technological rearticulation of Black female sexuality by Black women themselves. The professional websites of Black female porn actresses are indeed part of a broader “democratization” of a hyper-connected corporate dominated adult entertainment industry in the US over the last decade. Thousands of individuals, couples, collectives, and small companies have appropriated the technology and inserted themselves into the hardcore cyber-market in order to produce porn with a disruptive or alternative aesthetic to mainstream hardcore cyber-hangouts.¹⁵ Yet, like the so-called “democratized” political economy of the US, African American women are on the margins of what Michael Uebel calls the “metatext of late technocapitalism.”¹⁶

While Black actresses usually maintain anywhere from ten to one hundred and fifty memberships, with members paying \$10-\$20 per month, in addition to the sale of some merchandise and digital peep shows, they do not come close to what the most successful white actresses websites make. For example, Danni Ashe, a white porn star who has had a website since 1995 now owns a digital production studio that now employs over forty people and makes a profit of more than \$7 million a year.¹⁷ At least \$2-3 billion dollars a year is now generated by online pornography in the US, and despite the fact that nearly ten percent of the hardcore cyber-traffic probably visits “ethnic” or interracial porn sites, no single Black woman porn star running her own website is making more than a mouse’s share of the cheese.¹⁸ Nor do any have the capital to build their own state of the art production studio. Even though they are small players in the hugely profitable game of Web pornography, for Black actresses in the adult industry, ownership of a website is seen as critical to access resources and opportunities that they often would not normally be able to attain without engaging the technology.

SELF-AUTHORING AND CREATING SPACE ONLINE

Although Black actresses are not becoming rich with their websites, the sites do provide a key part of their income that they can organize on their own terms, according to their own schedule, from the comforts of home. As Kim Eternity posits as her rationale for taking up netporn production: “I can make extra money and can do what I do best without going anywhere. So naturally I was excited.”¹⁹

Performers such as Sinnamon Love, Monique, Vanessa Blue, and Kim Eternity have created dynamic self-designed and run websites as both financial enterprises and spaces for self-expression. Indeed, not only do their sites provide direct access to the porn consumers, they also allow the production of subjectivities that are dynamic and personalized versions of their professional personas in pornographic video. These women use their sites to display their own commissioned erotic photographs for the consumption of Internet consumers — a practice that serves to bolster their professional identities as it functions to help them survive in the sexual marketplace of pornography.

Even in the context of the huge corporate power of porn companies and mass com-

munications conglomerates, this collective appropriation of digital technology by Black porn actresses, holds possibilities for resistance. On the sites, they can become the ideal of what they imagine to be glamorous, sexy, provocative, smart, and savvy. In choosing the photographers, clothing, settings, and style of images to be exhibited in their photo and film galleries, the performers have much more control over the production and distribution of their image than they normally would in their video or magazine work.

The continuous process of producing and posting self-designed images to their professional websites functions as a hack into the visual economy of Black women's bodies in erotica. The archiving of self-authored representations in these digital spaces symbolizes a resistive signification project for the virtual pornoscape. Moreover, these online subjectivities serve to highlight the intelligence, creativity, and skillfulness of the authors, while they reflect the racial, feminist, and sex positive concerns of the sex workers. In the introduction to enter her online fan club via iFriends.com, Kim Eternity writes:

Why a Fan Club? Because I'm sexy and smart, just like you. I know that fans like you are key to my iFriends success. So when you join my Club (like you're doing now), I give you everything I've got — attentive, red-carpet treatment, all the way. You get it all. Because you make me feel like a STAR! — a gorgeous, glamorous goddess! You've made my day; now click 'Access' at right, so I can bring pleasure to yours!²⁰

Eternity defines herself as sexy and smart, glamorous, and gorgeous; she claims a desire to be a star. While the porn industry manufactures images of Black women as predominantly ghettoized/ghettoizing sexual vixens and marginalized in the porn star system, Eternity's revision of the cybertype script underlines the ways in which these women are battling on multiple levels to compete, and to assert a more holistic or dynamic view of their identities. Rather than just be represented as a sexualized body, Eternity highlights her intelligence as defining aspect of her cyber-identity. This claim demands that consumers recognize the labor involved in self-authoring web-spaces, the kind of intellectual attunement that it takes to insert oneself in the digital economy. In addition to asserting her intelligence, Kim Eternity uses her cyberbiography on KimEternity.com to represent herself in terms of her humanity and subjectivity:

My biography is a never-ending project of things in my life that are constantly changing. Everyday some new thought occurs that entices me into a different direction. Because of this I'm in constant personal growth. You'll find reflections of who I am and the person you'll ultimately meet throughout the pages of my website which I'm totally proud to present to you.

Eternity's narrative of her life as a "never-ending project" and a space of "constant personal growth," is a rich, subversive text that challenges the dominant constructions of Black women's lives as devalued, lacking in direction, pride, and power.

As twelve year veteran porn actress Sinnamon Love declares on one of her mul-

tiple self-owned and operated websites, her identity has grown beyond that of a “porn star” and self-identified and sexually empowered “slut”; now she also happily calls herself a “web mistress.” The titles of Love’s websites are accurate: SinnamonLove.com, SubmissiveFantasies.com, PleasureBroker.com, and ProfessionalDomme.com, are platforms for her members only, model managing, fetish modeling, professional domination, and high-end escort businesses. Love sees them as spaces for her to execute her web mistress project of ownership, design, and control of her image, but they are also loci of the cultural labor of self-authorship against, or in friction with, hegemonic real and virtual views of Black womanhood.

On the flyer for her sites, Sinnamon Love bills herself as “always breaking the stereotype that a woman can’t be sexually explosive and intellectual.” Like Eternity, Love critiques the stereo (or cyber) type that women, especially sexual workers, are merely objects of the body, rather than agents of the mind.²¹ Their assertion of intellectuality strategically responds to Western technologies of race, gender, and sexuality that have formulated lingering ontologies of Black women as wholly of the physical, sexual and laboring body. More than a body serving the needs of capitalism and mass public fantasies of racial sexual encounters in the interzones, Love argues that she has brains, and that cyberporn viewers should recognize that as they enter her sites, they are now in a domain of her creation.

Love’s members’ site, DiaryOfAPornstar.com, with its slick, urban, hip hop and MTV influenced design, underscores this urgent concern for control.

You think you know, but you have no idea,” the heading prompts, pulsing to the beat, score, and theme of the MTV celebrity reality show “The Diary Of...” The intro entices the viewer in to explore and experience Love’s “Confessions, secrets, intimacy, and passions.

Love’s site features behind the scenes and glamour photos, live private cam shows, access to her online journal (private musings) and her writings—both creative erotic and interviews with other celebrities (which is very important to her, since she loves to write), professional calendar, message boards (key for corresponding with fans), event listings, and access to the “web suite” or all her sites.

On her professional courtesan site Pleasure Broker, Love clarifies her class identity (and class preferences) as well as her intellectualism as equally important as her sexuality:

I am a woman of leisure, a reward for elite gentlemen that know the finer things in life...I am a gracious companion; elegant and conservative in public, yet wildly sensual in private. If you are a gentleman of means that enjoys the company of a woman that is as intelligent as she is beautiful, accept my invitation and prepare yourself for an unforgettable experience.²²

Here, the cultural labor of self-definition and identity performance is at play. According

to Nakamura, “performing alternative versions of the self and race jams the ideology-machine,”²³ Even in the context of the exploitative marketplace of capital—a defining experience for Black bodies in (cyber)space—this kind of performance, written in her words and visualized in her chosen images, holds exciting radical potential.

Love’s bourgeoisie class claims, narrated (and illustrated) through her performed identity of a technophile elite courtesan diva, do the cultural work of critiquing images of Black women’s hyper-accessibility in hardcore in relation to the iconic status of white womanhood. The ghettoization of Black femininity places their sexuality in the context of perceived crisis, crudity, volatility and violence. For Love, claiming the status of a high-class courtesan, and afrogeek is one way to counter the cyberetypes and define her sexuality as modern, progressive, and valuable.²⁴

The websites created by Black women performers like Kim Eternity and Sinnamon Love symbolize the crucial cultural work of hacking into the discourse machine of the virtual landscape. In utilizing both written and visual (and even sound) articulations, these web mistresses manipulate the capital of their bodies and sexualities for the cyber-cultural economy with the insertion of their voices and visibility. Written biographies and image archive galleries tell their stories, giving voice or illuminating how they got into hardcore, their feelings about sexuality, their fantasies and frustrations. For example, porn star Monique’s biography says:

*“As a child growing up I kept many of my fantasies and desires to myself, in the closet, sort [sic] of speak. It wasn’t until I began [exotic] dancing that I realized that many of my fantasies were common amongst other women. The longer I danced... the more I learned about myself and sexuality and even had my first girl-girl experience... The exciting world of porn soon began after that. The role playing, clothes, makeup, shoes, and sex I enjoyed very much, and still do.”*²⁵

For Black women in America we have a long history of keeping our fantasies and desires in the closet Monique speaks of. As Black queer scholars have pointed out, “closets” are not all the same, and for young Black women growing up in a society that has tied our sexuality, gender, and race to our oppression, we learned to keep silences about our fantasies and desires.²⁶

This tactic of protection, or “culture of dissemblance,” as Darlene Clark Hine posits, common among African American women has given rise to a problematic sexual politics invested in conforming to a hetero-patriarchal status quo.²⁷ Instead, Monique makes a critical intervention by shouting down the repressive silences of the cult of respectability. She clearly links her personal growth around sexuality to the experience of sex work. Within that stigmatized community and through her own erotic labor, she came to be affirmed in the value of her queer desires. Monique narrates her transition from erotic dance and sexual experimentation to porn as at once affirming her non-heteronormative sexuality choice that she was in control to make.

Of course the silent gaps in Monique’s narrative also signal the ways in which the

structure of the biographical porn website may be limited in its ability to allow for a safe space for expression of real life exigencies. In virtual life, however, Monique reveals that pleasures are also found in the performance of porn star glamour. The role play, make up and clothes seem to satiate a desire to hack sexual morals and gender codes, while they embody a need for the cultural labor of creative play and self-reclamation.

Cyberbiographies are rich sites of inquiry, as they are claims to subjectivities in an instable technological terrain. They elucidate the ways in which these netporn websites are ephemeral glimpses into one person's life hustling to go digital. Moreover, they are primary sites where sexual, racial and other minorities who can access the media may express politics and pleasures that are not only policed by the dominant culture and the state, but also their own communities.

In general the adult entertainment industry thrives off the disposability of (primarily women) sex workers—especially women of color who are seen as less valuable and marketable than white women.

These windows into the lives and aspirations of multiply marginalized sometimes often reveal the profound frustration of discrimination in the industry and the high stakes of survival. For of these Black women any space to gain control precious, and their appropriations of technologies of desire to reflect on themselves, to grow, or to just make a living are fundamentally political acts. This labor is incredibly insightful for the ways in which all Black women may engage new technologies and mass media culture. The insertion of entrepreneurial-minded Black sex workers into the hardcore cyber marketplace has had a profound impact on these women's senses of professional and personal identity and power.

There is no question that these porn stars' slow insertion into netporn marks a critical moment in the evolution of the industry. What remains to be seen is how far these Black porn star tech pioneers will go in expanding their production and distribution of webspace, and to what extent they will maintain autonomy or fall to the pressures to meld with corporate porn media. As technology develops, and these women continue to gain access to and appropriate new modes of digital articulation, how will their racial, sexual, gender and class identities be reconstituted and performed? Can they gain comparable visibility as sites about dominant white porn stars or corporate run media, and will this iconographical retooling really transform the hegemonic representational politics around Black bodies and sexualities? What new meanings will be inscribed into race and sexuality as techno-future unfolds? Hopefully, Black porn stars will have a say.

NOTES

- 1 Kushner, D. (1998) "Debbie does HTML," *Village Voice* vol. 43, no. 40, 6, Oct, p. 47; O'Toole, L. (1998) *Pomocopia: Porn, Sex, Technology and Desire*, New York, Serpent's Tail.
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PORN AROUSAL AND GENDER MORPHING
IN THE TWILIGHT ZONE

Katrien Jacobs

“NOT TONIGHT DARLING, I’M ONLINE”

This essay investigates the role of digital media in rewiring our sexual desires and animal responses to Internet pornography. It gives an overview of clinical experiments in porn arousal studies and then questions them because they rely on outdated notions of spectatorship and gender. There has been a tendency in the mass media to reinforce paranoid insights about the effects of pornography on our psyche and relationships. Journalists are reporting on Internet pornography as one of our worst types of media addiction, writing stories about the increasingly harsh effects of porn regimes on “male” porn addicts and their frustrated “female” partners. For instance, in an ardent plea against pornification, or web users being negatively affected by pornographic media, Adrian Turpin argues that pornography is now clinically proven to be the crack cocaine of the Internet. He uses statistics from the Internet filter company N2H2 to prove the steady growth of Internet porn sites. These statistics show that the number of porn sites reached 260 million in 2003, up from 14 million in 1998, and that porn sales hit \$2.5 million in 2005, over double the sales of music downloads.¹

Turpin describes the effects of the Internet porn boom on users by featuring “Michael,” a typical netporn “beast” who is addicted to porn browsing and has a dodgy sexual relationship with his wife. To prove the correlation between his media addiction and sexual neglect, he quotes Anne Layden, co-director of the University of Pennsylvania’s Sexual Trauma and Psychopathology Program, who has found that exposure to porn images directly alters brain waves: “Even non-sex addicts will show brain reactions on PET (Positron Emission Tomography) scans while viewing pornography similar to cocaine

addicts looking at images of cocaine.”²

To Turpin, this line of research shows that the human brain is hardwired to crave pornography. Watching porn is like binge drinking or eating junk food, it releases a chemical in the body that asks for more of the same. Another point of inspiration for Turpin is Pamela Paul's neo-conservative bestseller *Pornified: How Pornography is Transforming our Lives, Our Relationships and Our Families* (2005). Paul is a former liberal who came up with an urgent anti-porn message based on a number of interviews with porn users and their social circles. The book features women complaining about male consumption and men confessing their lack of gusto. Turpin's article ends with a cry of despair about the negative effects of netporn on children, minors and adults.

However, as the essay will show, the thrust of lurid journalism needs to be tempered. The essay will use theories of gender and spectatorship in new media environments to speculate about the complex and morphing identities of aroused porn browsers. The essay will thus suggest alternative ways of living and breathing with pornification.

THE EMPIRICAL SCIENTIST'S AROUSED SUBJECTS

The question as to how pornographic images affect brain waves and what the different arousal levels are between men and women, has long fascinated the field of sexology. Several generations of researchers have tried to measure quantitative responses using advanced technological methods, either by recording changing brain-wave responses, or by asking subjects to write down reactions in different kinds of surveys—the SOS (Sexual Opinion Survey), the VRQ (Video Reaction Questionnaire) or the SFQ (Sexual Fantasy Questionnaire). The experiments simulate an intimate home environment and expose subjects to various types of pornography in order to test responses.

In “Selecting Films for Sex Research: Gender difference in Erotic Film Preference”—a study carried out in the psychophysiology lab of the Kinsey Institute in 2003—the researchers set out to measure whether men have a different porn drive from women.³ They reviewed evidence from older studies that showed that men and women differ in their responses to sexual stimuli. But as these older studies were based on the subjects' exposure to male-centered pornography only, the research team were wary of the results. Hence, in the 2003 experiment, they included female-friendly porn selections when testing a student group of heterosexual males and females. They found that women responded indeed more positively to the presentation of female-friendly films selected by female researchers, in comparison to more typical mainstream and male-centered film clips selected by the males. But even though the women reported positively to the female selections, they did not report arousal levels comparable to those of men.

In a 2004 study “A Sex Difference in the Specificity of Sexual Arousal,” researchers posited a more rigorous recording of sex difference, showing that sex arousal is category-specific in men, whereas women show little category-specificity in their porn arousal patterns. Once again, researchers set out to measure different reactions in female and male subjects, this time including people who identify as either heterosexual, gay, lesbian or transsexual. Their work cited a previous body of work, which showed that female sexual-

ity is generally more flexible than male sexuality, with greater intra-individual variation in preferences, behaviours, attitudes and responsiveness to cultural influences. The 2004 study retested this thesis, this time digitising the experiment by using a MP100WS data-acquisition unit and the Acknowledge software. Male genital arousal was assessed with penile plethysmography, using a mercury-in-rubber strain gauge to measure changes in the circumference of the penis as erection developed. The genital arousal of women and MTF transsexuals was assessed via a change in vaginal pulse amplitude (VPA) with a vaginal photoplethysmograph. In addition, subjective arousal or lack thereof was assessed continuously through self-reporting by using a lever moving through a 180-degree arc.

The researchers acknowledged that their subjects, women more so than men, were often reluctant to be tested genitally, and that their responses may have been influenced by an amount of refusal to react. Thus, a second study was carried out that asked subjects to fill out questionnaires. Both psychophysiological data and survey tests amounted to similar results — women were less category-specific in their porn arousal levels. They had lower arousal levels than men and enjoyed a wider variety of porn. The researchers were inconclusive about whether or not these sex differences were inborn or culturally constructed.

A second type of arousal study sets out to record differences between sexual normalness and deviancy. In the 2003 study “EEG responses to Visual Erotic Stimuli in Men with Normal and Paraphilic Interests,” sixty-two white, right-handed heterosexual males were divided into “normal” vs. “paraphilic” males. Paraphilic subjects were defined as those interested in scenes of transvestism, fetishism and sado-masochism, and were sought in special interest clubs and through announcements in niche magazines.⁴ The study used “EEG” or Electroencephalography to capture neurophysiologic measurements of the electrical activity of the brain. These measurements were recorded from electrodes placed on the scalp and/or on the cortex. As the researchers write, the first EEG study was carried by Lifshitz in 1966, who measured the effects on males of artistic depictions of nude women, compared with pictures of ulcerated legs.

The study worked with the method of EEG analysis because it was based on the hypothesis that “normal” and “paraphilic” subjects get stimuli from different hemispheres of the brain. Whereas the right hemisphere initiates emotionality, aggression and sexual arousal, it does so under regulatory control of the left hemisphere, which includes sexual triggers in the format of verbal cues, rituals and scenarios. The researchers believed that the left-hemisphere could indicate an underlying deviation from normal arousal pattern activity, and wanted to test the presence of paraphilic tendencies in subjects.

The right-handed males were asked to fill out a SFQ (Sexual Fantasy Questionnaire) and were then seated in a comfortable chair. They were wired with 1-cm diameter electrodes on their scalp and around their right eye to measure the EEG responses. They were exposed to slides (projected with a good old Kodak Carousel), showing a mixture of 57 heteronormative slides, 57 paraphilic slides, and 57 neutral slides (e.g., landscapes and street scenes).

The findings of the study overturned the researchers expectations; the normal males were aroused by normal stimuli, but the paraphilic males were aroused by both normal

and paraphilic stimuli. The researchers had assumed that the paraphilics would have a lack of interest in normal sex scenes, but they were proven wrong. However, the experiment confirmed that certain parts of the left brain hemisphere were more stimulated in the paraphilic group: parts that they located as the seedbed of fantasies as social scenarios, role-plays, and rituals, as well as the psychology of social shame and awareness. "Normal" heterosexual arousal was confirmed to be primarily located in the right brain areas.

The remainder of the essay will question the validity of both types of tests from the history of arousal studies. First of all, one could state some obvious objections like the fact that these test environments don't appear to be very stimulating and may be off-putting to a degree that they become totally useless. Or the question of whether arousal patterns to porn are innate or culturally constructed. One of the obvious differences between the subjects, or between men and women, is that they may have delayed or hidden responses to porn images that may be impossible to capture. Even though the studies work with surveys to measure subjective statements, can they capture the complex workings of human sexual memory and fantasies? When people react to porn images, their sexual stimulation also stems from memories of past experiences, or random fantasies that filter into the present, mediated moment of porn viewing.

The essay will look at post-binary concepts of sex and gender and the use of non-quantitative research methods to diagnose how web users may be turned on and/or communicate arousal in response to porn. Regardless of their gender or interest in normal sex, web users are experiencing a rewiring of the sex brain, which involves activity stemming from a cross-over region between femininity and masculinity, and between normal and deviant types of agency. Moreover, there has been a boom of indie porn movements on the web that caters to a different type of consumer and has a mainstream appeal, including porn made by transgendered activists and producers. But rather than relying on interviews or empirical evidence, the essay proposes theory and participatory Internet research methods to conjecture about these emergence patterns of arousal and interactivity.

SOFT AROUSAL: THE LOVER WHO ENDLESSLY TALKS

Internet porn viewing differs from cinematic porn viewing in that spectators are encouraged to reach climax in response to porn as visual stimuli while they are chatting with other people. Web users can download and watch porn while exchanging chit-chat, with each other, while talking to sex workers through a webcam, or while showing their own bodies through webcams and acting out sexual personas. The processing of visual information is moderated by a wide range of speech acts or digital imaging techniques depending on the different technological settings and encounters. I would argue that this type of porn consumption produces a state of soft arousal, as detailed in the book *webAffairs*, written by a female artist and scholar under the pseudonym Show-n-tell.⁵ *WebAffairs* gives an overview of Show-n-tell's arousal in a chatroom and her reactions to sexually explicit images. The book has large collections of webcam photographs and details of ongoing correspondences. Show-n-tell collects an extensive collection of images of the bodies and body parts of her chat partners — facial glows, erect penises, naked

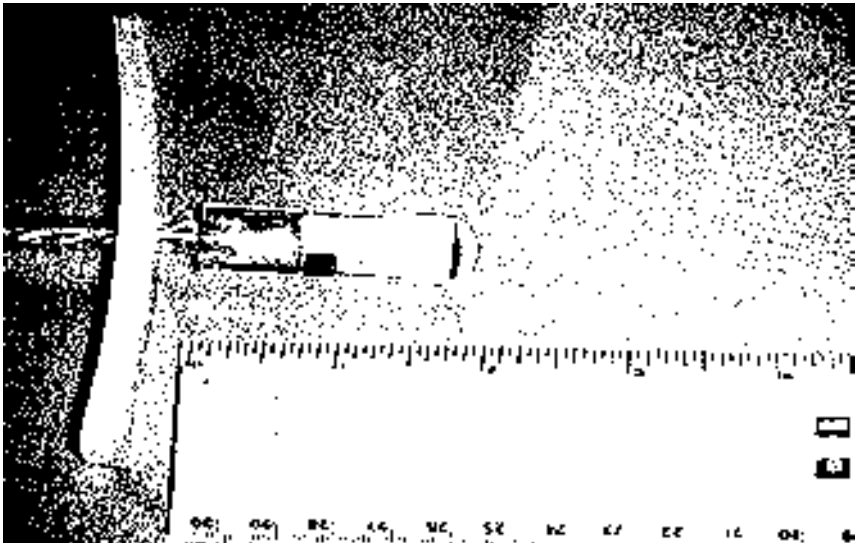


Figure 1. Vaginal Photoplethysmograph, instrument used on women on MTF transsexual to measure arousal

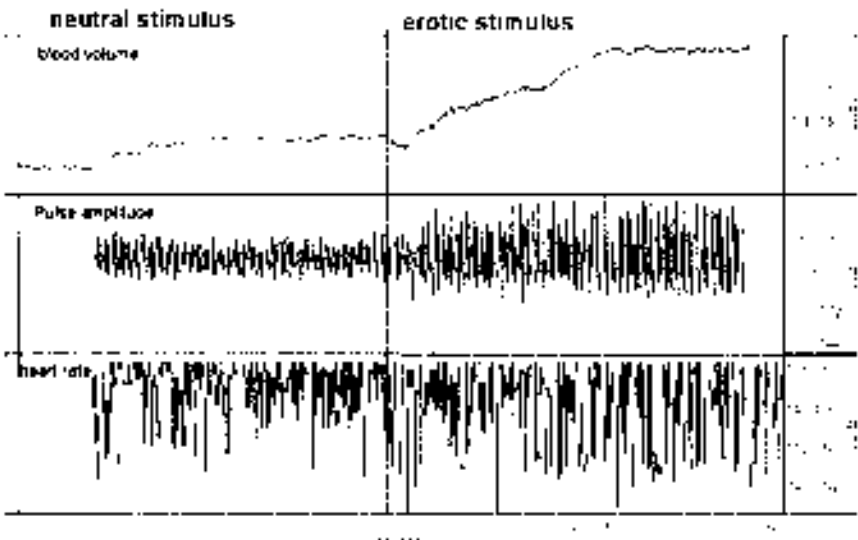


Figure 2. Diagram of stimulation during porn arousal



Figure 3. 1966 Lifshitz experiment, comparing arousal reactions to nude women and ulcerated legs



Figure 4. 2003 experiment, comparing arousal reactions to heteronormative, paraphilic and neutral slides

buttocks, hairy chests, and promising bosoms. She also documents the moments where people make special dates to show off their special fetishes or paraphilic interests, such as a man who wants to show off an elaborate rubber fetish costume, or a cross-dresser who wants to show female lingerie.

Is Show-n-tell a typical feminine or masculine consumer with an ability to be aroused by these phantasmogoric displays and chats? Do the chat logs show that males and females have different arousal patterns? To which degree are males in chatrooms still innately animalistic or culturally trained to be aroused by visual stimuli? Show-n-tell sets out to answer some of these questions as she performs a double-role — she gathers data while responding to the desires of others. She narrates the peculiarities of her web affairs and analyses them afterwards; hence both her performative and analytical voices are present in the book.

WebAffairs demystifies the profile of the straight male as a porn beast. For example, in the early stages of the project, she asks men to point their cameras away from their bodies and erections into their home spaces, and finds that men love to get this kind of unusual attention.

The chatters are personally, physically and emotionally involved in the act of making and sharing data. Sometimes they help each other work through personal relationship issues. Other times, they invite each other to have sex and conversation in private rooms, but these can also be largely non-sexual. At one point, she has an extensive humorous conversation with an older sexually estranged male and encourages him to get his wife involved. Show-n-tell herself is a married woman who performs sex while her husband sits next to her working away on his own computer. She often discusses her chats and ongoing cyber relationships with him or asks him how far she can go in her diary of evolving desires.

Show-n-tell's research shows that people develop unique and complex relationships that are determined by a manipulation of pornographic images. Since it is assumed that males will have a larger impulse to crave the naked bodies of females, some of the chatrooms are administered by certain rules. Some are anarchic while others are polite or women-friendly rooms with stricter rules for males. For instance, polite rooms prohibit men from displaying their genitals and/or inviting a woman into private rooms. The idea is to make women feel more comfortable and to boot out any potential obnoxious men. Since polite rooms have a larger percentage of women to men, men tend to line up for them trying to get in. Show-n-tell tries out the polite rooms for a while, but in the end she finds them too forced: "I eventually stopped going to these rooms because it seemed too hypocritical to be participating in an adult room and yet be offended by nudity. Isn't that what we already do in real life: keep sex apart from the rest of our daily life and define it offensive when it is expressed in public?"⁶ She prefers to interact with people's unadulterated performances whether they include sex or not.

Lastly, as Show-n-tell's case study shows, performers on the web have alter-egos and develop discursive strategies and behavioural traits that are unique to their new personas. Thus, arousal is based on constructed notions of identity, sexual preference and gender.

Show-n-tell engages in excessive sexual communication and pornographic exhibitionism and voyeurism. She is also committed to acting out complex layers of porn identity. What matters within these encounters is a consensual sharing of sexual experiments, joys, disappointments or satisfaction. In light of these layered identities and fluctuating encounters, would it remain possible to measure female and male chatters, or normal and paraphilic subjects? Are males and females adopting similar multi-layered types of sexual behaviour in the chatroom?

MORPHING GENDERS AND THE VARIETY-FUCK

We could resort to post-binary concepts of gender to get an understanding of arousal. As Ken Plummer explains in the foreword to *Blending Genders*, even though most of us uphold a solid idea of gender as a binary split between male and female, gender is also seen as a concept that is shifting, ambiguous and fleeting. As such, it is one of most contested concepts in the social sciences and contemporary political struggles. But anthropologists have demonstrated the cultural relativities of gender, and sociologists have shown that genders are socially constructed through material and cultural conditions. Moreover, there has been research on the larger cultural impact of individuals and communities that cross gender lines.⁷

In "We are So Much More than our Naked Boobies," Marije Janssen uses feminist theories to analyse how a new wave of "alt porn" girls use performative mechanism to denaturalise gender. Janssen refers to Luce Irigaray's notion of "mimicry," or the stark reiteration of dogmatic clichés as a means of questioning gender within dominant discourses. For Irigaray, it is important to think of modes of femininity as they have been drawn within dominant discourses and image regimes. As one cannot formulate a language outside of these discourses, it is important for women to enact and mimic their roles within existing discourses. As for the DIY portraits of alt porn, web users can deliberately assume and perform feminine roles, which could then convert a form of predictability into an affirmation, and allow a thwarting of these roles. We can see instances of feminine mimicry in Eon Mc Kai's popular alt porn movie *Neu Wave Hookers*, where sex workers deliberately act out clichés. In this movie, typical porn numbers are alternated with non-pornographic scenes that make viewers aware of the constructed nature of the sex bomb. For instance, the models show typical expressions of bliss and satisfaction when they are being ejaculated upon, but they show theatrical and surreal poses when shot behind the scenes.

Judith Butler has criticised the position of Irigaray and theorised the possibility of gendermorphing, or the use of performativity as innumerable sexes. Butler uses the concept of masquerade to argue that people can take on different identities by adopting gender codes. Janssen suggests that this theory holds special value in the online world, where people are more likely to take on parallel or alternate identities, whether real or virtual, by replacing one profile or nickname with another. Specifically, she looks at Butler's interpretation of the psycho-analysis of Jacques Lacan, who reviewed the role of adopting the phallus in relation to male and female identity. According to Lacan, the phallus is



Figure 5. (Above) Show-n-tell and Mike Mandel, *Suzy*, ceramic and glass mosaic tile mural with video screen embedded, 12x 13 feet temporary installation at GASP gallery, Boston, 2005

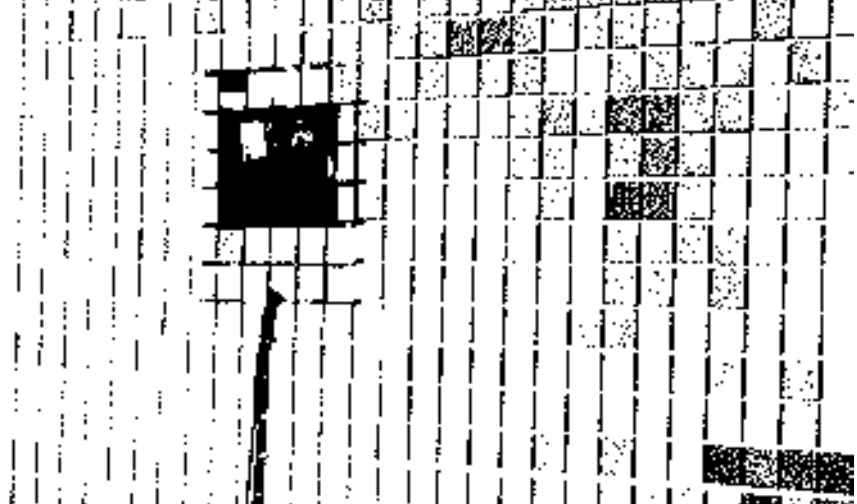


Figure 6. (Below) Show-n-tell and Mike Mandel, GASP wall detail2, *Shygirl*, digital video, 1:32min, Chantal Zakari, 2005



Figure 7. Buckangel, Buckangel Entertainment, Leather 1, 2005



Figure 8. Buckangel, Buckangel Entertainment, Fire 2, 2005

the primary signifier of the subject, as opposed to the biological penis. It is a signifier that can be detached from the male body and can be adopted by women. Women can steal the phallus and reconstruct identities, but they can only work once affirmed by males and masculine culture. Butler places this kind of masquerade outside the framework of binary gender roles and male affirmation. For her, masquerade is seen as a way to denaturalise authentic forms of desire/arousal, and foreseeing endless possibilities of gender that do not need masculine affirmation.⁸

In addition to Butler's theories of performativity, a school of cyberfeminists sees the networked body as a pragmatic interface. Rosi Braidotti argues that people can use mediated spaces and identities to reverse the patriarchal order and try out mimetic strategies of gender. Unlike Butler, Braidotti is more skeptical about the concept of the transferable phallus or of our ability to adopt an endless variety of gender codes. One cannot revolutionise gender so easily even though one can more easily play with its codes using new technologies. A real change of gender identification would take time and require hard work, pain and effort.⁹

By adopting these theories of performativity and gender morphing, one can understand how modern subjects denaturalise gender by adopting codes of (hyper) masculinity or femininity. Fifteen years ago, Donna Haraway equally predicted a trend towards morphing subjectivities in "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century." According to Haraway, women would be able to fight oppression by transcending biological determinism and making new alliances with technological data and changing animal behaviours.¹⁰ The web has meanwhile made room for feminine mimicry, gender-fluid modeling and FTM porn stars who denaturalise binary gender codes.

"You have seen chicks with dicks, now come see a dude with a pussy," proclaims Buckangel of Buckangel.com. Buck wants to "change the face of porn" by constructing a profile that merges hyper-masculinity and hyper-femininity — a tattooed and muscular torso, large moustache and retro style sunglasses, along with a decidedly slutty "cunt" pride. Buck was born as a bio-female and later became a FTM transsexual who likes raunchy sex. He emphasises his authentic female genital, but adds layers of masculinity. He is now a "man with a cunt," and declares that "two holes are better than one." Buck also likes to get fucked in both holes.

We see a further mixing of female and male attributes in his ability to "variety-fuck" his sex partners: "See buck fuck guys, gals and she-males." We can see it in a range of photos: Buck is sucking cock, Buck is smoking a cigar while looking at a dildo going into his/her pussy, Buck is kissing a woman's breast, Buck is being penetrated in the vagina by a man. Buck is really getting it on in every possible way and shows a flexibility and willingness to arouse both biological and transgender females and males, as long as they can also get aroused by his performance of roughneck masculinity.

Nofauxx.com is a porn site that equally wants its models and voyeurs to denaturalise binary gender codes. The site offers "cute pin-up girls, hot boys, chubby chicks, gorgeous BBW babes, steaming hot couples, punk, goth, hippy, natural, pierced, tattooed, shaved

and unshaven models, sexy trans-gender/transsexual models (FTM & MTF), erotica, straight, gay, lesbian and bi-sexual models, black models, asian models, soft-core, hard-core and realistic S/M and bondage” One could argue that both these sites use the portal model of commercial porn to offer excessive choices, but the selections consistently address a shifting of gender codes. As we can read in www.nofauxxx.com policies for models: “No Fauxxx has no “boy” and “girl” categories, and for a reason. We believe that, for many people, genitals have nothing to do with gender or gender expression. We do have many trans and genderqueer models, and we ask that you respect them by referring to them by their preferred pronouns (“he,” “she,” or “ze” are the most common, and it will be specified in the model’s bio) if you’re blessed with the chance to interact with them on our message boards or through other means. If there are any reports of abuse or disrespect to any model for any reason, action will be taken to remove you from the message boards, and if necessary, the site.”¹¹ The site asks its membership to question their innate or culturally conditioned notions of gender.

Web users are invited into acts of gender morphing in alternative, amateur and online queer porn sites. The morphing spectator may be a web user who surfs and wanders into novel sex cultures and pleasures. S/he may also be a “cross-voyeur” who peruses selections beyond the boundaries of his/her niche site of gender and sexual orientation. One well-known example of such “cross-voyeurism” would be the Japanese softcore animation *yaoi/shounen-ai*, which portrays gay sex scenes or “boy love” for female consumers. Their “lesbian” counterparts are called *yuri/shoujo-ai*, and can be seen as a new type of soft arousal for males.

Both lesbian and gay images made for cross-voyeurs are a refreshing change from the sexist and violent premises of most hentai. As Philip Mak explains in his *shoujo-ai* database, people like *shoujo-ai* to adopt feminine feelings of affectionate desire: “For some of those who have a soft spot for warm-and-fuzzy-feeling romantic stories, it is the appeal of seeing a nice girl-girl relationship, which while not rare, is also not as common in anime fanfiction as some of us would like ... Others get bored with predictable everyday situations in anime fanfiction, where the roles in relationships are clear cut: the man’s job is to defend, provide food and shelter and be manly, while the woman’s job is to support the man, keep the food and shelter straight, and be demure. In a lesbian relationship, these roles are not clear cut at all; the relationship becomes exciting and unpredictable again.”¹² Mak believes that these lesbian bodies and relationships may attract male viewers who want to see a shift in bi-polar gender relations.

NEW MODELS FOR NETPORN RESEARCH: HYBRID-HYBRID PROFESSOR

These new types of identification with Internet data and morphing animal behaviours could also be extended to Internet research methodologies. In this way, we can supplement or critically question empirical data in sexology. In “The Other Game Researcher,” Marinka Copier questions scientific paradigms in media studies and discusses the possibilities of boundary-work, a term used in Science and Technology Studies to discuss the formation of artificial boundaries between “scientific” and “non-scientific” knowledge.¹³

Whereas boundary-essentialists favor a strict definition and application of science, constructivists argue that separations of science and non-science are social conventions. As Copier explains: "Essentialists do boundary-work, constructivists watch it get done by people in society." Copier favors the researcher as a "hybrid-hybrid," someone who combines the profiles of researcher and actively engaged participant, as opposed to the essential and neutral scholar of scientific knowledge. She refers to the example of fan scholarship in media studies, where scholars have long acknowledged the possibility of being a devoted fan of media and poignant researcher at the same time.

The hybrid-hybrid profile of scholarship allows scholars to explore particular sites and step in and out of fieldwork. Researchers can acknowledge their own shifting identities and ask the question: "Is it possible to be a detached neutral scholar when confronted with fleeting naked subjects?" Sexology could update its antiquarian research methods, become less aroused by its fancy tools and technologies, and more involved in discussions about the quotidian state of soft arousal.

NOTES

- 1 Fig. 1 through to Fig. 4 are available on the web and reproduced under the Fair Use provision of US copyright law Some parts of the text will appear in her forthcoming book *Netporn: DIY Web Culture and Sexual Politics* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2007). In his Onanism 2.0 blog Nicholas Carr has a dialogue with Seth Finkelstein about the validity of Turpin's statistics. They are deemed unreliable as they were issued by the N2H@ censorware company as part of global publication relations campaign. See <http://sethf.com.ifothoughts/blogf/archives/000424.html> and http://troughtype.com/archives/2006/03/onanism_20.php.
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SSSPREAD.COM:
THE HOT BODS OF QUEER PORN

Barbara DeGenevieve

I was the content provider for Ssspread.com — *a prime porn site for hot femmes, studly butches, and lots of gender-fuck*—which I started with a friend in 2001. What you're seeing is a brief twenty minute compilation of seven out of one-hundred-and-fifty-one videos I shot over the three years the site was in operation. This is a test. I know how hard it is to think and watch porn at the same time, so pay attention!

Looking back after three years of making porn for Ssspread, what I found more fascinating than anything else was how little difference there was between straight and queer porn, except for one thing: the bodies. The bodies of queer porn are insubordinate, disobedient, unruly, i only interested in having people perform the kinds of sex acts they were comfortable with, and this strategy actually lead to a very interesting variety of scenes. "Actors" were paid \$75 per person per shoot. This is obviously very little, but in the three years we operated, we didn't even earn back our initial investment, so I appreciated that everyone was willing to do this for so little. The fact that so many were interested in this project because they felt it was important was what kept me going for three years (from January 2001 through to Valentine's day 2004), and this was the reason it was a difficult decision to finally shut it down.

I witnessed a "community" of people who were proud of their bodies and weren't afraid to put them on display for others to recognize and enjoy. Having had major body issues most of my life, I was fascinated by the total lack of discomfort or self consciousness. The FTMs, particularly those who were only hormonally altered with no upper body surgery were mesmerizing. And they were letting me look, videotape, pull stills from the video, and then let others look. Queer porn is a place where anything goes, where everything is possible, where each body is objectified and fetishized because it wants to be.

Queer bodies create a world of difference in the way they enact everything from vanilla sex, to masculinity, to blood sports, to violence. Queer porn is democracy at its best.

Beyond the bodies of its subjects and the desire for those bodies by its viewers, there are actually many more similarities than I would have imagined between queer and straight porn. (Perhaps the difference in bodies is so huge as to make the similarities seem irrelevant.) It is the complexity of the cultural narrative in the performance of sex in any kind of pornography that I find so compelling. Unless the scene I was shooting was simply two women taking their clothes off and having “lesbian” sex, there was an overwhelmingly hetero (male/female) and gay (male/male) narrative embedded in the scenes. It wasn't until I started to deconstruct what I was seeing, that I realized how prevalent it was.

In a sort of feminist sense, queer porn is politically correct for queers because queer bodies are in it having queer sex. But the scenarios that these queer bodies engage in are those that feminists inveighed against for at least twenty-five years. When did it become OK for two women to have multiple-holed penetrative sex? to fetishize the penis? to strap on a dildo and have a female partner engage in fellatio? To hyper-sexualize femmes and call it queer? Or to have a male born person identifying as a pre-op female transsexual strap on a dildo and fuck a butch dyke identifying as a trannie-boy in his pussie. Or to have a trannie boy who was a butch dyke get fucked in the ass by a gay man. Of course this isn't the full range of gender variations and combinations. I'm certainly not complaining, but having been a feminist since the mid-1970s, an anti-porn feminist I might add until 1988, I'm absolutely astonished (and parenthetically thrilled) at the way things have entirely reversed direction.

This seems so right to me — the gender fluidity that embraces every historical aspect of every kind of sexual act between two or more people despite their gender or sexual orientation.

I still have to ask — are we all hard-wired, do we lack imagination, or are the cultural narratives so powerful that we can't produce any other kind of narrative desires beyond the ones so present in the culture at large? Theoretically the queer body expands gender and destabilizes hetero/homo binaries, and certainly the rigidity of hegemonic gender roles has been addressed since the advent of second wave feminism. But what constitutes “queer or queered” gender roles needs just as much scrutiny.

There are so many questions about gender and queer porn floating around in my head, and I have no clear organizing principle or theoretical framework from which to produce a coherent fifteen minute “paper.” So I decided I'd try to answer a few of the questions for myself in no particular order, with no desire to be comprehensive, with no claim to expertise.

IS THERE A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN QUEER PORN AND STRAIGHT PORN? IF THE ANSWER IS YES, WHAT IS THAT DIFFERENCE?

The bodies are the biggest difference. Queer bodies, altered or not by surgery, hormones or attitude, are different from heterosexually identified bodies. They are no more constructed as identities than are the majority of unchallenged male and female, masculine and feminine bodies of the mainstream. But female masculinity, power relationships,

and transsexuality trouble the reading of these bodies in a way that destabilizes all gendered bodies.

And yet content-wise, there's really not much narrative difference. However, I'd say the major difference in regard to content is intention — queer porn is definitely coded as “play” so there's no question as to whether it's “real,” unlike violent straight/heterosexual porn that often leaves the viewer either believing or seriously wondering whether if what they saw was actually real: like rape scenarios and other forms of violence. Queer porn is unmistakably “a scene,” clearly play, even when it mimics hetero-normative gender relationships.

ARE YOU SAYING YOU ACTUALLY BELIEVE PHOTOGRAPHS AND VIDEOS ARE REAL?

You can assume all photo and video is constructed as a fiction controlled by the person holding the camera and the person who is editing, if editing is even involved. But with certain kinds of straight porn it's sometimes hard to believe it isn't “real,” even if you know it has to have been staged, because there is an attempt to show (or to realistically simulate) actual violence. The real world analogue is just too close to elicit a response of anything but horror — “Am I actually seeing someone being raped?” If it is an actual rape as many sites proclaim (which is the point of it and the locus of the turn-on for the audience), then it's a criminal act and doesn't even fit my definition of pornography.

(Sexually explicit imagery in which the consensual acts being depicted are intended for the sexual arousal and masturbatory entertainment of the viewer. This definition excludes illegal acts such as images or videos that “document” children being sexualized or molested, criminal rape and violent abuse, murder (snuff), etc., all being non-consensual acts, but generally still included within the category of pornography. I consider these to be prosecutable crimes, and therefore not technically pornography.)

Even when queer porn sets out to simulate violent scenes, even when the acts themselves are very similar to what might happen in straight porn, it is still unmistakably “a scene” and thus very clearly fetishistic.

ISN'T THAT A DOUBLE STANDARD? HYPOTHETICALLY, WHAT IF THE STRAIGHT PORN IS NO MORE “REAL” THAN THE QUEER STUFF. IF IT'S ALL BEING ACTED, WOULD YOU STILL FEEL THERE IS A DIFFERENCE?

Pretty much. I'm not ready to give porn carte blanche across the board. There's acceptable and unacceptable porn. No matter how tolerant I've become of most genres of porn including heterosexual porn aimed pretty exclusively at men, I still have to draw a line at violence that's intended to look real as opposed to violence that's obviously intended as fantasy both for the perpetrator and the “victim,” the dominant and the submissive, the one with power and the one without. Violent heterosexual porn is replicating something that isn't a fantasy, something that isn't consensual, something that validates criminal violence, particularly against women. There is a distinction between the two genres in regard to violence, subtle as it may be visually, heterosexual porn is based in misogyny; queer porn in role and power play.

SO THE QUESTION BECOMES WHY WOULD QUEER PORN WANT TO ENGAGE IN VIOLENT SCENARIOS SUCH AS RAPE, CUTTING, OR ANY INFLECTION OF PAIN?

Because the fantasy of being at the mercy of a force beyond your control, of completely relinquishing your own control, to be made to do something you might not otherwise do, and on the flip side of it, to make someone totally submissive to you, is hot. I think a lot of women have rape fantasies. We grow up with the fear and the fascination of it. Queers aren't immune to the influence of the dominant culture. Do they actually want to be raped in the criminal sense? No. But when the fantasy is controlled and all parties have consented to their roles, it's really hot.

Porn isn't politically correct, whether it's hetero, homo or queer. We all have our fantasies, our fetishes, our deep dark little secrets, our unspeakable turn-ons, and they are all supposed to be kept out of sight. That's what complicates this analysis. Queers aren't supposed to have the same fantasies as hets and if they do, those fantasies are certainly not perceived to have the same origins. Oddly enough, on Ssspread, the closer the scene came to hetero-normative role-play, the hotter the viewers thought it was. But I suspect queer porn is assumed to be on higher moral ground by liberal segments of academia simply because it's queer and not heterosexual.

OK, SO LET'S STEP TO THE HIGHER MORAL GROUND THEN. WHAT IS IT ABOUT QUEER PORN THAT ELEVATES IT TO A PROTECTED, INTELLECTUAL SPHERE?

Queer porn is a documentation of an important aspect of queer lives — it gives visibility to queer bodies and their sexual practices, giving representation to a diverse if relatively small “community” that has very little public presence, and even less representation of its sexualities. Academically, queer porn is a magnifying glass in regard to the complexities of gender and I believe it serves a very different purpose than the study of other genres within the greater context of pornography as a historical and cultural phenomena. Power dynamics are subverted, inverted and perverted in queer porn. The very essence of who we think we are as gendered beings is called into question and unmercifully interrogated.

A quote from an essay by Judith Shapiro in *Body Guards: the cultural politics of gender ambiguity* (1991):

The way in which transsexuals go about establishing their gender in social interactions reminds us that the basis on which we are assigned a gender in the first place (that is, anatomical sex) is not what creates the reality of gender in ongoing social life. ... Transsexualism makes explicit for us the usually tacit processes of gender attribution. ... the transsexual reveals the extent to which the normally sexed person is a “contingent practical accomplishment.” In other words, they make us realize that we are all passing. (257)

I credit the gender-queer and transgendered actors and members of Ssspread with an education I couldn't possibly have acquired otherwise. Making queer fantasy visible is a challenge to dominant ideas about the fixity of gender, and because of that, it is a political gesture not without consequences particularly in this ultra conservative climate.

ISN'T THAT ASSIGNING A LITTLE TOO MUCH CREDIBILITY TO IMAGES OF PEOPLE FUCKING MADE SPECIFICALLY TO GET PEOPLE OFF?

I don't know.

I'll end with one last statement rather than another question I can't answer. We can forever analyze porn as having a social significance for the understanding of power, sex, and gender, and as being a political and politicized cultural form of production. But what it will always come down to, whether it's gay, straight, dyke, queer or whatever, is that it is produced as a tool for sexual stimulation, primarily masturbation. Porn is made to get people off. In order to do this, bodies must not only be highly sexualized, but objectified, fetishized, exotified and made to accommodate very particular individual kinks. Political correctness has become an intellectual prison within which an extremely limited dialogue can take place, and in fact where monologues and diatribes are usually the discursive practice. Embracing the need to objectify and be objectified, to fetishize and be fetishized, to play the willing victim as well as the victimizer, opens up a mine field that will be difficult to traverse, but it is a more intellectually provocative and honest terrain from which to understand who we are as complex sexual beings. I applaud and thank the organizers of this conference for creating the kind of environment in which we are able to expand this conversation.

‘THE REAL THING’:
REFRAMING QUEER PORNOGRAPHY
FOR VIRTUAL SPACES

Julie Levin Russo

The free tour of the CyberDyke network Cyber-dyke.net includes a promotional banner [Figure. 1] that captions thumbnail images of happy naked women with the phrases: “real fantasies / real orgasms / real lust / real butches / real bodies / real sex.” As evidenced here, “real” is the primary term the site uses to frame its project, implying that the realness on offer at CyberDyke is what distinguishes their product from “fake” commercial lesbian porn. The immediate problem with this strategy, which is common to much alternative netporn (see www.altporn.net), is that “real” is just as much a ubiquitous catchphrase of the very commercial porn from which CyberDyke and its ilk want to set themselves apart. WeLiveTogether.com, for example, a porn site which features three supposed roommates who pick up a different girl each week for a group lesbian scene, also invites potential customers to “Find out how REAL lesbians live” [Fig. 2]. Thus, if CyberDyke and [WeLiveTogether](http://WeLiveTogether.com) offer the spectator palpably different experiences—and to me it seems that they do—the status of this difference remains a provocative question: Is it just that [WeLiveTogether](http://WeLiveTogether.com) is lying about being real, whereas CyberDyke is telling the truth? And if so, what precisely is it about CyberDyke that is more real?

In addition to being a popular marketing buzzword, realness has been identified by many theorists of porn as a defining characteristic of the genre. In order to schematically condense this field, I’d like to propose that pornography is typically understood as having a privileged relationship to the real in one or more of four ways:

- it records an unsimulated, authentic sexual act (realness of production)
- its images appear real due to their character and conventions (realness of representation)

- it acts directly on the viewer to produce real effects (realness of reception)
- it is directly tied to real economic, political, and/or cultural processes (realness of social context)

As an especially apt and microcosmic example, CyberDyke mobilizes all four arguments in their FAQ. Elaborating on the question I raised above, “So what’s the difference between ‘hot lesbian action’ for ‘frat boys’ and quality porn aimed at real women and lesbians?” they answer:

We use real people and couples as often as possible, and narratives based on real-life and real fantasies. We try to depict the sex the way people really have it, not just in positions that maximize expos[ure] to the camera or that make the women look a certain way... That other kind of porn is easy to recognize: it has obvious cues, like a silly contrived plot-line or artificial-looking women; it’s not about the real world at all... Even if the content is almost identical in terms of the action and explicitness, the personality of the camera holder makes [a] big difference; he or she is a proxy for the viewer.
(my emphasis)

This statement relies on a realness of production in its claims that its models are “real people and couples.” It invokes a realness of representation in its discussion of visual strategies, like naturalistic staging and implied viewer positioning, that allow CyberDyke’s images to “depict the sex the way people really have it.” It references a realness of reception in identifying CyberDyke in the query as “porn aimed at real women and lesbians,” suggesting that it will effectively act in pleasurable ways on these authentic minds and bodies. And elsewhere in the FAQ, it’s clear that CyberDyke is also concerned with a contextual realness: they write that “we’re out to redeem porn!... women often don’t have much extra pocket-change for things like porn sites, and... they are anxious about signing up for adult sites as well. I thought a network of sites made by women, a safe space on the Net where sex was given respect, was needed.” This is a project to intervene, through porn, in the broader sociopolitical field of gendered sexuality.

Now, the fact that this four-fold conceptual tether, or some part of it, is taken up by both alternative and mainstream porn sites, and (as I’ll discuss) by both pro- and anti-porn critics, suggests, at the very least, that this convoluted historical, theoretical, and ideological nexus of pornography and the real requires rigorous examination. For politically-engaged queer netporn sites, the question of what assumptions they perpetuate when they embrace this language is especially important. The idea that porn has a special capacity to transparently reflect the real, one of the most common aspects of this discourse, is necessarily problematic in its erasure of mediation. But it becomes increasingly untenable as porn encounters first video and then the Internet, moving further and further from the specifically visual and indexical particulars of its cinematic roots. If the celebration of referentiality is in tension with the digital pixels of the net, it is equally antithetical to the ideal project of queer porn, which is anything but reflecting an established, static “real”

CYBERDYKE
It's not just about quantity, but quality

real fantasies
Real Lust
Real Butches

Real Sex

back Apply more

This advertisement features a collage of images. On the right, a woman is shown in a close-up, looking towards the camera. Below this, there are two smaller images: one of a person in a dark setting and another of a person's hands. The text is arranged in a stylized, layered manner, with 'CYBERDYKE' at the top in a large, outlined font, followed by the tagline 'It's not just about quantity, but quality'. Below that, 'real fantasies' is written in a serif font, with 'Real Lust' in a cursive script. 'Real Butches' is in a bold, sans-serif font. On the left, 'Real Sex' is written vertically. At the bottom, the words 'back', 'Apply', and 'more' are spaced out.

Figure 1. From <http://www.cyber-dyke.net/cyberdyke-tour1.html>.

iwantnewgirlfriend.com

Find out how REAL lesbians live...

This advertisement features a large, high-contrast, black and white photograph of a couple in an intimate embrace. The woman is in the foreground, leaning towards the man. The image has a grainy, high-contrast aesthetic. At the top, the website name 'iwantnewgirlfriend.com' is written in a stylized, outlined font. At the bottom, the text 'Find out how REAL lesbians live...' is written in a similar outlined font.

Figure 2. From <http://www.iwantnewgirlfriend.com/porn/we-live-together.asp>.

sexuality. After surveying the discourse of realness and its problems in more detail, I'd ultimately like to argue that CyberDyke is in fact more real than commercial lesbian porn, but only in the last of my four modes (the contextual): it participates in a dynamic and ongoing process of identity and community formation. This role, which we might more appropriately call virtual, has the potential to reverberate fruitfully with the virtuality of digital media to offer "alternative" porn alternative models of legitimacy.

As I've already suggested, the first reservation one might have about the promotion of alternaporn's signature realness is that much anti-porn rhetoric is founded on a parallel argument. According to Catharine MacKinnon, the North American anti-porn feminist movement's chief figure, pornography is defined, first of all, as a record of real, pro-filmic rape and abuse of women: "pictures women had to be directly used to make" (MacKinnon 2000:98), sex that "is happening to their bodies" (106). MacKinnon is the number one proponent of what I've called the realness of production — the idea that porn transparently depicts real women having real sex. Second of all, she defines porn as the genre with real effects (what I've called realness at the site of reception): "In a very real way," she writes, pornographic pictures "have made sex *be* what it is to the people who use you and the pictures of you interchangeably... [Women's] fathers, husbands, and doctors saw the pictures, liked them, and did the same things to them" (95). Through the erections and orgasms it stimulates in the bodies of its viewers, masturbatory rituals that are part of a real-time "sex act" (101), porn causes them to do what they've seen onscreen. Moreover, porn is thus the linchpin of the patriarchal sex-gender system (the realness of social context):

Pornography makes the world a pornographic place through its making and use, establishing what women are said to exist as, are seen as, are treated as, constructing the social reality of what a woman is and can be in terms of what can be done to her, and what a man is in terms of doing it (106).

As for porn's realness of representation, MacKinnon acknowledges it, writing that "the camera gives the pictures a special credibility, a deep verisimilitude, an even stronger claim to truth" (95), but sees it as a damaging alibi: "[state] protection [of pornography] relies centrally on putting it back into the context of the silence of violated women: from real abuse back to an 'idea' or 'viewpoint' on women and sex... On the assumption that words have only a referential relation to reality, pornography is defended as only words" (98). For MacKinnon, pornography is not representation at all, but pure unmediated reality.

Because MacKinnon so definitively staked out porn's privileged relation to the real as a reason to despise and censor it, pro-porn feminists have traditionally responded by taking the opposite tack, emphasizing the nontransparent, nonlinear aspects of representation and desire. As Judith Butler puts it, "Whereas anti-pornography feminists presume a mimetic relation between the real, fantasy, and representation that presumes the priority of the real, we [other feminists] can understand the 'real' as a variable construction

which is always and only determined in relation to its constitutive outside: fantasy, the unthinkable, the unreal" (Butler, 2000: 488). Jane Gaines believes that this schism reverberated through film and media theory more generally, confirming that, because of the behaviorist terms of popular media and anti-pornography discourses, theorists were long reluctant to speculate that texts can have direct, material effects. This terrain shifted, she claims, with the penetration of Foucault into feminist film theory, particularly in Linda Williams' seminal book *Hard Core*. Situating pornography as the founding principle of cinema itself, Williams writes that the cinematic apparatus would "produce a new kind of body, which viewers experience through this optical machine" (Williams, 1999:45). Thus, according to Gaines, Williams is the first left-wing feminist to venture into the discursive territory staked out by Catharine MacKinnon: "Here it is. The bold feminist admission of what anti-porn groups have feared the most: machines making the body do all manner of perverse things" (32). According to Gaines, at least, feminists on the left can now agree with feminists on the right that pornography acts on and shapes the body of the spectator, though the potential political consequences of this convergence are not yet clear. Feminist and queer pornographers are echoing both camps when, based on the assumption that viewers act out what they see in porn in their own bodies, they call for porn that shows more "real sex."

Williams' book, however, is most concerned with what I've called the realness of representation: she argues that film as a medium is inextricable from the pornographic pleasure of its attempts to capture the visual real, and conversely, that the incontrovertible impression of realness characteristic of sexually explicit images authenticates all film. Discussing early protocinema, particularly Muybridge's motion studies, Williams notes that "it is but a short leap from the 'academic question' of body movement mechanics to the 'pornographic answer,' wherein the elusive and prurient 'truth' is located in increasingly more detailed investigations of the bodies of women" (36). At the origin of film, then, "positivist" anatomical and sexual knowledge is yoked to the "maximum visibility" of sex.

Now, I don't think we should accept that all pornography is necessarily defined by this sort of claim to cinematic realism, particularly as porn transitions to video in the 1980s and now to digital media. Paul Willemsen quotes Laurence O'Toole's assertion that "by the 1990s [porn] had changed from '...being about "real" people having hot sex to body-sculpted, silicone-enhanced superhumans "performing" hot sex,'" and goes on to maintain that "[w]hat such films achieve... is the new genre of the 'performed documentary' [à la reality TV], whereas the older forms of pornography were more straightforwardly in the 'cinema direct' idiom or in the mainstream, 'realist,' 'classical narrative' idiom" (Willemsen, 2004: 20). In response to the increasing dominance of porn's artificial, spectacular mode over the cinematic realism that Williams emphasizes, an opposing strategy of authentication has developed, drawing heavily on video and television. I'd date this to the markedly self-reflexive 1989 porno *The Adventures of Buttman*, which launched the now wildly popular gonzo genre. While certainly still animated by a will to knowledge focused on the involuntary confession of sexual pleasure, amateur porn eschews formulas

and staging in favor of low production values that convey what, in television studies, is described as “liveness”: a sense of presence, immediacy, and spontaneity. As Zabet Patterson puts it, “the central draw of the amateur image [is] that it shows ‘real bodies’ experiencing ‘real pleasure.’ This desire is figured oppositionally to the supposed artificiality of more general pornography, in which ‘it’s all fake’” (Patterson, 2004: 116). The second reservation I’d raise about the discourse of realness, then, is the question of whether the voyeuristic, scientific impulse to expose the sexual real retains its explanatory rigor when applied to nonindexical media, or whether amateur video and netporn is in fact making a far more simulacral appeal.

Internet media such as Webcams have eagerly embraced this postmodern (as opposed to cinema’s modern) mode, capitalizing on an impression of temporal and spatial presentness familiar from television. As Patterson puts it, “the necessarily low-res quality of the streaming video thus becomes a further guarantee of liveness... a sense of presence guaranteed by what is perceived as a privileged relationship to the real” (113). Wendy Chun also focuses her analysis on amateur netporn, which is saturated with these strategies. Discussing the artporn site IsabellaCam, which invites those of you who’ve “‘had enough with corporate porn and fake orgasms [to] come here and open your mind 2 the ultimate in virtual sexual experiences where everything u see is 100% REAL,’” Chun argues that such

‘Amateur’ webcam sites... mimic voyeurism in order to create indexicality and authenticity within a seemingly nonindexical medium... ‘voyeuristic’ images lend the Internet an authenticity it otherwise does not have... further buttressing the ‘reality effect’ necessary to making fiber-optic communications and computer-generated images seem transparent. (Chun, 2006:103)

A similar strategy of simulated liveness is evident at WeLiveTogether.com [fig. 3], where pornographic installments are framed by introductory scenes and brief diary-like texts that narrate how the “roommates” met their conquest of the week in the course of their daily activities. Chun’s crucial point is that netporn is doing a certain ideological work for the Internet as a whole, importing the cinematic sense of referentiality that Williams identifies as porn’s legacy into a medium with which it is no longer commensurate. This is another reason to beware of online claims for images’ authenticity.

Despite these medium-specific changes in its conventions, however, mainstream pornography universally retains what is, according to Williams, the key conventionalized marker of realism as “maximum visibility”: the money shot. Williams sees the money shot—an interruption of the all-important genital connection and a shift of focus from the female to the male body—as a fetish substitute for the invisible, involuntary truth of female sexual pleasure that porn always seeks but can never capture. Analyzing it as both a Freudian and Marxian fetish, Williams writes that “[i]n combining money and sexual pleasure—those simultaneously valuable and dirty things—the money shot most perfectly embodies the profound alienation of contemporary consumer society”

(107), a society in which even human bodies are commodified. This points toward what I've called pornography's privileged connection to the contextual real. Williams cites porn historian Walter Kendrick, who "maintains boldly that pornography as we know it emerges at that moment when the diffusion of new kinds of mass media... exacerbates a dominant group's worry about the availability of these media to persons less 'responsible' than themselves" (12). Jennifer Wicke elaborates on this connection, claiming that "[a]t the bottom of the so-called pornography debate lies a mystified relation to the conditions of mass culture... To many commentators, the ease and rapidity of mass cultural consumptive visual strategies is appallingly emblemized by pornography itself, where the languor and voluptuousness of consumption in general gets raised to its apotheosis" (Wicke, 2004:179). Pornography becomes a sort of screen onto which the anxieties and evils of capitalist modernity can be projected. Hence, it also becomes a cathected site of social regulation and control—the attempt to censor obscenity, Carolyn Dean asserts, "represents an effort to ward off threats to the concept of stable sexuality first defined in the interwar years and embedded in normative heterosexual expression" (Dean, 1996: 70). Given this social terrain, we must be wary, in a third sense, of the impulse to reject the purported artificiality and objectification of pornography with calls for porn that is more real and authentic: this rhetorical move adopts the terms of anti-porn anxieties, and disavows the fact that pornography's perceived connection to the real is often precisely what makes it seem emblematic of the evils of commodity capitalism—just as the money shot is the quintessential marker of both spontaneous and involuntary sexual confession and conventionalized, manufactured pornographic spectacle.

If all this is at stake when it comes to mainstream commercial pornography, I'd now like to ask how it's materialized specifically for queer porn. Certainly—since, as Williams, Dean, and Chun have argued, attempts to contain pornography are symptoms of the defense of normative sexuality—queer porn has always been especially vulnerable to prosecution and persecution based on arguments from the contextual real. In her article "Second Thoughts on *Hard Core*," Williams traces "a major change taking place in American obscenity law... away from the notion of explicit sex and towards the targeting of scapegoatable 'deviants'" (Williams, 2004:166), particularly homosexuals and sadomasochists. The aspiration to produce, say, lesbian porn that reflects (or perhaps produces) an authentic lesbian experience—whether through unmediated access to the real sex happening in front of the camera, through the viewer's real bodily response, or through representational codes that evoke this impression of the real—must operate in this highly-charged milieu. In her history of "dyke porn," Heather Butler quotes the box cover of the early amateur series *San Francisco Lesbians*: "True dykes right off the street! They're incredible and they're real!" [fig. 4]. Some porno films, she writes, "attempt to suggest an authentic dyke space outside of the diegesis" (Butler, 2004:187) by "co-opting an already established dyke community" that is recognizable to the target audience (186). When the regulation of pornography becomes a means of defining and policing sexual subcultures, the production of pornography becomes an important means of self-defining identity and community. This is the most significant sense in which "real" queer



Figure 5. From <http://www.cyber-dyke.net/public/gallery/albums.php>.



Figure 6.

porn is a valuable and politically vital project: rather than allowing the anti-porn forces to monopolize the interpretation of the real of sexuality and “deviance,” queer porn strategically reclaims the label “real” for images that are connected in their production and consumption to material social networks and collective experiences.

However, the three reservations I raised earlier still hold, and they amount to the same thing: there’s always an ideological erasure in play when images are described as unmediated. This is the most disturbing aspect of anti-porn feminist rhetoric, first of all, and the impulse to adopt it wholesale should give us pause; secondly, it plays into the symptomatic urge to rollback the fetishistic artificiality of capitalism to a pure, uncontaminated contact; and finally, it is particularly disingenuous when it claims transparency for the Internet, a nonindexical, nonvisual medium. Overall, Heather Butler claims that dyke porn is characterized by “the attempt to create a fantasy of authenticity” (189), and it is important to remember that this desire remains a phantasmatic one. Seeing authenticity in the images is always relies on a process of reading: for all we know, the models on WeLiveTogether.com are “really” lesbians and bisexual women — what makes CyberDyke more real is not the innate sexuality of its producers (to which we have no reliable access) but their mobilization of recognizable markers of dyke subculture (e.g. butch bodies, tattoos and piercings, fetish attire). And this is certainly not a real which all queer women will necessarily accept or identify with. If CyberDyke is about “real women’s real fantasies,” then, this is a strategic real that is meant to participate in the protean dynamics of community and identity building, not a pre-given real that appears transparently in the image. As Judith Butler writes, “when we point to something as real, and in political discourse it is very often imperative to wield the ontological indicator in precisely that way, this is not the end but the beginning of the political problematic... If the production of the real takes place through a restriction of the phantasmatic... then the phantasmatic emerges necessarily as the variable boundary from which the real is insistently contested” (489). The real, that is, is never pure — it is constitutively contaminated by the phantasmatic, much as mass culture is constitutively contaminated by the pornographic.

Furthering my assertion that CyberDyke’s claim to realness is more strategic than hegemonic is the fact that the site is unconcerned with either documentary or televisual modes of authentication as previously discussed. Instead, it adopts the conventions of erotic art, such as aestheticized composition, evocative staging, and fanciful narratives [fig. 5]. CyberDyke states, in the FAQ, “We want to let erotica and porn consumers know that porn doesn’t have to be contrived or ugly or insulting to one’s intelligence; that explicit work can be beautiful and thought provoking. We want to make adult entertainment that is authentic, spontaneous, and that has artistic merit.” It is, in this sense, appealing specifically to the real as entangled with the phantasmatic — what they rather paradoxically call “real fantasies.” Again, to quote Judith Butler:

The categories of identity instate or bring into ‘the real’ the very phenomenon that they claim to name only after the fact... The task is not to resolve or restrain the tension, the crisis, the phantasmatic excess induced by the term, but to affirm identity categories as

a site of inevitable rifting... It is the incommensurability of the phantasmatic and the real that requires at this political juncture to be safeguarded. (504)

We might say, following Butler, that it is through the instability of the “real” as CyberDyke mobilizes it, through the invested choices that appear in the course of naming what counts as a legitimate representation of real lesbians, that the site does its most crucial political work (rather than, as they seem to claim, through relaying a pre-existing “real” experience).

If Williams intimately links the origins of cinematic pornography with modernity, netporn — with its post-industrial economics of personalized taxonomies and disposable bodies, its sometimes televisual modes of authentication and its post-structuralist theoretical ties — can fittingly be associated with postmodernity. The Internet, in its technological specificity, offers opportunities to take alternative pornography in the direction of proliferating rather than stabilizing “reals.” As a nonvisual medium (something which Chun argues that netporn’s amateur authenticity is often trying to efface), the Internet potentially frees porn from the cinematic expectation of transparency, opening the door to more fanciful conceptions of the route from the eye of the photographer to the eye of the spectator. With its much-touted virtuality, the Internet calls into question the boundaries of the real, which may no longer appear as a set of contiguous physical spaces where, say, unsimulated sex happens in front of a camera and a viewer masturbates elsewhere in front of a screen — these sites may instead appear as nodes in a part-physical, part-immaterial, part-phantasmatic webwork of economic and subjective transactions. And perhaps most importantly, the Internet, as a distributed network, can facilitate changed relations between the producers and the consumers of pornography, wherein porn can be a participatory form of intercourse within subcultural communities that are composed equally of real and virtual environments. I’d argue that all these possibilities are nascent in the work of the CyberDyke network. To close with the words of Zabet Patterson:

The affective charge of pornography is linked to, and redoubled by, the affective charge attached to new and perpetually renewed computer technology. Pornography changes once it is positioned on the computer; the attraction of cyberporn becomes in part the attraction to and fascination with what we perceive as the vastly new possibilities for subjectivity that technology seems to offer. (120)

Queer netporn needs to take up the challenge of capitalizing on the pleasures and potential of its medium by cultivating discourses of purpose and legitimacy that don’t fall back on the specter of a static, overdetermined “real.”

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FIRST PORN SON:
ASIAN-MAN.COM AND THE GOLDEN PORN REVOLUTION

Samantha Culp

Rick Lee has sex with girls on camera. A lot of girls. How many exactly? He's lost count somewhere north of five-hundred-and-fifty, but intends to start tallying again. He runs a pay web-site featuring explicit videos of his sexual adventures, updated weekly to satisfy his fans. None of the above is unusual in the wild wild west of Southern California, the capital of the nation's booming adult entertainment industry, where thousands of men and women are plugging away (and in every conceivable way) to turn pleasure into profit. Like them, Rick is in it for the fun and the money, but also for the cause: to show, in his own words, "that Asian men have a penis."

There are no Asian-American men in heterosexual porn. Gay porn, yes—a quick search on the Internet or spin around your local sex shop will turn up *Best of Geisha Boys Vol. 9* and *Dragon Fucker*, as well as the "Samurai" penis enlarger sex toy ("Give your cock the strength of a warrior"), all featuring smooth-skinned Asian pretty-boys peering demurely from the packaging. But most of this content is produced in Asia itself (Thailand or the Philippines mostly), and is still a small niche market compared to the enormous demand for Asian females in straight porn. From Asia Carrera to Annabel Chong, *Bamboo Bimbos* to *Porcelain China Vagina*, Japanese schoolgirls to "Saigon Whores," the adult world is hyper-saturated with images of the sexy and submissive Asian female, custom-tailored to the fetishes of their primarily white male consumers. And the "Little China Dolls" and "Oriental Blossoms," not to mention their "Blonde Cheerleader" or "Hot Chocolate" or "Tijuana Spice" sisters, are always shown with big strong white guys, or sometimes African-American guys, maybe even Latinos... but never with Asian-American dudes. Until now.

Welcome to the only Adult site on the Internet that focuses on Asian men and women of all kinds, including blonde girls, brunettes, Latinas, Asian, Black girls, etc. I am a horny guy and I want to be with all the beautiful girls out there!
(www.asian-man.com)

"I mean, I've seen an Asian guy doing straight porn, but it's rare, very rare," Rick Lee ruminates over a café latte at a West Hollywood Starbucks. He is explaining how he got into porn, and how his website, Asian-man.com, got started. It's a bit of a shock to meet the man in person after witnessing his orgasms online, and to see his face, after only seeing the rest of him. Rick always digitally blurs his identity in the pictures and videos to separate the life of Asian-man from that of Clark Kent. On the site he explains: "in time I might actually put a regular picture of myself, to let everyone see me...until then, imagine a good ol' Azn boy with a big smile on his face." Which is a pretty accurate description. He's an ordinary-looking guy with a broad smile, glossy black hair, a casual confidence but also an extremely polite manner. The first true Asian-American male porn star challenges the stereotypes in more ways than one. One of his fans proclaims on a message board: "Based on preconceived notions, I'd think that Rick was a coke-snorting misogynist; fortunately, he's everything else but that."

Ethnically Chinese, but born in South America, Rick Lee (not a real name, but neither is Jenna Jameson) came to the States at age twenty-one and has been here ever since. He speaks impeccable English with just a trace of a Spanish accent; he has an MBA, and held a normal white-collar office job for several years before becoming a free-lance webmaster. He's intensely private about his family and the non-porn women he dates. He doesn't drink, smoke, or do drugs. He just loves the ladies. "I've just been very sexual most of my life, and when I got onto the Internet I got into the swinging thing, exploring sex. And then one thing leads to another..." One day while assisting the camera-crew on an adult film being produced by a friend, they needed an extra guy for a sex scene. The producer friend said, "if you want to jump in, just go ahead." Rick jumped.

Not long after, he started Asian-man.com, first as a "hobby," just a web-journal to document his busy sex-life and to post what pictures he could find of other Asian men doing the deed with hot ladies. Which weren't very many. Rick originally hoped to have several "AM" (Asian male) performers on the site, but couldn't find anyone else who fit the description and wanted to participate. "So I figured I'd just do it myself and combine the site with my then-online sex journal." In the beginning he wasn't even charging membership fees; he had a "day-job" and didn't need the money. But then the site's traffic began using up bandwidth, and the girly galleries multiplied, and the fans clamored for more. Asian-man.com then became a pay-site with more extensive triple-x content, as well as stories, dating advice, forums, submissions, and links. Though the membership is still small (around 200), Rick knew he had stumbled onto something important. "I got feedback from the guys who really wanted this, and I realized that it went deeper than porn. They felt they were misrepresented or oppressed, and it made me think about a lot of things. This is a real issue, that a lot of Asian-American men face... that we're

not that sexually represented, you know, in the media.” Some might call that a major understatement.

Jackie Chan and Jet Li are great at kicking ass and the Dali Lama is good at putting his face on MTV and all over the world for his peace movement, but when was the last time you saw an Asian guy with a hot woman on television or a movie?? When was the last time you saw an Asian man having sex on screen??

(www.asian-man.com)

The absence of studly Asian men in porn is perfectly paralleled by their absence in mainstream American popular culture as well. Even a cursory glance at the American media will reveal the stereotypes about Asian and Asian-American men to which Rick Lee and countless others refer: effeminate villain, pathetic pervert, clownish nerd, or simply invisible. These overlap and have changed slightly over time, but the asexual essence of these images persists even today. The swishy and evil Fu Manchu, the inscrutable Charlie Chan, and the comical voyeur Mr. Yunioshi of *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (all played by white actors in “yellowface”) gave way in the 1980s to Long Duk Dong (*Sixteen Candles*) and the sadistic businessmen of *Rising Sun*, and eventually to imported kung-fu masters, who chew up a lot of scenery but never get the girl, like Jackie Chan and Jet Li.

On the other hand, Asian and Asian-American women in television and the movies are Dragon Ladies or Suzie Wongs, and, just like their triple-X counterparts, are always paired with white guys. This discrepancy carries over to the real world as well: according to the 2000 census, Asian-American women married white or non-Asian spouses 3.08 times more often than Asian-American men did. In his memoir *Where the Body Meets Memory*, poet David Mura quotes the Japanese-American actor Marc Hayashi: “Every culture needs its eunuchs. And we’re it. Asian-American men are the eunuchs of America.”

Artists, academics and cultural critics have been aware of this issue for quite some time, but writers and scholars like David Mura, Shawn Wong, and Amy Kashiwabara have focused more on identifying the problem, exploring its reasons, and airing personal grievances, instead of finding a way to change things. Professor Darrell Y. Hamamoto of UC Davis, however, refuses to stop there, and chastises his colleagues for doing so. “The problem is — what do we do about it? To me, [identifying the stereotype] is not enough, any halfway bright person can come up with these generalizations... I’m talking about a revolution in consciousness.” Which brings us to *Skin on Skin*.

As long as Asian Americans are marginalized within, or excluded outright from, the dominant system of film representation, they will continue to embody an alienated sexuality conditioned by an oppressive system of White racial supremacy. ...The most efficacious and crudely direct strategy to assert an immediate visual presence is to take up the camera and turn it inward to capture the pleasures of the flesh as enjoyed by Yellow people...

So begins Dr. Hamamoto's 1998 academic paper "The Joy Fuck Club: Prolegomenon to an Asian American Porno Practice," where he lays out a game-plan for revolutionizing representations of Asian-American (or more generally, "Yellow") sexuality through pornography. And earlier this year, the professor put his money where his mouth was, and produced a fifty minute pornographic video starring an Asian-American man and woman. The video is called *Skin on Skin*, and is already causing quite a stir. Hamamoto wouldn't have it any other way. "This is partly my act of revenge on academia," the professor says. "It's sort of like a middle finger to my colleagues, and I'm just raising the bar so high they're gonna piss their pants...because I'm showing fucking on screen and they just want to weasel around it with these weasel words."

Professor Hamamoto has spent much of his academic career pushing peoples' buttons, and clearly delights in it. He takes pride in being the first scholar to cite tabloids such as the *Star* and *National Enquirer* as authoritative sources in his research, he uses slang like "haters" and "to pop a chubby," he calls Ang Lee a "coolie-man" and refers to Paris Hilton as "that slutty girl." He's extremely frustrated with the stagnation, hypocrisy and plagiarism in the academic world around him, and has a remarkably long hit list, including many of his own Asian-American studies colleagues. "I don't care, I'm going to name names... it's like a Hong Kong martial arts film: I'm up for revenge before I go up the mountain to rejoin the Wushu masters." He talks a mile a minute, and after three hours, that's a lot of ground covered. Somewhere between the psychomythology of serial killings and the Wu-Tang Clan, we get to the story behind "The Joy Fuck Club" and *Skin on Skin*.

In a class Hamamoto was teaching on "Theoretical Perspectives in Asian American Studies," he asked his (primarily Asian-American) students to discuss the types of bodies they found sexually attractive, and found, to no one's surprise, that all the bodies were white. "That's just more evidence to show how powerful the white supremacist complex is in the lives of people of color," Hamamoto says, "and that's why I'm making these movies for my people — to ask 'why do you adore whiteness so much, why do you have Yankee fever?'" He pauses to assert that he knows why, that there are "historical reasons for it, material reasons, internment, genocide, exclusion, and if you're subjected to all of these historical forces, there's a tendency to blend in, to assimilate, to love the master." And that besides these forces, white bodies are the only desirable ones portrayed in the mainstream media today. No wonder Hamamoto's students had a "warped" sense of their own sexuality. "Man, you need some sexual healing," the professor intones like a late-night radio disk-jockey, "you need to get with some of the skin-on-skin action." After writing up these conclusions in "The Joy Fuck Club," Hamamoto set about bringing images of yellow-on-yellow pleasure to the masses in the most direct way possible: porn.

Did he ever consider starring in the film himself? "Yeah, I did actually, sure, it plays on my exhibitionist side... but my girlfriend has forbidden me from doing that." Instead, Hamamoto and his girlfriend and co-producer Funie Hsu started casting. The woman was easy. Lyla Lei, a twenty-year-old half-Cambodian half-Thai girl with over sixty adult

videos already under her belt, agreed to take part in the project; but locating her costar was more challenging. Professor Hamamoto first thought of Rick Lee, the original Asian-man, whom he admires and even invited to speak to his students at UC Davis. “Rick Lee is a good guy, he’s very very smart... He doesn’t have a political agenda, he just likes to screw. I call him Rick the Dick. I wanted him to be in my movie, but I’m not gonna have a film about Asian-American sexuality with a mask on.” Because Rick wouldn’t go un-pixelated, an alternate had to be found. Rick recalls: “He wanted me to perform in it, but I told him I can’t without a blur, I want to keep certain things private, so I told him I could advise him on talent... But it was kind of difficult to find guys for them.” Many men contacted Hamamoto only to bail out at the last moment. Finally, Hamamoto and Hsu discovered Chun, a Korean-American adoptee from New Jersey who agreed to show his face on camera. Chun flew in, the STD tests were taken, a hotel room in Torrance was reserved, the stars began making out on the couch and then... “I was wondering what it would be like when they were there and they were doing it. I wasn’t slightly aroused by what was happening in front of me, I was just trying to figure out what the next sequence was, making sure he that he didn’t blow his load too quickly.”

Hamamoto and Hsu did all the camera-work, shooting about three hours of footage on mini-DV cameras. “It’s like the World Series,” the professor says, “you’re like a tenth player, standing on the sidelines of the game, you could almost join in if you wanted to, but you don’t want to.” Luckily, Chun hit a home-run, and Hamamoto ruminates like a proud coach: “Does he have the makings of a porn star...” And he has all the more chances to become one: not only do Chun and Lyla star in *Skin on Skin*, the fifty-minute “wanker” movie, but they are also primary characters in the documentary *Masters of the Pillow*, about the making of Hamamoto’s project and issues of Asian-American sexuality.

Director James Hou was a student of Hamamoto’s at UC Davis right as he was developing the “Joy Fuck Club” concept, back when “it was sort of a crazy idea that no one could take seriously.” He went on to make a few short films, and was looking to do a longer project that addressed issues of sexuality and masculinity when he heard about *Skin on Skin*. Hou worked alongside Hamamoto, documenting the development process and the actual shoot, as well as interviewing several “leading voices” of Asian-American masculinity in arts and media, such as fellow filmmakers Eric Byler (*charlotte sometimes*) and Justin Lin (*Better Luck Tomorrow*), actor Eddie Shin (*Gilmore Girls*, *That ‘80s Show*), Tony-award-winning playwright David Henry Hwang (*M. Butterfly*), and, of course, our old friend Rick Lee. Everyone weighs in with their views on Hamamoto’s mission and Asian male sexuality, and most agree that creating a new image—several kinds of new images—is key. Hou says that “positive images are empowering images... not to say we should all become porn stars, but we should embrace our sexuality.”

So far, *Masters of the Pillow* and excerpts from *Skin on Skin* (and its shorter, more political companion piece, *Yellocaust*) have screened at the Hawaii International Film Festival and the San Diego Asian-American Film Festival, mainly to rave response. At the showing of *Yellocaust* in San Diego, Hamamoto recalls there was “almost universal support... the only two dissenters were two Asian-American female filmmakers, or wannabe

filmmakers, who said ‘well, the guy’s technique was passive, he wasn’t really aggressive, he wasn’t dominating the woman.’ And someone in the audience said, ‘Just because it’s Asian-American porn doesn’t mean you have to fall into the conventions of mainstream white porn.’ Hamamoto likes to point out that all the questions at these film festivals were directed at him, and is glad that the message of *Skin on Skin* shines through James Hou’s documentary. He admits that he’s surprised *Masters of the Pillow* is as good as it is: “I thought he was gonna make it more of a comedy, more of a joke—sex is a very funny topic, but this is no joke to me, it’s about our survival.” Both the Tonight Show with Jay Leno and the Daily Show with Jon Stewart have run segments on Hamamoto’s project, treating it with humor, but he doesn’t mind as long as it generates buzz. After all, Hamamoto’s eventual ambition is to sell *Skin on Skin* to the highest bidder, and use the money as start-up capital for an independent Asian media company: YEN (Yellow Entertainment Network). There is plenty of interest already, but Hamamoto is “proceeding very carefully.” “I don’t want to end up on the outside looking in... pioneers aren’t always the ones who are the financial beneficiaries. But if nothing else, I have the distinction of being the first.”

Name: Amber Rain. Age: 23. Location: Los Angeles, California. Her Asian Experiences: She had a boyfriend in high school who was Asian, but they never had sex. So again I had to do my job and break her into a new world — :)

Even though Rick Lee is making a profit off of Asian-man.com these days, if he lost money on it he wouldn’t mind. It grosses about \$3000 a month, and isn’t his main source of income. Some copy-cat web-sites have sprung up, including Bordello4am.com and Pinkcrave.com, which offer content stolen from Japanese videos (according to Rick). “This guy—he’s made it this commercial thing. I don’t think it does well, he wants to make money on it...I think he came in with the wrong idea.” Rick’s idea was simple. Have sex with beautiful ladies, record it for posterity, and maybe remind people that

“Asian men exist and that they do have sex and do enjoy it” (in the words of one member). Rick Lee intends to retire in a few years, settle down and have a normal family, but he has already made his mark.

In the 1980s, David Mura wrote about the frustration of watching porn: “I know there is something missing, that I will never find my body, my Asian body, up there on the screen, and this rage erases all other considerations, consumes me.” Slowly, this is changing.

“Rick Lee is doing more for Asian-American men and women than any theoretician out there,” proclaims Darrell Hamamoto. “Change only comes about through anarchy, rupture, when you start renegotiating power relations. We’ll put an Asian-American lead in a Hollywood film, I think that’s gonna happen soon, and I think a sea change is taking place, and partly it will be due to me.”

Will the increased presence of Asian-American men in porn lead to greater and more diverse representations in the mainstream media? Certain movies on studios’ slates for

spring release look promising for featuring studly Asian-American men: Leonardo Nam in *The Perfect Score*, Daniel Dae Kim in *Spiderman 2*, and Byron Mann opposite Halle Berry in *Catwoman*. But will they still just be playing emasculated best friends, kung fu punching dummies, geeks, villains, clowns? Maybe we can't rely on Hollywood just yet. Professor Hamamoto argues that sexuality is "too important to belong to them [the powers that be]. They're the most guilty of wringing the life out of human sexuality... let's take it from there, and change it, and revolutionize the personal and then the political and then the World—that's how powerful it is to human civilization."

Meanwhile, somewhere in the greater Los Angeles area, Rick Lee is getting ready to shoot some more scenes. It's a dirty job, but somebody's got to do it.

21ST CENTURY SCHIZOID BEAR:
MASCULINE TRANSITIONS THROUGH NET PORNOGRAPHY

Francesco Macarone Palmieri aka Warbear

The vector that transforms ideas into words is produced by the desire to understand how masculinities are performed as gender representations in late postmodern netpornographic languages. Such a hypothesis runs through a socio-anthropological analysis of the end of gay culture and Bear culture therein, the return of the subversive body and the political perspective of contemporary pornography. This theoretical horizon contextualises the definition of new masculinities through four fields of netporn research:

- 1) LAMP dynamic Bear websites and self-representation of masculinity through the concept of the profile as measure unit.
- 2) Ethnic fetishisation as re-appropriation of masculinity: the arabear phenomenon.
- 3) Bull Empire and morphing hyper-masculinisation as a post-Bear experience.
- 4) Transbears, masculinities through bodies and the evolution of FTM transgendered culture.

Stealing and morphing the title of the famous King Crimson track, I operate some semantic substitutions: schizophrenia is seen as a dense texture with which to signify recent concepts of culture in the history of contemporary anthropology. Looking at the sociological research field of cultural processes, we participate in the historical change of the sociological concept of culture through an increasingly rapid disjunction and liberation of the idea of the cultural form from the idea of society. Culture is no longer enslaved by the structural-functionalist ideas of western society's homeostatic balance (of mostly European social democratic welfare societies). The social norms that render social action through a precise value scale as the function of culture for the definition

of institutions collapsed as more of this scale has been designated and changed in terms of individualisation. After the collapse of contemporary historic walls, postmodernism bolstered this disjunctive process through producing a citizenship of alterity and a micro economy of social aggregation with a sub-counter institutionalisation process. This was the electricity that enlightened and energised all human and social rights movements through to the end of the 20th century. This was a perfect sociological barometer of the individualisation of cultures, which produced social trauma through the positive spreading of anomia, etiologically defined as A-nomos; an absence of norms. This absence was a subtraction of the idea of coherence imposed by the Hegelian philosophical idea of dialectics towards the possibility of dialogic thought and action. Dialogic thought as an architecture of postmodernism does not base itself on a synthesis of the contradictory oppositions (thesis/antithesis), but on the maintenance of contradiction as the performative actualisation of human complexity. Human complexity becomes post-modern when it becomes a conscious, influential product of Appadurain interscape connections. We can now say that coherence is to contemporary history what consistence is to postmodernism. Again, etiologically speaking, consistence comes from "cum-sister" to "being with." This "being with" allows us to live the "subtraction" of synthesis as an "addiction" of the antithesis. This means that the multiplication of identities creates liberated spaces of representation and experimentation in terms of be/coming. Passing from the concept of cultural schizophrenia as a re-appropriative value, to the one of "Bear" can sound very far-fetched, but they are juxtaposed nonetheless. If the beginning of the G/L/B/T community is a "total social fact" which represents postmodernism as an alteration of instances of citizenship toward a disjunction from social mores, the Bear community as a subcultural definition of sexual orientation, mathematics and gender representations expresses its acceleration towards cultural explosion. The frontiers opened by the post-modern age are being reshaped by new boundaries that are historicising life cycles of present experiences.

As television images of the fall of the Berlin wall produced a ritualised narrative that sanctioned the beginning of a "Post-era"; while 9/11 closed it with the fall of the Twin Towers. The fall of the western land. Here we see Burroughs and Stockhausen doing a dance macabre through the smoke of the dead white-male-anglo-saxon-protestant-empire. Here we see Edward Saïd surfing the Arab waves of self-representation to disintegrate the power of western ethnography. Here we see Chinese neo-liberalism taking over the world market and establishing migratory fluxes. Here we see the wave of western poverty producing dynamics of "low-cost culture" and new social stratifications. Here we see neo-media flowering from the humus of convergence, and here we see the crisis of politically correct ideology: both as a linguistic purification and as a tool of cultural research and political transformation. Finally we feel the return of the body and its fluids after more than twenty years of digital orgy. Here we can apply the dialectics between virtualisation and actualisation put forward by French epistemologist Pierre Levy in his famous work *Qu'est-ce que le virtuel?*, to the post-modern and contemporary moments. If virtualisation represents problematic abstraction through technological prostheses, the

return of the new body is the actualisation of total social reign in disjointed spaces and times from the pre-virtual experience intended as an ecstatic moment: ex-stasis.

THE BODY OF PORNOGRAPHY: FOR AN ANTHROPOLOGY OF AROUSAL

“Queer studies” distinguish the new body from the historicification of the G/L/B/T community, and in a certain way, as Nietzsche says, from the “active amnesia” intended as the abandon of memory as a weight that situates, produces and owns the present. The idea is still “anomic” and “dialogic” so it still addresses the survival of freedom outside strict identity definitions. Being “dialogic” means starting to penetrate and deconstruct the G/L/B/T community as a “text”; understanding how its gentrification produces new bodyscapes of subversion. Certainly, one of the major perspectives through which we can take a momentary lapse of excitation is independent pornography. In the neo-contemporary age, surviving against postmodernism as a historicised moment — especially if related to digital culture — pornography is such a huge object of study, producing so many subjectivities in terms of action that it cannot be easily circumscribed; honestly, this is not even my method. In any case, D.I.Y. sex work is a major topic in contemporary queer culture, and pornographic production is part of it. To shape pornography as a tool of radical subversion I need to return to an important cultural anthropological theme, namely identity. In order to give you a taste of what pornography means to me, I wish to quote Barbara DeGenevieve’s definition of porn which is taken from her work “The Hot Bods of Queer Porn”:

Porn is made to get people off. In order to do this, bodies must not only be highly sexualized, but objectified, fetishized, eroticized and made to accommodate very particular individual kinks. Political correctness has become an intellectual prison within which an extremely limited dialogue can take place, and in fact where monologues and diatribes are usually the discursive practice. Embracing the need to objectify and be objectified, to fetishize and be fetishized, to play the willing victim as well as the victimizer, opens up a mine field that will be difficult to traverse, but it is a more intellectually provocative and honest terrain from which to understand who we are as complex sexual beings...

Adopting a punk ethic: I love the idea of pornography as a fist in the face of the moralistic leftist majority scared to face the honesty of bodies and fluids. Especially in Italy, where patriarchal culture and Catholicism are huge repressive apparatuses that exercise their untouchable, invisible power mechanisms daily—even the most libertarian areas of political action exert repressive moral values. The desemantisation/liberation of bodies in pornography therefore has an important and experimental goal to attack these repressive moral values. To understand how pornography becomes political through breaking out of the normalising “erotica” field, I would like to refer to Pier Paolo Pasolini. He was an honest subversive Italian pornographer. He wanted to give libertarian erections to the left in the seventies. It is important to underscore how much he was inside his films in terms of arousal and, most of all, how in *Salo o le 120 giornate di*

sodoma, he needed to destroy all the moral values of the poor Italian seventies Catholic and macho left-wing culture, not just by theatricising it, but by taking a pornographic, arousing and ecstatic part in it. Again, pornography is a state of ecstatic trance. It is the pleasure of bringing down the barriers between the internal and external perception of the body. It is the destruction of the erotic melody. It is the rush of amphetamine in your synapses. It is the primal noise in your genitals and living organs. It modifies your perception. It is like Stockhausen, Glass and Reich's reiterative sound syntaxes. It is like electronic music, four/four, 909 straight hardcore techno kick. It is what Brian Eno said in "Oblique Strategies" (1975) about "repetition as a form of change." I do think that the concept of "hard core" can be group mathematics which unifies countercultures: punk/techno and pornography. In all of them there is the concept of the radicalised, expanded, multiplied and exposed body. Going back to Barbara De Genevieve's definition, I think that there is a basic level through which pornography belongs to "cultural studies." This can be done by analysing it as a text, namely as:

- 1) political, within the mechanism of radical transformation, collapsing moral barriers and gender definitions
- 2) anthropological, on the level of representation (and politically speaking, on the level of self-representation)
- 3) sociological, in terms of the space of the production of social relationships
- 4) psychological/psychoanalytical, in terms of the mechanisms of arousal
- 5) semantic/semiotic, in terms of the production of meanings and definitions
- 6) economic, in terms micro/macro analysis

This is the body field I refer to when speaking about pornography.

WHAT IS A BEAR? DEAD END OF A NATURALIST GAY MALE SUBCULTURE

If we analyse the perception of the body in relation to changing social and cultural identities, we arrive at an understanding of how it has brought down social mores by defining its own culture in a post-modern citizenship process; by virtualising identity through the G/L/B/T community. The Bear community is a late product of this process and the end of biological supremacy in terms of masculine representation. We arrive then at the main question: what is a Bear? We can answer that by following the works of Les Wright, gay studies researcher, professor, founder of the *Bear History Project*, and writer/curator of *THE BEAR BOOK: Readings in the History and Evolution of a Gay Male Subculture*, *THE BEAR BOOK II: Further Readings in the History and Evolution of a Gay Male Subculture*, curator of the e-zine *Verisimilitude* and more. He always answers by not answering, by saying that there is not a real unilateral definition of what a Bear is. I would like to propose a vision of Bear identity as an open opus of masculine definition/representation inside the homosexual sphere. Historically and geographically speaking, the spread of the Bear community started in the US in the early eighties. Les Wright focuses on the same-sex attraction not just as a biological input, but as a social and cul-

tural construction of the self in terms of realisation. If “coming out” can be represented by an inner narrative of the self (as an elaboration of gender politics), perceiving ourselves as Bears means to expand, extend, and multiply this process: it is a much more complex narrative, a sub-cultural/countercultural depth beneath the surface of the gay mainstream. Wright continues by affirming that the homosexual mediascape continued producing interpretative models for same-sex relationships that were still oriented towards bipolar gender dialectics, extending from wolves vs. fairies to macho leathermen vs. queens. After the Stonewall riot and the beginning of the gay movement as a political, cultural and social force, the heterosexual interpretation of homosexual relations was deconstructed in favour of a hippy androgynous imaginary mixing up cross-dressers, transsexuals, butch dykes and homosexuals. The Bear identity emerges from an exasperation with this model, and the historicification of a masculine representation from the B/D and S/M leather scene. The new entry is as a counter identification from the narrative of the -ism: as juveniles, perfectionism, androgyny; Bears, as homosexual men aesthetically defined by strong presence, hair, beards, bellies, and blue-collar looks proposed their difference as an integrative safe space for them and their lovers and admirers. This was based on a pre-existent body politics of fat men called Girth and Mirth, who proposed the chub man in the mid-seventies as a weight to squeeze the gay imposition of the young, blonde, effeminate, suntanned, perfect, smiling, *I-can-do-what-ever-I-want* gay man. Even if it worked on masculinity, the early Bear movement was a very queer one because it created an aggregation of all the big wild freaks, bikers and weirdoes who did not fit in. They developed strategies to resist the assimilation at the very beginning of the gay gentrification. Again, Bears had a very positive influence in the beginning of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, by producing a social space for positive people and not only that, they produced a safe space for aged people, by fetishising maturity as a masculine element of sexual arousal. Being a culture of the radical body that expanded itself in many different contexts and fetish scenarios, Bears had their own pornography as an important space of acceptance, self-expression, and socio-sexual socialisation. *Bear magazine* produced by Brush Creek Media, was the most important pornographic media that defined the standard of all porn magazines for Bears, with an editorial structure organised around Bear models, Bear fiction, a deepening space of thought and ads. From the fanzine format to the glittering magazine, the step was very short and fast. Brush Creek Media produced the standard of the Bear and the new masculinity by the iconographisation of big hairy men like Jack Radcliffe, Mac, Steve Hurley/Tit Pig, Bill Addams, Buddy LaRue and many more. This was still the tape and paper media era, when technology was based on huge hardware volumes, magazine pages stuck together with sperm from jerking off and bulletin board systems that were more important than ArpaNet/Internet. As a matter of fact, frequency modulation and demodulation as system of network communication gave strong input to the development of the Bear community, structuring the basic network of the BML (Bear Mailing List), the official mailing list for Bears to define a new language. It was actualised through Bear parties, Bear weekends and Bear clubs all over the US. The more digital communication spread

via the Internet, the more this phenomenon began to spread all over the world. Bear identity, even if multiplied in its insider identities, was structured more and more by the Bear contests whose winners became the cover stars of magazines that proliferated after Bear magazine, and Bear porn stars. This created a market unit that became highly valuable as a niche. Personal websites and Internet Bear communities (like "Bear quay" or "Bear resources" websites) exploded, with huge databases of Bear phenomena from all over the world. Increasingly, Bear pornography slipped into the spiral of the virtualisation process. Now screens started getting sticky because of good muscular scrotal apparatuses. That was parallel of the I.R.C. communication system that gave the M.U.D. environments a dynamic and friendly use by a small free software called M.irc emulated by another one called Ircele for Mac users. That was the real explosion of "chats" as a popular communication system, and bearchats with its own languages and semantics. You could find endless channels for endless bearfades on endless servers. The connection between mark-up language programmed personal web pages and the chat was immediate because the latter gave you the time and rhythm of socio-sexual relationships, and the former the space and status of personal views. I believe that the concept of the profile as a unit of measurement, specifically for Bear relationships inside the netpornscape, comes from this connection. After giving the basic elements of Bear history and its pornography within the shifts between paper, cassettes and virtualia, what is essential to focus on here is that a new transformation occurred after the end of gay culture. What is called "beardom" as a huge sexual, cultural, social and political scape of Bears extending from meetings to the web, is over; it was not able to escape the gentrification process of G/L/B/T community. Metaphors aside, most of the historic Bear culture promoters from around the world are physically dead. David Hooker, the webmaster of "Bear Quay," is dead. The second BLM System operator, Alex Schell is dead. Lurch, one of the First IBR (International Bears Rendez-vous) promoters is dead. Brush Creek Media, the most important producers of Bear pornography, was busted and closed due to financial problems. The continuous iconographisation of the Bear body and its representation of masculinity has saturated gay media with endless magazines published using exactly the same format, structure, contents and aesthetics. The same applies to HTML Bear websites. Identity happened and died within. At the same time, this sense of homosexual post-mortem gave life to spaces where Bears would not be "the funny fat passive average guy next door" anymore. You find people with high levels of diabetes, necroses and amputations, heart attacks, bulimia, radical bone deformations and liposuctions. At the same time, the de-mediatisation of HIV as a popular illness made an epidemic come back stronger than ever with a mutation of dynamics supported by its sister, syphilis. A documentary entitled *The Gift* by Louise Hogarth underlines the dead-end of gay culture and Bear culture within it, analysing contemporary unsafe homosexual behaviour and the narrative of harm reduction that the G/B/L/T produced, unchaining a cultural black out. It is enabled by a contradictory communication of the impossibility to justify the increase of HIV/AIDS contemporary to the political correctness in the communication of positive people acceptance and the terrorist warnings of

the equivocation of AIDS to death. This communications merry-go-round encourages men to fetishise HIV, pushing them to become “bug chasers” researching the “gift givers” in conversion parties. This is supported by a huge bareback culture boosted by the nihilistic vision of life and approach to homosexuality. The bareback pornography market has seen a huge increase that plays on unprotected sex as the ultimate masculine sodomy, as something for a real man who likes to give it and take it RAW.

WORLD-WILD WOOFERS. PROFILE NETLANGUAGE AS MASCULINE SELF-REPRESENTATION

In the ongoing developments of open-source web environments and the dynamic contribution of web content by individuals, we are undergoing a profound communications revolution in the Bear mediascape. This strong transformation strikes almost all the old Bear profile-based websites and the whole worldwide web. Those websites usually offer a free profile service. The profile is intended as a free webpage where the hypertextual structure defines a series of facts organised through a main picture, secondary pictures, a self introductory text describing the reasons of the online presence, a personal e-mail and/or a personal website link. With the interface being the filter of social action and consumption defining new roles, new norms, new identities and new languages, we can now focus on its changes as a radical transformation for the human and sexual perception. The starting point which gave life to a whole new way to build socio-sexual relationships by elaborating new network engineering and new markets, is based on a series of innovations whose strongest trait is the real time web site “communicative navigability.” This means building the possibility to integrate the idea of a chat with what the ambient was (Internet Relay Chat), to the possibility of visualising the other without the hardware and software implications of a videoconference. The profile concept was “in vitro” in videoconference software like CU-See-Me, Icuui, or Ispq, Ivisit etc. These kinds of software were based on servers who gave lists of participants in specific rooms. It was easy to get an idea of who was behind the nickname by clicking on the nickname link a small window with a small picture appeared and a small text and a link to the personal page. This idea was developed as the basic unit for the new profile-based websites. This acceleration of information was propelled by the friendly use of the interface through the possibility of bypassing the webmaster to individually upload and shape contents in a small self-published and self-directed personal webpage. And here we are with the informational Big Bang that happened just by applying this concept on the web renewing the old Bear websites with the traditional html programmed pages. From there on, we witnessed a double process: a restylisation of old websites and a demographic explosion of Bear profile-centred new websites, which multiply the services in an oligopoly of proposals. The phenomenon can be read from a media analysis perspective by trying to use the models of the convergence. Theoretically speaking, the theme of convergence is defined as a communicative moment where old and new media integrate themselves in one macromedia, using the digital platform as shared base. This moment gives life to hybrid media creatures like webTV, net radios, Internet through cell phones or game

consoles and so on. We can see this kind of process summarised in the profile-based websites (Bears-non Bears) where text, video, pictures become completely self-organised on a digital base. This free access and registration to most of those websites creates a qualitative economy in terms of participation. The more the website is utilised (creating a community), the more the passage of information produces content-oriented banners and a peripheral services market. In terms of Bear oriented content, we can see the blooming of bear products like Bear porno (either on-line or through DVD or videocassettes productions). Bear merchandising (from mouse pads to clothes, passing through everything Bear related). The second source of economy production is the membership to the websites. This kind of approach defines a liberation economy, which sets the information as free and shared, giving basic services and communication infrastructures for Bears. Take the German –Dutch website Gayroyal.de for example which hosts mostly northern European Bears (but it is opened to all kinds of gay people). It gives a 24-hour access with a multiple research key to the profiles. The service is based on a profile that contains: main profile picture plus more side pictures and short videos to upload, free self pornographic contents without any censorship (besides the use of the Adult Check or a password to get access), introductive text with e-mail and personal URL link, message exchange through a personal forum, one-to-one web chat possibility, peer-to-peer web chat possibility organised on content channels, discussion groups with the possibility of one's own community, and the possibility to rate the profile and check who surfed on the profile, and to see who put the profile in his pal list. Ninety percent of this proposal is free. Those who wish to support the website can buy extra services with the membership. The most astonishing and widespread phenomenon in terms of Bear profile-based websites for francophone and anglophone users is Bearwww.com. But before speaking of Bearwww.com, we should introduce its ancestor Bear411.com that tripled its proposal and changed its communicative strategies in order to be active and completely up-to-date. Bear411.com was one of the first websites to propose this kind of interface based on pop-up profiles that allow a personal chat and the quick building of a new Bear community. Its webmaster, Gregg, quadruplicated the communities by giving birth to Eurowoof.com for the European bearscape while Bear411.com remained for American users, then Bearworld.com and Bearguide. all websites are interconnected; the users may have access to both the profile areas from both the websites. The most intelligent thing that Gregg from Eurowoof/Bear411 did is creating a third content space called Bearguide.com. This is a web site with database technology with the same methods of self-publishing through specific formats, dedicated to the information of Bear meetings and Bear activities from all over the world. Bearguide.com is connected to Bear411.com and Eurowoof.com giving the possibility to the Bears to point the next Bear meeting that they shall attend, by having the link directly in their profile. At the same time, the website provides a profile research engine system through the Bear meeting keys. This creates a social psychological mechanism of fast Bear community spreading because of all the circuit Bears addicted to the electricity and adrenaline produced by developing expectations in terms of friendship, sexuality and love through the net.

It's very interesting to see here the social fallings of Levy's actualisation process as the final part of the virtualisation of social relationship that creates human change through the disconnection of body and human interaction. This kind of dynamics produces a double magnetism: on the one hand, the site is visited by Bears who want to meet each other in the real; on the other, it is connected to all the organisations who provide the meetings. This entails a double information economy for the website. A small furry smart man gives the answer to Bear411/eruowoof/Bearguide from Paris. His name is Fred and he is the engineer/webmaster/owner of Bearwww.com. This website came out as a kind of challenge. The format is more or less the same. The free pages host profiles with side pictures and introductive texts applied on a communication network based on the psychic trap of pop-up chat which brings the life of a man in a 2 x 3 inch window that comes out of your screen, straight in your face. In the space/time of few months there's been a big bang of a new furry hot galaxy transforming the world wide web in a world wild WOOF! Thousands and thousands of daily contacts and profiles popping up every hour declare Bearwww.com one of the most popular Bear profile based websites all over the world redefining the Bear culture in terms of languages and identities. Surfing profiles is building a huge open opus of Bear life; experiences and self produced pornography. The introductory test inside the profile varies from a simple question mark through cut-ups where Bears introduce desires, songs lyrics, poetry, activities promotion, viral marketing or just links, all in a limited text space. Following the texts we can see specific picture narratives splitting into two macro-categories:

- 1) Bears who do not want to be recognised and therefore only expose parts of their naked bodies. This because they are mostly oriented towards sex and, moreover, because they have not come out. Socially and culturally speaking, this kind of appearance is typical from Catholic and homophobic countries like southern Europe. Most of the men who do not put their face in the profile are middle-aged, and a large percentage of them are married to women. Usually most people on-line do not answer men without the face in the profile, but at the same time there are others who only look for them because it's like an assurance of direct sexual actions with no dramas and often, most of the Bears without a face on the profile are equipped with web cams or pictures to send directly to the e-mail of the pretender.
- 2) Bears who want LTRs (long-terms relationships) try to show the most they can in order to leave a possible track to follow. These kinds of people use five pictures uploads as some kind of a Bear peep show allowing the voyeurs to discover themselves in five clicking steps arriving at a naked picture right at the very end. In both cases the more the profile is uploaded and restyled, the more it will be hit and checked, becoming a live immaterial object: a small open window in the world of a big furry man.

Between and beyond these two polarisations of endless existential narratives of emotions, intellectualities, loves, exhibitionisms, voyeurisms, sexualities, dreams, hopes, fears, fantasies, crying, sadness and solitudes. It is of deep interest here to do a content

analysis of the profile search engines inside the websites from the more generalist Bear websites like Bearwww or Bear411 to the identity oriented websites like Silverdaddies.com, Bearwww.com started the research keys with four polarising identities like: Bears, chubs, cubs, daddies, chasers, and admirers. Now the webmaster added, couples, and after that muscle Bears. This happens because of a continuous interaction with the users, which ask for new categories to look for. The search engine becomes a mirror of the users Bear perception defining/micro identities with its norms, its cultures, its languages. It's even interesting to see the Bear photographers' aesthetics through the Bear profiles. We can see Bear photographers involved like Lynn Ludwig, Cybears, Gianorso, Antinoo, PhotoBear and many more. This creates some kind of a hierarchy of A or B Bears; where Bears are recognised from Bear photographers or Bear magazines or Bear video productions and the rest of the Bear world. Offline gatherings are actualising this trend which is emerging from these kind of Bear communities. Following the first Bearwww meeting in Cologne during the Bear pride in 2003 (organised by Photobear, Epicentro Ursino Romano — the Bear group that I founded in Rome four years ago www.epicentroursino.com) the biggest Bearwww offline meeting was organised in Rome during the Toga Party International Bear Weekend 2004, and it is producing a new meeting which gathers all those living profiles from all over the world.

BEARABISM.

ETHNIC MASCULINITY AND PORNOGRAPHIC EXOTICISATION

Three years ago I was at the Baerennacht/Bear Pride in Cologne, one of the biggest bearmetings in the world. I was hanging out in the offices of the German Bear Magazine when I saw another magazine called *Alcazar*. The cover was incredibly appealing. The logo was written in an arabesque script. On the cover was a huge Turkish man with jet black eyes and moustache, thick arms and legs, a big butch belly, a tempest of hair that was spreading on his chest and belly like a hurricane bringing the viewer directly to the eye of the storm of the image: his huge fat cock shot in wild erection. The only thing he was wearing was a red Fez on his mature bald head, which he sported like a military recruit. And in his hands he held up a shiny silver sword as if it were the most important of the two erections. Of course I too had an erection, and that made me instantly want to buy the magazine that cost half of as much as the traditional *German Bear Magazine*. I consumed this pornography voraciously, using it for various jack-off sessions. Nonetheless, I felt there was something going on here that was turning me off a bit. There was a disturbing element: a subtle base line that I was about to discover. First of all the editorial structure was exactly like the other bearporn magazines: editorials, big naked hairy men showing off, fiction/short stories, ads, banners and advertising. The language used was not Turkish or Arab or bilingual, but German. The only difference was based on the cast and the set. The models were all ethnically defined in terms of aesthetics: big fat, hairy, moustached, dark-skinned, lascivious men, mostly naked or dressed up in typical Arab clothes, shoes, and accessories. The sets made a difference too. Bear pornography reflects western male stereotyping. Most of the contexts where masculinity is

(re)produced are based on working class imagery: truckers parking/cruising areas, parks and forests, warehouses, policemen or military backgrounds, sports backgrounds, finally arriving at middle class white-collar imagery in offices, backyards, and pools. In *Salazar*, most of the sets are outdoors and look eastern/Palestinian in terms of nature. That spleen of *deplacement* invaded my senses and made me start researching where the magazine was produced. I discovered that it was a German product for German/European Bears, specifically oriented to countries whose immigrant populations are basically South Eastern, and specifically, Turkish. Bingo. The picture was clear. I was participating in an operation of gender replacement through the exoticisation of masculinity. This means that western homosexual models of old Europe have arrived at their dead end, needing to recall through the “real,” imported masculinity. “Real” masculinity can’t be replaced with real eastern male identity, because it would not feed the western need for erections if not function in terms of stereotyping. Cultural studies critic James Clifford, in his famous work entitled *The Pure Products Go Crazy*, analysed how the concept of “authenticity” grew up as a form of power in human sciences. It emerged from the western ethnographic power to define how otherness developed in the history of cultural anthropology, folding them to the interests of the western legitimacies. This is more or less what is happening in German/Northern Europe Bear pornography, where western Bear porn publishing is “editing” ethnicity as a sexual need to feel the exploited male stereotypes. The west is eating itself through ethnicity in male-to-male pornography, through the exoticisation of masculine representation. I then started to jerk-off on this concept that was much more arousing. Following this ethnic line, I discovered a growing world of masculine representations through eastern exoticisation. *Hairturks.com* is the biggest and most important pole where this sliding identity game is enacted. The largest development of this website is Germany and France: basically Northern Europe. The site is dynamic and based on a database architecture made by a profile system. As the domain of the website ‘Hairy Turks’ suggests, the only distinctive trait from sites like *Bearwww.com*, *Bear411.com*, *Silverdaddies.com*, is that they focus on ethnicity. The concept of ethnicity here is expanded to all the easts and souths of the world. Communication strategies of male representation are vastly applied. Most of the profiles are faceless because this gives the western masturbator the thrill of an identity that is much more gender defined since the national side of it imposes a cultural repression that underlines the “authenticity” of masculinity. A little different but conceptually similar is *Moi-kelma.org*. This is a typical website that sells “beur” masculinity (which is not to be confused with “bear”). The word “beur” comes from “verlan,” a specific syntactical system which reverses words so they cannot be understood which developed from the second and third generation of North African/Arab immigrants who are mostly westernised, but living in poverty and disenfranchisement on the periphery of large French metropolises like Paris or Marseille. Also known as “Racaille,” this ethnic juvenile area became a new stereotype in gay male iconography producing the ultimate fetish for hard masculinity in French countries (and others). Graphically speaking, the site conjures the idea of Turkey with a K depicted in a moon and a star. Again, to choose the language of the home

page, the access flags are in the following order: French, English, Spanish, German, and Italian. The text on the website says "Kelma: Arabs, Moroccans, Algerians, Tunisians, Africans, gays in France and Europe." Parallel to Kelma there is a porn production company called Casbah Films whose website says: "Gay porno for the Arab lovers who don't have cold eyes [are brave]." The website has Arab script, but again, the production is for "Arab Lovers." Arab language appears as some kind of *escamotage* to underline the concept of authenticity. This is more than clear if we do a content analysis of DVD promotion kits on the website. From the "Gypsy Sex" promotion page we read:

JNRC a infiltré le zones à risqué dans l'est des Balkans frontière avec la Turquie. De nouveaux acteurs sauvages prêt a tout pour se vider le breloques. Sur le premier passif qui prendra se role ... un nager venu avec a meuf très vulgaire et au langage guttural pousse son mec a servir de passif, soumis à cette gueuze, il s'execute sense broncher...et se donne pour la première fois devant la camera de JNRC (another porno production working with Arab imagery).

The masculine representation aspect of the text produces the idea of animalistic ethnics ready to find whatever hole to empty their scrotums with a savage fuck. The animalistic representation of ethnicity based on:

- 1) the geographical context
- 2) the guttural/animal sounds instead of language, rather than proper French
- 3) the use of "verlan" ("meuf" is the reverse of "femme") in the description
- 4) the female element in order to underscore the heterosexual masculinity as stronger
- 5) the total top role in fucking

BULLS EMPIRE. MORPHING CULTURE

Following the end of postmodernism and gay culture within it, and in response to the masculine reappropriation through the fetishisation of the Arab ethnicity as a sign of the radical change in the gender imagination, we further a specific kind of practice performing western hypermasculinity through net pornography. All starts from a post-bear Yahoo group called "Bulls Empire." Surfing through it I found a very interesting essay signed from the Bulls Empire owner, aka Bullneck. In "Introduction to Bulls and the BullEmpire Group," he traces the roots of masculinities inside northern American and western homosexual culture to define routes of new masculinities development as sub-cultural formation, iconographies and independent pornographic production from the Bear mainstream. Bullneck starts defining the macho code "...from the halcyon days of the butch biker/leather-daddy, through the 1970s Castro clone look, up to the modern pervasive conception and commodification of gay men as twinkish, hairless, blond, youth-obsessed Chelsea boys who have a penchant for interior design and female-vo-cals-centric techno music..." That was the fertile humus where the Bear culture came from, opening its own socio-sexual spaces of desire and different aesthetics (with the

hair/size/age variables intervening) to survive the statistics of a post-seventies gay era. A new masculinity started to be performed while developing and crystallising the Bear identity through its icons and rites. Bullneck says that as soon as the institutionalisation of the sub/bear/identities rhizome took over, they formed their own social spaces and cultures (seeing chubs, muscle Bears, Gen X Bears) which contradicted the “A” Bears icons and pornographic market over-saturation, the Bear culture thus diluted itself, losing its inner meaning in masculine performance. This is where “bulls” come out witnessing the detritus of the Bear culture and stomping out their mass rage through new masculine performance. Bullneck starts his definition by saying:

Bull is, of course, not a new term of anthropomorphic description, either within the gay or straight communities. It has long been used as a root-word to describe a combination of strength, size, and attitude, whether it's the word “bullish,” “bullneck,” or “bull-dyke.” Hence, in my mind, Bull is a fitting term for a new class of men who embody the traits of great brute strength, a large bulky body, and (when possible) an attitude of smug aggression. There's no focus on body-hair, in my view, with regard to Bulls; Bulls can be either hairy as all hell, or not. Bulls may or may not have facial hair, as well, though all bulls ideally should have short haircuts. Some examples of archetypal bulls include: power lifters, American and Canadian football offensive linemen, off-season bodybuilders or those who lift purely for size and not definition, rodeo bull-doggers, some of the larger rugby props, and thick-necked law enforcers and military personnel. These types combine the best elements of beefiness, power, and actively expressed aggression. Typical synonyms for bulls can include Meathead, Ox, Moose, Hoss, Goon, Guido, Bubba and Lug. The youth variant for a bull is Bullpup — much like Cub is the youth variant for Bears. With these basic outlines of Bull imagery, I believe the potential exists for a full-on development of a Bull sub-culture. It may at first find itself attached to the Bear movement, but in time, I see the chance to develop it as a fully independent movement, especially in regards to the traits of bull-attitude. Whereas Bears, in general, have a neutral or even warm fuzzy demeanour, Bulls should have an actively furrowed brow, a firm smirk, and a proclivity to use force to get what they want. It is with trait that we may see the most potential for self-declaration and expansion.

What we find here is a recall to the western iconographical masculinity as the omega from the alpha process of bearabist ethnic fetishisation. The interesting aspect is that Bullneck questions the Bull identity by proposing an immediate meta-thought about the sense of being a bull. He asks himself:

- Is the description of Bulls as mentioned expansive enough, or too limited?
- How important is attitude to you as opposed to pure image and body-type?
- Are there standards for what bulls wear?
- Are there alternative viewpoints on what bulls or Bears are?
- How realistic are the chances to develop these ideas as a new gay sub-culture?
- What are the political implications, if any, to these ideas?

- Are there additional or alternative synonyms for Bulls?
- Are there regional (US South vs. US North) or international (English, German, French, Latin American, etc.) variants of bulls?

This enquiry is radicalised by the answers of bulls and bull admirers who take back the concept of anthropomorphism as a metaphor of transformation, developing a morphing culture as an approach to the extreme of hypermasculinities. The leader of this form of masculine visual art is GB Morph with his website gbmorphs.com. The starting idea is to define the relationship of bull traits in terms of aesthetics and attitude and expand them to the limits of human. Muscle explodes, bellies become solid and tough, hair grows all over, cocks become monsters, veins pump blood, masculinities become authoritarian and aggressive, man become beast. This radical call for masculine reappropriation bases itself on another form of fetishisation that is based on morphing techniques. The penetration of fiction through hypereality pushes bull admirers to imagine those human monsters becoming real, right through the computer screen. This kind of material is mixed up with porno bombing and daily life pictures of the new renaissance man through Yahoo groups such as Bulls Empire, GB Morphs and Brute Morphs. The confrontation about models and techniques, about morphed photos and morphed drawings, shows a total disconnection from what is proposed as bull intended as masculine performance in the western (mostly American) daily life.

TRANSBEARS. MASCULINITIES THROUGH BODIES

Three years ago I attended a “Le Tigre” concert in Rome. “Le Tigre” is the electronic incarnation of the “Bikini Kill,” a female lesbian feminist punk band based in NY. Well, while looking at the merchandise desk, I saw the back of this man. He had great, big, wide shoulders, shaved hair, a baseball cap, a flannel shirt, dirty rotten 501 Levis with a red hanky in the left pocket (top fister) and Caterpillar boots revealing fat feet, big fat hands moving t-shirts from one side to another. My knees started to shake and I started to put myself in the WARBEAR MODE, thinking about what kind of seduction strategy I would deploy in order to hook-up with him. When he turned his face to the desk I discovered that he was a she. Fuck, I had a hard-on!!!! That experience shocked me for a while. Around the same time, I was following a discussion on the BML about Tranny Bears. So even though I am quite settled and focused on a specific imaginary, I was able to pass through gender barriers and to question the concept of masculinity, transforming it into “masculinities,” but still, starting with masculine representation. This made me pose a number of questions about gender, masculinity and beariness. What arouses me in a masculine representation? Is the idea of a peculiar kind of body “hair-size-age” around a cock or is male genitalia a symbolisation of masculinity that can be removed in the production of arousal? How much is sodomy important in the reproduction of masculinities through the narratives of pornography especially through the fact that in Bear pornography penetration covers a very small percentage? So what defines masculinity in Bear culture if the mechanism of identification is based on specific fetishes that pass through beards, weights, age and looking butch? What I look for in pornography is

to get turned on by masculine representations. I am interested in how this big, heavy, hairy, fat, sweaty, tough, bearded, inked, pierced, hardcore masculinities can be represented through different bodies. And it is happening more and more that all those characteristics are much honestly expressed by butch dykes and f to ms better than from the institutional Bear pornography with historical mainstream Brush Creek Media stars. I'd like to think about "BUTCHFUCKS" as intergender categorisation of pornography that deals with masculinity crossing Bear pornography too. To give a more intense weight to this topic we can relate to Ron Suresha research. Through his work entitled "Bears on Bears" Suresha was the only theoretician who dared to rip the curtains of Bear dogmatism by deepening and analysing the Transbear phenomenon. He organised a Panel discussion that became a chapter entitled "Lesbears and Transbears: Dykes and FTMs as Bears." The intervening characters to this panel were Sharon Bear Bergman, Drew Campbell, Mike Hernandez and Matt Rice; all gender twisters identifying themselves as Bears. In all the confronting experiences of being identified as Bears without having male genitals, the interlocutors underline that beards, butch presence and straight-acting produced the excitation. A leitmotiv of all voices is the identification on the becoming part of the Bear phenomenon intending it as the pleasure to abandon range of imposed gay identities and to set the masculine side free as a socio-sexual space of acceptance. But, again, what happens when this masculine side has mixed body elements that are transitory in terms of sexual orientations? What if a big fat hairy bearded man with tits and without cock discovers himself to be gay and sexually bottom? It is interesting to understand that in being Bear culture — based on a language of touch, grope and male body impact through wrestling and fighting — a strong feeling of *displacement* is produced when groping finds tits on a bearded hairy man body. This is what happened to Matt Rice while working as bartender at the "Lone Star Saloon" (the Bear mecca in San Francisco), and introduces another DeGenevieve concept: "the pornographic sublime." Starting to from the previous definition of pornography, We apply here the concept of sublime used in Lyotard Literature as the pleasure of displeasure. Doing a history of the "Sublime" semantics, DeGenevieve affirms that its meanings come from the 21st century where the word was associated with the idea of nature as an inspirational muse. Something was removed from that meaning and it was the Kantian idea of terror. Lyotard operates toward a reintegration of the dark side of the sublime meaning intending it as outrage and disturbance to imagination. Referring to Kant, the more the outrage was huge and wild, the more the experience was sublime. Phenomenologically speaking, DeGenevieve affirms that pornography can be perceived as a possible space for the sublime experiences in the exploration of bodies and identities. This is why I like to apply this vision of the sublime category as a tool to interpret transbear masculinity as a new model of masculine representation through netpornography. Experimentations like Sssspread.com and No Fauxx are the perfect field to locate this experience. In both websites masculinity is represented through bodies. The provocation of being homosexually seduced from butchdyke big hairy harms that fists no/gender holes is sublime as sublime is the prosthetic experience of naturalisation through the use of the condom on

a dildo. As exciting is the heterosexualiation of inverted gender codes where from masculinity is performed by fucking MTF girls. Those are all topics, visions and shootings expressed by the two areas of interventions which give use to the sense and sensibility of our post-post modern sexual complexity through net performances of masculinities. My sperm is actualised and it is difficult to clean the screen.

TEN FRAGMENTS ON
A CARTOGRAPHY OF POST-PORNOGRAPHIC POLITICS

Tim Stüttgen

1 POSE

Post-pornography lays claims to a critical, revolutionary potential within the regime of sexual representation through performative excessiveness. But beware: This assertion is camp, a vulnerable gesture situated between implicit, critical, denaturalising performance and glamorous affirmation (Brecht/Warhol). This doesn't mean that it cannot have an effect on reality, though.

2 SPRINKLE

Annie Sprinkle is the mother of post-porn.¹ Her career can be read as the performance of biopolitical de-identification: sex worker – porn performer – performance artist – pro-sex feminist – happy-lesbian-love. Coming from the centre of the production of normative sex images, namely mainstream porn, Sprinkle abandoned the role of the victim in order to develop sexual and artistic practices that no longer naturalise, but instead comment, reflect and parody. This critical, performative approach to sex and image production marks a paradigm change from porn to post-porn.

In the age of digital cameras, Internet sex chats and amateur performances, the hetero-normative dispositives of contemporary hegemonic porn incessantly attempt to beef up the naturalisation effects of their images, to dispense with narration, and underscore their pseudo-documentary interpretation of desire as an “event that actually took place.” In following Sprinkle's work (performances, body art, transgender sex films, photos, journalism, Tantra, burlesque, theatre), one encounters the potential diversity of a fund of practices that not only pave the way for new forms of critical-deconstructivist representation, but also enable the invention of counter-strategies and alternative desires.

3 RE-ACTUALISATION

Post-pornography is a transversal concatenation permeating the most diverse areas of sex and image production, be it on the Internet or in mass culture, in art or theory, in micro- or macro-politics. One of today's most prominent post-pornographic blueprints stems from Beatriz Preciado, who not only publishes articles on a philosophy of post-pornography but also organises workshops for drag kings in the queer underground, and in 2004 – 2005 set-up a lab for the development of post-pornography at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Barcelona, in which short films were produced and new collective body-sex performances were developed together with sex workers, artists and other cultural producers, by employing practices such as S/M, or drag and objects such as dildos or artificial arms. Preciado, too, makes reference to Sprinkle: "For me, the issue of [...] pornography should be judged from the perspective of performance theory. That's something I learned from Annie Sprinkle."²

4 INSCRIPTION

According to the fundamental analyses of the film scholar Linda Williams,³ pornography consists in the staged re-inscription of the role relations of men as sadistic, dominant and powerful, and women as masochistic, submissive and powerless. The woman, subjected to the male gaze, admits that she desires this seemingly never-ending, identical narration of hetero-normative sex performance. The ultimate proof of the authenticity of the event called "sex," from which the male performer emerges as a symbolic hero, is the cumshot, which functions as the climax and final proof that real sex has taken place. Williams grasps pornography in the tradition of the biopolitical confessions which Foucault examined in his "History of Sexuality"⁴ and understood as confessions of an inner truth of gender subjects which, from then on, served to anchor sexual identities. Preciado calls attention to the fact that Foucault's history of sexuality ended in the 19th century — prior to the development of photographic apparatuses.⁵

5 QUEER PRODUCTION

If queerness is associated with making the representation of gender ambivalent, one strategy of post-porn would lie in complicating normative representation patterns in a critical way. But as both Sedgwick⁶ and Preciado stress, post-porn also produces new forms of sexual subjectivity. Acts such as drag, cruising or dildo sex are not to be understood as the uncovering of the constructedness of heterosexual gender positions, but as articulations of the body that possess their own spatialities and temporalities, and enable alternative forms of social practice and the production of subjectivity — and thus alternative forms of sexual identity and subjectivity as well.

6 FEMALE MASCULINITIES

It seems to be the case today that post-porn is for the most part re-actualised in (post) lesbian contexts. The performativity and production of masculinity with women in genres such as butchness or drag kinking, all the way to the concrete materialisations

of transgender bodies, mark a paradigm change in the power relations of femininity and masculinity. Post-porn takes note of masculinity's arrival in the age of its performative reproducibility and, after decades of deconstructing femininity, addresses the no less constructed character of masculinity, which it expropriates from biological men.

7 FETISHES

Post-porn neither condemns the fetish nor does it raise questions as to lack. It instead investigates what can be created with the fetish. It doesn't look at what might await us after overcoming alienation, a perhaps happy natural state, but focuses on the de-naturalised body technologies which we can create using the fetish, beyond the normative forms of hetero-sex. Katja Diefenbach writes: "The question should not be whether beauty, sex, fashion, and pornography cover up power, but with which practices they connect themselves to each other and the way in which they produce bodies and ways of life. It's not about uncovering but analysing."⁷ A prominent example of the productive appropriation of the fetish is Preciado's departure from the status of the phallus and her philosophy of the dildocrats. The penis possesses its own biopolitical history, with penis lengths prescribed by medical dispositives and the destruction of deviant penis shapes, like in the mutilation of the genitals of intersexuals. Preciado cites Derrida's proposition that the hetero-male power strategy consists precisely in maintaining that its own code is the original and all others are fakes.⁸ For this reason, she prefers to speak of the dildo, which she grasps as a part of the body that is a prosthesis.⁹ In her view, the dildo is replaceable in many respects; an arm can be a dildo, as can a baseball bat, a bottle, or—a penis. And the dildo belongs to no one: "The dildo negates the fact that desire is something that takes place within an organ belonging to the self."

8 CONTRASEX

In the "Contrasexual Manifesto,"¹⁰ Preciado proposes exercises to deterritorialise the classical erogenous zones and instead open up new ones that have nothing to do with the binary of man and woman and the reference to reproductive organs. To this end, she lionises the proletarians of the anus, the founders of a new, contrasexual society: The anus is radically democratic in that every body possesses one. And every sex protagonist participates in the production of culture: We are all sexual proletarians. This appeal includes the production of the entire body of the people, it implies different forms of the practice of relationships, the dissolution of family structures, the demystification of heterosexual love, and the introduction of contractual sex, which subjects its acts to critical debate and allows them to be negotiated in political terms. Post-porn and contrasexuality influence and permeate each other. Parallels between sex films, as an alternative form of cultural production, and the basic practices of economic and artistic self-organisation in feminism, can be traced from Sprinkle's call for women to produce their own porn films,¹¹ all the way to the DIY workshops of the queer underground porn filmmakers GirlsWhoLikePorno (Barcelona).¹²

9 BELLADONNA

Post-pornography is not only produced on the fringes of queer contexts or the art scene. The mainstream porn-star, Belladonna, displays parallels to Annie Sprinkle's de-identificatory practice, without taking recourse to the linear narrative of the social rise from a porn performer to an artist. Two years ago, Belladonna founded her own firm, "Belladonna Entertainment," and rejected the classical patterns of hetero-sex. Beforehand, she had been a masochistic icon of gonzo porn, which since the boom of digital cameras, sells sex performances as being even more "authentic." In addition to the shaky hand-held-camera aesthetics and a documentary gesture having nothing to do with glamorous studio sets, gonzo stands for an intensification of the body. Harder sex with anal sex as a highlight, new gagging techniques (blow-jobs leading to the actress almost suffocating), more salivation and stronger affects. Belladonna utilised the intensification of gonzo sex for a line of flight away from the role of the passive female subject. She has now directed more than a dozen lesbian films which, as a matter of course, include fun and empathetically negotiate power relations anew. In *Belladonna Fucking Girls Again* (2005), the director plays the role of a dominatrix with the submissive actress Melissa Lauren. At one point she demands that Lauren stick an inflatable dildo into her mouth, which, with the increasing influx of air, hardly reminds one of a penis anymore. Her face turns red and becomes a (post-)vaginal centre of desire; Lauren gently caresses it and kisses the tube out of Bella's mouth. By means of a new body technology, power is turned into a complex relation of forces that departs from the symbolism of the phallus and the separation between dominant and submissive man and woman. In *Fetish Fanatic 4* (2006), Belladonna turns a jet of water in a bathtub into a dildo for herself, which here doesn't even possess the material, solid shape of a dildo. In the same performance (with the dominatrix Sandra Romain), there is also a kissing scene in which the dildo is shared by the mouths of the two performers, until it disappears. The reference to the relation of phallus-dildo-power is thus entirely abolished. Both performers are at once penetrators and the ones being penetrated, so to speak.

10 POST-PORNOGRAPHIC IMAGES

Merely a tendency towards post-pornographic images can be discerned, be it in the films of Bruce LaBruce, Virginie Despentes and Hans Scheirl or in the photographs of Del LaGrace Volcano. This is reminiscent of the concepts of movement-image and time-image in Deleuze's philosophy of film, in which they do not exist in a pure form but in a resonating body, as it were—as approximations and in degrees.¹³ In general, one can say that a post-porn image emancipates itself from the binary logic of hetero-power and makes available potentials for other forms of representation-critical affirmation, which make new subjectivities and power relations within the practice of sexuality conceivable and debatable. In the best case, this results in affective singularities of lustful image politics that smuggle themselves into the interface of theory and practice with the aim of complicating it. In the process, the gender-specific and economic circumstances of the works, as well as the fact that they are constructed, are suspended and put up for

consideration.

Present post-porn debates are far from possessing a unified strategy or position. For example, while Sprinkle's position can be interpreted as a campy, yet serious, claim to brotherly/sisterly love and humanistic integration, the most determined counterposition can be found in the anti-humanism of the queer theoretician Lee Edelman, for whom post-porn images are (or can) only be produced in sexual acts that place the sexually identitary mode of existence at risk. Terre Thaemlitz is also in line with such a position, yet he addresses it in the form of institutional criticism (e.g., of the art market) or by questioning the notion of subcultural community (e.g., queer communities).¹⁴ Diefenbach, on the other hand, proposes conceiving post-pornography on this side of gestures of transgression and liberation or in relation to the symbolic law of the "big Other," as a non-utopian strategy aiming at different economies between bodies and desires.¹⁵

NOTES

- 1 Cf. Sprinkle, A. (1998) *Post-Porn Modernist*, San Francisco.
- 2 Stüttgen, T. (2004) "Proletarier des Anus: Interview mit Beatriz Preciado, Teil 1," in *Jungle World* 48/04, p. 24.
- 3 Williams, L. (1995) *Hard Core*, Basel.
- 4 Foucault, M. (1978) *History of Sexuality I: An Introduction*, New York.
- 5 Preciado, B. (2005) "Gender Sex and Copyleft," in *Del LaGrace Volcano, Sex Works*, Tübingen, p. 152.
- 6 Sedgwick, E.K. (2003) *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*, Durham, p. 149.
- 7 Diefenbach, K. (2006) "The Spectral Form of Value: Ghost Things and Relations of Forces," ed. S. Sheikh, *Capital (It Fails us Now)*, Berlin.
- 8 Preciado refers to Derrida's deconstruction of the French language as "original" and "mother tongue" in relation to the minority migrant languages of Hebrew and Algerian, in Derrida, J. (1998) *Monolingualism of the Other; Or, the Prosthesis of Origin*, Stanford.
- 9 Stüttgen, T. "Proletarier des Anus: Interview mit Beatriz Preciado, Teil 1," loc. cit., p. 24.
- 10 Preciado, B. (2004) *Kontrasexuelles Manifest*, Berlin.
- 11 Sprinkle, A. (2006) "Annie Sprinkle's *Herstory of Porn* (New DVD-Edition with Off-Commentary by Linda Williams, www.anniesprinkle.org).
- 12 For a view of the work of the Girlswholikeporno collective, visit their blog that includes clips, photos and commentaries: www.girlswholikeporno.com.
- 13 While Deleuze sees the actualisations of the movement-image in the linear, uninterrupted narration of Hollywood cinema, the time-image which he discovers, for example, in the New Wave Cinema of post-war Europe (Italian neo-realism, Nouvelle Vague, New German Cinema), is considered the result of a crisis in uninterrupted narration and the identification with the protagonist: the sudden entry of exterior social conditions into the life of the main protagonist causes a shock that, through events, introduces new temporalities into the narration and, hence, new

forms of thought. In a similar way, one could grasp post-pornographic image categories in relation to classical pornographic images that confront the heterosexually identified narrative patterns of the sexual act with other sex events and plunge them into a state of crisis. The development of these images can also be connected with the historical events since 1968, the struggles of the feminist, gay, lesbian and queer movements, which began at about the same time as the porn film market became established — the double bind between porn and post-porn thus existed from the very beginning.

- 14 Thaemlitz emphasised this in several statements during the final panel discussion of the Post Porn Politics Symposium, Volksbühne, Berlin (15/10/2006).
- 15 Katja Diefenbach, “Dying in White: On Fetishistic Repetition, Commodity- and Body-Experiences,” unpublished lecture given at the Post Porn Politics Symposium, Volksbühne Berlin (14/10/2006).

SECTION 4

BIOGRAPHIES AND WEBOGRAPHY

BIOGRAPHIES

Adam Arvidsson is associate professor of Media Studies at the University of Copenhagen. He is the author of *Brands. Meaning and Value in Media Culture* (London: Routledge, 2006), a book that examines the brand as a paradigmatic economic form for the information economy. At present he is particularly interested in the relation between value and affect in the information economy, and in the new economy of ethics and in networked processes of creativity.

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Franco 'Bifo' Berardi founded the magazine *A/traverso* (1975–1981) and was a member of staff of Radio Alice—the first free radio station in Italy (1976–1978). He was involved in the political movement of *autonomia* in Italy during the 1970s, then fled to Paris where he worked with Felix Guattari in the field of schizoanalysis. During the 1980s, he contributed to the magazine *Semiotexte* (New York), *Chimerees* (Paris), *Metropoli* (Rome) and *Musica 80* (Milano). He published *Mutazione e ciberpunk* (1993), *Cibernauti* (1994), *Felix* (2001), *Telestreet - Macchina immaginativa non omologata* (2003). Berardi is based in Bologna, Italy.

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Manuel Bonik is author, DJ, artist, curator and IT-consultant and is currently writing his dissertation on “Fehler als generatives System” (“Mistakes as generative system” — working title). Together with Oswald Wiener and Robert Hödicke, he published *Eine elementare Einführung in die Theorie der Turing-Maschinen* (*An Elementary Introduction*

to the Theory of the Turing-Machines (Vienna / New York: Springer-Verlag, 1998), a textbook on automata theory. Bonik lives and works in Berlin.

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Mikita Brotzman, PhD, is Professor of Language, Literature and Culture at the Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore, Maryland, USA, and a therapist in private practice. She writes about expressions of the apocalyptic and pathological in contemporary culture. Her latest book is *High Theory, Low Culture* (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

Florian Cramer studied literature and art history in Berlin, Konstanz and Amherst/Massachusetts. He is course director of the Media Design MA program at the Piet Zwart Institute in Rotterdam. Cramer writes on literature, arts, computing, and is currently researching obscene aesthetics.

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Samantha Culp was born and raised in Los Angeles, California. As an undergraduate at Yale University, she was a recipient of several arts grants, including a Kingsley Trust Fellowship to film a documentary in the Pacific islands of Micronesia. After graduating with a BA in Literature, she moved to Hong Kong to teach at the Chinese University as a Yale-China Fellow. She founded the film screening series "Superplex" at the Chinese University, and writes on contemporary Asian arts and culture for publications such as the South China Morning Post, Shift, The Fader, and RES. She is currently working on various writing, curating and film projects, such as a documentary about Chungking Mansions and an overseas travelling exhibit of young Hong Kong artists for the 10th anniversary of July 1, 1997. She is also a summer 2007 FUSE Artist-in-Residence at Videotage.

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Barbara DeGenevieve has been a professor of photography at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC) since 1994. She has also taught at the University of Illinois and California State University, San Jose. Originally known for her work as a photographer, DeGenevieve has exhibited in Tokyo, Frankfurt, and numerous esteemed galleries in the USA. She has also lectured at the Glasgow School of Art, CalArts, Rhode Island School of Design, and New York University.

Mark Dery is a cultural critic. He is the author of *Escape Velocity: Cyberculture at the End of the Century* (1996) and *The Pyrotechnic Insanitarium: American Culture on the Brink* (1999) (www.markdery.com/pyrotechnic_insanitarium.html). His seminal essay "Culture Jamming: Hacking, Slashing, and Sniping in the Empire of Signs", popularised the guerrilla media activism known as "culture jamming"; widely republished on

the web, “Culture Jamming” remains the definitive theorisation of this subcultural phenomenon. In *Flame Wars: The Discourse of Cyberculture* (1993), an academic anthology he edited, Dery coined the term “Afrofuturism,” which jump-started the academic interest in black technoculture. *Flame Wars* also helped found the discourses of cyberfeminism and cyberculture studies. Dery teaches in the Department of Journalism at New York University, where he directs the undergraduate concentration in media criticism. He is at work on *Paradise Lust*, a book about the online culture war between sexual revolutionaries and the morality police.

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Michael Goddard is Professor of English, Cultural and Media Studies at the University of Lodz, Poland. He has published on Polish and International Cinema, Deleuze’s aesthetic theories and radical Italian thought. He is currently preparing a book on the cinema of Raul Ruiz and conducting research into East European postmodern audiovisual cultures.

Stewart Home was born in south London in 1962. When he was sixteen he held down a factory job for a few months, an experience that led him to vow he’d never work again. After dabbling in rock journalism and music in the early 1980s, he switched his attention to the art world. Now Home writes novels as well as cultural commentary, and he continues to make films and exhibitions. He has long been an underground legend in Europe, North America and Brazil.

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Katrien Jacobs is a scholar, writer, artist and activist, and is assistant professor in at City University of Hong Kong. She has lectured and published widely on digital media, art, pornography and censorship. She has a PhD degree in comparative literature and media, with a thesis on dismemberment myths and rituals in 1960s/1970s body art and performance media. Her book *Libi_doc: Journeys in the Performance of Sex Art* (Maska, 2005), contains travelogue writing, interviews with 26 international artists, and performative commentary. Her new book *Netporn: DIY Web Culture and Sexual Politics* discusses alternative porn domains and will be published by Rowman and Littlefield in Fall 2007.

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Marije Janssen received her MA degree in new media & genderstudies at the University of Utrecht in 2006. Thereafter she worked with the Institute of Network Cultures and Paradiso as the producer of C’Lick Me. She has presented at the Post Porn Politics symposium in Berlin 2006. In her private life she likes to watch gayporn for girls. She also works as phone operator at the first all-female run escort agency in the Netherlands.

Regina Lynn is the author of *The Sexual Revolution 2.0* (Ulysses Press, 2005) and the Sex Drive columnist for *Wired News*. She also runs the Sex Drive forum at Reginalynn.com. When not pursuing better sex through technology (or better technology through sex), she spends time with her chocolate Lab.

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Mireille Miller-Young, PhD, is Assistant Professor of Women's Studies at University of California at Santa Barbara. Her research explores the sexual politics of Black women in the sex industries in the US and the African Diaspora. Her current manuscript in progress, "A Taste For Brown Sugar: Black Women in Pornography," analyses the history of Black women in the US pornography business, including representational and labor economies. Dr. Miller-Young researches and teaches about feminist documentary film-making, sex work and sex cultures, and feminist, queer, and critical race theory. She participated in the first netporn conference held in 2005 in Amsterdam by the Institute of Network Cultures, and a version of her article was first published in *Cut-Up Magazine*: www.cut-up.com.

Tim Noonan has been instrumental in providing blind Australians timely access to daily newspapers and other information over the standard telephone and other channels. He is a member of two Standards Australia committees as well as having been involved with the Web Accessibility Initiative of W3C (the World Wide Web Consortium). Tim is a professional speaker and is a frequent guest on radio and TV where he engagingly examines issues of social inclusion and access to emerging technologies. Tim has a BA majoring in cognitive psychology and special education, and holds a diploma in Therapeutic Massage. He has more than twenty years professional experience in issues of accessibility and the disability field with a special focus on technology.

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Francesco Macarone Palmieri, aka *Warbear* graduated in Cultural Anthropology at La Sapienza University in Rome. He is an international stimulator of confrontation and deepening in fields such as countercultures, urban anthropology, media studies, literature, art and emotions sociology, cultural studies, queer studies with a focus on pornography. Warbear gave life to one of the first Italian bear groups: Epicentro Ursino Romano, through which he organises activities about gender and masculinity, and produces the 'Subwoofer' bear dance party. He has also created the multilinguistic queer project 'Phag Off'. Warbear lives and works in Rome.

www.myspace.com/warbear www.phagoff.org

www.epicentroursino.com

www.tekfestival.it

Matteo Pasquinelli is editor of *Rekombinant* (www.rekombinant.org) and author of *Media Activism* (2002). He has been involved in several projects around net activism and cultural jamming—from Luther Blissett to Telestreet. He co-curated the Art and Politics of Netporn conference (2005) and the ‘C’Lick Me festival’ (2007) with the Institute of Network Cultures in Amsterdam. Nomadically inclined, he currently lives and works between London and Berlin.

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Audacia Ray is an executive editor of *\$pread*, a magazine by and for sex workers, and is a contributor to the porn blog *Fleshbot*. Her first book *Naked on the Internet: Hookups, Downloads and Cashing in on Internet Sexploration*, is due June 2007 (Seal Press).

In 2006, Audacia wrote and directed her first feature adult film *The Bi Apple*, which she produced in New York City under the auspices of her Waking Vixen Productions. The film was released by Adam & Eve Pictures in February 2007. She has a BA in Cultural Studies from Eugene Lang College, and an MA in American Studies from Columbia University. She lives in Brooklyn, New York

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Julie Levin Russo is a doctoral candidate in Modern Culture & Media at Brown University, where she is working on a dissertation entitled “Indiscrete Media: TV/Internet Convergence and Economies of Lesbian Fandom” (www.01cyb.org/diss). She has appeared in several feminist porn vehicles. Her erotic fiction was most recently published in “Best of Best Lesbian Erotica 2.”

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Andreas Schaale (Dr.) is originally a nuclear physicist. As one of the founders of the company Contraco – Consulting & Software (www.intranetsuche.de) specialising in search technology, he currently leads its Research and Science division. Among other things, he develops and publishes on themes such as search- and filter-algorithms for search machines as well as risk management. Schaale lives and works in Berlin.

Nishant Shah is a Junior Research Scholar exploring cyberspaces for his PhD thesis at Centre for the Study of Culture and Society, Bangalore. Nishant works as a freelance information architect and has recently come back from Taiwan where he was a visiting scholar at the National Central University. Apart from designing and teaching courses for undergraduate students in new media and urban spaces, Nishant is interested in questions of gender, identity, modernity, culture, citizenship and new pedagogies for teaching. In his spare time, he hides behind a keyboard and encrypts his life on cyberspace.

Tim Stüttgen is author and artist. He holds a BA in Film Studies (London/Berlin) and is a postgraduate researcher at the Jan Van Eyck Academy, Maastricht. Tim writes as a journalist (*Spex, Taz, Jungle World, Texte Zur Kunst, Spiegel Online*) and theorist. He has published writings on Afro-American and Asian popculture, pornography, avant-garde cinema, queer politics and poststructuralism. At the moment he is editing a reader on Deleuze and Guattari (b_books) with Nicolas Siepen, and writing his book *post / porn / politics* after the same titled symposium he organised at Volksbuehne Berlin in 2006. He studies Fine Art at HfbK Hamburg. Under his dragqueen alter ego 'Timi Mei Monigatti,' he has performed in Germany, England, Denmark and the Netherlands. His recent performative lecture piece is called: "Post Porn Happiness: The Fun Of Castration."

www.postpornpolitics.com

Matthew Zook is an Associate Professor in the Department of Geography at the University of Kentucky. His research focuses on the intersection of digital and human geography and is particularly interested in how technologies like the Internet are interacting with the spatial organisation of economic and social activities. Recent projects include a critical analysis of the promise and constraints of Google Earth, the geography of Nigerian spammers and the adoption of e-commerce by manufacturing firms. His book *The Geography of the Internet Industry: Venture Capital, Dot-coms and Local Knowledge* (Blackwell, 2005) focuses on the rise and fall of dot com firms in the San Francisco Bay region.

www.zook.info

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www.nofauxxx.com

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www.onenightstand-thefilm.com

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www.eff.org

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Good Vibrations
www.goodvibes.com

Love Piece Club
www.lovepiececlub.com

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www.grandopening.com

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C'LICK ME: A NETPORN STUDIES READER

Edited by Katrien Jacobs, Marije Janssen, Matteo Pasquinelli
Institute of Network Cultures, Amsterdam 2007

C'Lick Me: A Netporn Studies Reader is an anthology that collects the best materials of two years debate: from The Art and Politics of Netporn conference held in 2005 in Amsterdam to the 2007 C'Lick Me festival. C'Lick Me opens the field of 'Internet pornography'. Based on non-conventional approaches, mixing academics, artists and activists, the C'Lick Me Reader reclaims a critical post-enthusiastic, post-censorship perspective on netporn, a dark field that has been dominated thus far by dodgy commerce and filtering. The C'Lick Me reader covers the rise of the netporn society from Usenet underground to the blogosphere, analyses economic data and search engines traffic, compares sex work with the work of fantasy, disability and accessibility. The C'Lick Me reader also expands the notion of digital desire, and smashes the predicatable boundaries of porn debates, depicting a broader libidinal spectrum from fetish subcultures to digital alienation, from code pornography to war pornography. The reader concludes by re-contextualising the queer discourse into a post-porn scenario.

Contributions by: Adam Arvidsson, Franco 'Bifo' Berardi, Manuel Bonik, Mikita Brottman, Florian Cramer, Samantha Culp, Barbara DeGenevieve, Mark Dery, Michael Goddard, Stewart Home, Katrien Jacobs, Marije Janssen, Julie Levin Russo, Regina Lynn, Sergio Messina, Mireille Miller-Young, Tim Noonan, Francesco Macarone Palmieri aka Warbear, Matteo Pasquinelli, Audacia Ray, Andreas Schaale, Nishant Shah, Tim Stüttgen, Matthew Zook.

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