

SOCIOLOGY OF THE ELECTRONIC FLESH. DIGITAL CULTURE AND THE IMAGINARY OF THE OBSCENE

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ABSTRACT

Contrary to the initial emphasis that was given on aspects related to intelligence and knowledge, we are finding that the web is increasingly becoming a platform welcoming aesthetic and ethic forms marked by senses, emotions and voluptuousness in pleasure as much as in its darker side. Previously, pornography was a hidden, obscure and marginal dimension of collective life. Nowadays, digital culture favors the advent of *porn culture*, where porn tends to become a symbolic matrix, an ordinary code, an atmosphere. In this visual and sensitive context, the obscene gets closer to the truth and the truth appears as an obscene. What imaginary presides over this mutation at work?

KEYWORDS

Digital culture; imaginary; obscene; porn culture

RESUMO

Ao contrário da ênfase inicial que tem sido dado a aspetos relacionados com a inteligência e o conhecimento, conclui-se que a *web* está a transformar-se progressivamente numa plataforma que convida formas estéticas e éticas marcadas por sentidos, emoções e voluptuosidades do prazer, perspectivadas até a partir de um lado negro. Noutras épocas, a pornografia era escondida, obscurecida, pertencendo a uma dimensão marginal da vida coletiva. Hoje, a cultura digital favorece o advento da *cultura porno*, onde a pornografia assume uma matriz simbólica, um código comum, uma atmosfera. Neste contexto visual e sensitivo, o obsceno fica mais perto da verdade e a verdade apresenta-se como obscenidade. Que imaginário preside a esta constante mutação?

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Cultura digital; cultura porno; obsceno; imaginário

What is left to do after the orgy?
(Jean Baudrillard, 1990)

What is left to do after the orgy? This is the question that concerned Jean Baudrillard for a long time, as he was convinced when he wrote, that the time for party was long gone. Is it really the case? Is the party over? Aren't we forced to observe that it has been perpetuated in other forms, transfigured? In particular, what happens when eroticism embraces the regime of everyday life? What happens when the nocturnal imaginary invades the daylight and that festivity mingles with the ordinary?

We can see commodities impregnated with aphrodisiac perfumes, romances displayed on most disparate billboards, Viagra, cocaine, GHB and Red Bull, the return of poppers and other substitutes that constantly stimulate sensitivity. We are saturated with political scenarios full of sexual allusions, obscene performances, sexting, dickpick, twerking, gastroporn, food porn (Coward, 1984) and other lascivious erotic practices around food. Cosmetic treatments are designed to shadow each curve of body. System of objects as a whole, have become common as well as designers dedicated to giving sex appeal to any form in the world, retailers of all kinds specialized in the art of seduction, priests, models, rock stars, intellectuals and entrepreneurs involved in sexual scandals ...

Let's look around: the walls surrounding the porn industry have fallen. Its hidden spaces have been shed to light, and the substances of hardcore porn proliferate in each rivulet of the public scene, spreading by successive viral contagions.

For the first time since the Edens of more primitive times, sex has become a common and public activity. In a way, we all participate in sexuality, whether we want it or not (Ballard, 2014, p. 114).

WELCOME TO PORN CULTURE

At its peak, consumer society (Baudrillard, 1970) now displays a pornographic structure. It is not as much a metaphor than truly its fundamental dynamics, its vital flux, as obscure as one might think. This paradigm of consumption, flaming with sensitive desires, is based on excitement. It seduces the body by inviting it to voluptuousness, agitates the flesh tumultuously towards the intoxication of its limits, where quite often, enjoyment is confronted to the intriguing anxiety of death.

The dilapidation of an object always contains the dawn of another object (Debord, 1967/1992). In that way, each orgasm sought in the realm of porn is always a pretext for another climax, even more audacious, formidable and exceptional. Whether it is real or not does not really matter. The perpetual acrobatics of the orgasmic body, the *porn performance*, in its spasms and bites, constantly refers to the thrill of overcoming limits. It wraps itself in the intoxicating fascination of *spectacle*. It also shrouds itself in the panic inherent to this journey through the whirlwind of precipice. This new object is revealed after pleasure, once the festive ecstasy is exhausted, once the earth has been scorched, when the scene becomes heaps of ruins...

The parable of merchandise and the eroticized body, on which the society of *spectacle* rests, is the epic of a continual relaunch. It culminates in dissipation, an increasingly resounding promise leading to anxiety. It is a gradual uncovering of the subject, constantly directed towards satisfaction as well as the reactivation of desire: a story destined to arouse sexually – and not only – every organic and inorganic flap of our existences. In this story, oscillating between obscenity and *horror vacui*, we are all masks, clowns and grotesque figures participating to a carnival that overflows from its original frame. It becomes uncontrollable in its tumults and drifts, beyond and below the public arena. It autonomizes itself from political, economic and mediatic scenography. In that way, the

trajectory of porn offers an instructive metaphor of the foundations of the diffuse erotization of everyday life, as well as its perverse side effects.

FROM PORNOGRAPHY TO PORN CULTURE

A few years ago, pornography was a universe specific to a crowd of fans with homogeneous and identifiable sociocultural profiles (Adamo, 2004). This consistent tribe asked those who wanted to join to undergo through a series of tests intended to carefully filter their numbers and identity. Only those driven by an erotic drive more powerful than the barriers of shyness were able to accomplish the transgressive leap towards an abyss of pleasure. Going to an X-rated movie, buying a videotape or a DVD, or crossing the threshold of a dark room were initiatory rituals – mostly male and heteronomous – necessary to indulge the pornographic instinct.

In the last years, we have witnessed the development of new communication technologies (at first web 2.0 – then geolocation), combined with a deflagration of desires and the dissolution of the inhibitions that marked history since the 1960s to nowadays. They have led to the advent of a new sexual economy (Combessie, 2013), symbol of a profound transformation of the phenomenon, exorbitantly expanded. Porn has been emancipated from the marginal role it held in the media and in contemporary culture. To this regard, Youporn, PornTub, RedTube, PornHub, XHamster, Xvideos.com and their counterparts highlight in an exhaustive way the links between networks and sexuality. They have fully entered the Olympus of electronic sociality.

Through their windows, we understand in a tangible way to what extent the connective tension that irrigates the flow of digital culture (Susca, 2016) acquires precisely a prominent value through the carnal confusion that it causes. By its faculties it promotes the advent of a corporality that transcends singular individuals, their identity and their separation. It immerses them into moist flows, where eroticism boils. These flows of high emotional density are where humanity dissolves and can be found in unexpected conjunctions with the “other”: the sexual, inorganic, mystical, cultural “other”... Indeed, the burning screens of porn sites are not limited to corporality and to inviting bodies. They are not only a membrane and a display set with a tactile gaze. They are also and above all a laboratory for the deconstruction and regeneration of the body – from flesh to electronic flesh – as a symbolic device and a sexed organ.

Each close-up in a porn video is an act where the body is dissolved. It decomposes itself, is reduced to shreds, while the somatic boundaries and symbolic limits of the body are being reached, experiencing peaks of pleasure. It is as if the settings of any pornographic scene were also the control center from which analysis is being made. It is where the boundaries of humanity, its enjoyment and its happiness are being tested and manipulated. The gushing images of x-scapes constantly exhibit, in a deluge of mechanical aspect with a humming incantatory rhythm, the spreading of all the cavities of the body, immediately followed by their obstruction, with a touch of disturbing torture. Sex, all the organic and inorganic orifices, with other devices of pleasure, act as agents of passage

to conflate in the Other and in porous interstices capable of engulfing it. It constitutes planes where something very close to the multiple becoming, dear to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1980), is becoming growingly contemporary.

Nanny porn, Fetish, Environmental porn, Milf, Gif, Fantasy, Interracial, Beurettes, BDSM, Shemale, Toys, Monster... the categories featured by contemporary porn sites are baptized in a whirling festive atmosphere characterized by the principles of pleasure, alteration and violence. They are simultaneously the laboratories and the slaughterhouses of the new flesh being removed and replaced, torn apart and sewn together. This is where the shapes and substances of the life to come are cut and sown together. There, bodies are both renewed and sacrificed, as we are taught by carnivalesque wisdom: cultures are celebrated and squandered, beings created and archived.

The most important aspect of the archetypes disseminated within the entrails of digital porn, of their novelty, is situated in their heterodox character. It challenges the consolidated sexual and identity patterns to which we are accustomed: it favors unprecedented conjunctions: cross-dressing, odd crossings, connections to limits of humankind, capable of undermining the monolithic orders and dichotomous orders of our traditional cultural paradigms: “as if an exacerbated quotation from Hieronymus Bosch’s “Garden of Delights” was bubbling in the interstices of the network, imagination is channeled towards the territories of the human-animal-mechanical intermixture” (Ciuffoli, 2006, p. 116).

The porn web is therefore much more than the wild lecherous jubilation of the flesh. It rather represents its welcoming disruption, its final dissipation: the slaughterhouse of humanism, an apocalyptic poetry. Pleasure can be interpreted as the dawn of an access (Nancy, 2001). That means that the tone of a transition, the excitement that one experiences by watching a sex video puts the body in a state of effervescence. It prepares a prodigious trance, a journey out of selfness. It involves the vision of an elsewhere where senses and imagination are attuned: bodies and kilobits, dream and information, nightmare and communication...

Porn is therefore the gate to an exultant diaspora, a tumultuous drift of flesh...

Lust is the carnal quest of the Unknown, as the Cerebrality is its spiritual quest.

Lust is the gesture to create and it is creation.

Lust is the perpetual battle never won. After the passenger triumphs, the ephemeral triumphs itself, it is the resurgent dissatisfaction which pushes, in an orgiastic will, the being to blossom, to surpass itself.

Lust is a force. (Valentine of Saint-Point, 1913)

THE FLESH BECOMES LOGOS

In order to understand adequately the nature of the anthropological mutation in progress – object and subject of our research – it is necessary to grasp the distinctive

features of the *pornscapes* in what constitutes their basic pattern and in their current features. On one hand, there are electronic pornoerotic social networks, of which Youporn.com is of the most extraordinary archetypes. On the other, we have to consider their actualization as swarms oriented by telematic systems that geolocalizing tastes, profiles and desires.

Registered in December 2005 by a Californian company, the Youporn domain name was so successful that it quickly integrated, along with some of its look-alike, the short list of the fifty most visited websites in the world. Its singularity, simple and striking, transposes the logic of Youtube into the universe of porn. It delegates to users the ability to produce and evaluate the contents of the platform. The operation is financed through the advertising that frames the pages, in a plethora of links to sites, erotic chat-lines or private spaces offering opportunities for encounters – direct or not – to all those who share common interests in pleasures, trends and styles.

Every day, the archipelago of porn is enriched with thousands of new videos, which can attract an exorbitant number of visits only a few hours after being posted. Each of those “islands” offers an overview of the fractal horizon – symptomatic of the tribalization of the post-modern world (Maffesoli, 1988) – that articulates society and tastes. The visitors of the site and its countless competitors waddle through the different spaces of the “landscape”, according to their preferences. Thus they determine a multiverse of possible options – which correspond to many identities and maps of the pornoerotic imaginary – but not only...

This strikingly indicates that porn has expanded into the mainstream. It is no longer confined to the subcultural margins where it remained lurking until the explosion of web 2.0. Its public is now potentially equivalent to the mass of the users of the web. Porn plays a leading role in this communicative environment, as shown by empirical data: the most typed word on search engines is “sex”, 35% of downloaded files have lewd content and 12% of the sites are sexual (Wired, 2014). Porn is therefore one of the fires that fuel the Internet culture and, by extension, the contemporary cultural *milieu* as a whole.

It is no longer relevant to treat this trend as a niche phenomenon or a specific *genre*. Web 2.0 and its followers, on the contrary, have consecrated the advent of porn culture. This *sensitivity* crosses the Web and contaminates all aspects of social life. A red line connects porn with pop culture (Regazzoni, 2014). The videos of Youporn, *Jacquie and Michel* or *Zombi porn* are connected with the provocative images used by the advertisement industry to seduce the metropolitan passer-by (Abruzzese, 2010). Sex shops, hard or soft, kitsch or luxurious, are directly connected to the smartphone’s touch screens. More or less trivial erotic novels resonate with the erotic news that cloud the careers of contemporary political leaders: the “Bunga Bunga” of Silvio Berlusconi, the sexual scandals of DSK, as well as the true or probable stories that stained the careers of Bettino Craxi, Bill Clinton, Nicolas Sarkozy or Francois Hollande ...

Politics, in particular, seems to use a sort of *hierodulia* to confirm its sacral supremacy and to claim the monopoly of obscenity and transgression, secret and distant bases of power in all ages (Girard, 1972/1985). The orgiastic or pseudo-orgiastic spectacle offered

more or less unconsciously by most of the representatives of the ruling classes aims, on the one hand, to harmonize the instituted power through the use of societal eroticism. Its objective is to restore the lost correspondence between those who govern and those who *live*. On the other hand, its representatives are trying to pose as exceptional muses of the social body, but beyond the reach of the common. The revival of performance, the exasperation of tones and the swelling of moods are supposed to restore the supremacy of politics in the public arena. On the opposite, they are perceived by the public as a performance of still and stale posing. It is only a simulacrum, because the public arena, especially the domain of the digital, has already brought down the barriers that separated it from the scene of the theater of obscenity.

This is why what matters is not the more or less fine and authentic forms of realization of this phenomenon but our immersion in pornocultural reality. Its networks are simultaneously the cause, the effect and the soundboard that spreads the phenomenon massively. In fact, the mediatic environment in which we are soaked is the epidermic and tactile paradigm that underlies contemporary electronic media (McLuhan 1962/1977, 1962/2004). Media are not only communication tools and means of information, but the *skin of culture* (De Kerckhove 1998, 2014). As skin of culture, the semantic basin of electronic media, is the place *par excellence* of this contamination between bodies. It characterizes contemporary obscenity. It contains and spreads the sensibility of our time with its entire somatic burden, including its fantasies and body fluids.

In that way, pornoerotic networks are many things at once: a prodigious paroxysm, an allegory of orgiastic confusion between flesh and the kilobits of the internet, but also an excessive figure – neither the last nor the first – of the ecstatic dance which agitates contemporary sociality.

Unlike its predecessors, passages, interactions and combinations of this febrile context are no longer driven by a simply porno-graphic structure. The scriptural dimension from which the second part of the term derives plays a marginal role in the practices that flourish among the erogenous zones of the Web. They often invade the screen with their short, improvised and repetitive scenes – bordering on obsession – inspired by the categories they are attached to. They are laced with explicit close-ups, pouring into redundancy. What is consumed here, corollary of the collapse of writing, is the saturation of our gaze. In other words, the exuberance of an overflowing tactility is at work. The production and vision of X-rated scenes are no longer directed to the eye, but induced and pushed by the body, which *sees* only to the extent of what it *touches* and where it is *touched*.

The writing of pornographic clips emanates from decomposed grammars of the body represented through its excesses: emaciated, urticating, damp, emaciated, bloody, dirty, disguised, dilated, wounded... In that perspective, according to Massimo Canevacci, the *hot* internet “attest the transition from traditional pornography to porn in its rawest version: writing disappears and porn becomes entirely visual”¹. *Visual scape* and *pornscape* are intertwined, questioning the dominant rationality of alphabetical order and overturning its divine basis. It also attacks the balance between sacred and profane,

¹ This sentence is taken from an epistolary exchange between M. Canevacci and the author of this chapter.

instituted since the tables of the law were handed over to Moses. “They were the work of God, and writing was the handwriting of God, engraved on these tables” (Old Testament Exodus 32).

The cultural landscape that emerged from the viscous folds of the Web has seen a peremptory reversal of the balance between Logos and flesh, on which Western culture has been based at least since the Old Testament:

in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (...) The Word was the true Light, which enlightens every man by coming into the world. (...) And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us. (João, 1-14)

The sacrilegious blaze of porn (especially in the pagan and wild version of web 2.0), by burning bodies, gives substance to a sensitivity where on the opposite it is the “flesh that makes itself Logos”.

Flesh becomes the primordial meaning of contemporary imaginary.

The orgiastic liturgy coming along with it is a sort of sacrificial rite surrounded by lacerations, totem poles and fetishes. It is the place where body cults and mystics with Dionysian accents are being celebrated and ritualized, where the deepest sacredness and eroticism are tied in an intimate embrace.

EROTIC AFFINITIES

The pleasures that can be found in chat rooms, in the windows and screens of porn culture add an additional touch to western and modern civilization. It transfigures its pivots – creation and procreation – into generalized recreation, emancipated from production and distanced from the logic of progress. Porn is a sumptuous metaphor of the most unproductive expenditure possible. Through its capillary diffusion in increasingly extended layers of society, it insinuates contagiously into the interstices of everyday life. It has become a lifestyle turned towards sexual appetite rather than achievement through work. Lascivious behavior replaces bourgeois imprisonment. Subtracting oneself from duty in the name of unscrupulous hedonism, beyond morality, becomes the new norm.

In a symptomatic manner, the symbolic galaxy used as a breeding ground for porn films is inspired by everyday life with all the storytelling that ensues (Salmon, 2007): its decor, but also the directors and the users-protagonists. It refers to figures of ordinary existence. They express a vision of things from below and specific to that space (Bakhtin, 1998), as we could define it in classical terms.

This is the case of *Gonzo* and *Indie*, but especially *Realcore* (Messina, 2010). It is a recent porn genre characterized by its technical and aesthetic subjects, mostly ordinary, underground, almost *grotesque*. The quality of production sticks to rough dilettantism, with no need for fiction nor sweetening. Movies spouting from the aforementioned platforms are also constantly ejecting contextualized sequences. They come straight from

domestic pools or unusual places, as opposed to film sets. Among the productions available on the market, we can also distinguish products oscillating between spontaneity and its simulacrum. *Amateurs* who create sets of professional quality cohabit with professionals pretending to be *amateurs* to bait viewers searching for authenticity. The primary content of web 2.0 is indeed the network of users, with the load of information, flesh and symbols coming along.

Thus, in a completely coherent way with the media world from which it derives, pornography 2.0 exhibits everyday life, even if it is simulated. It is up to everyday life to organize and interpret the show. In that particular sort of show, the planes of ordinary and extraordinary intersect, and generate short-circuits and virtuositities. The ordinary nature of the protagonists and the settings in which they *play* (outsiders, housewives, precarious, bloggers, students, apartments dilapidated clothes, DIY clothes) blends with the extraordinary quality of performance (inordinate dimensions, vaudeville moanings, unbelievable durations of the act, extreme practices, innovative shooting angles), transforming banality into fantastic and conferring a formidable value to the most ordinary aesthetics irradiated by the social body.

In most cases, the viewing and consumption of electronic porn occurs precisely at the most boring moments of the lives of their users, rather than in the blind spots and obscure areas of temporary autonomy, on the margins of free time. It has become a practice void of any transgressive charge. It is also void of its corollary: the feeling of guilt. Porn is no longer the name of outrage, an aspiration to contradict or to provoke common sense. It is watched with a euphoric, if not hilarious, lightness in homage to hedonistic cults.

Pornography is common sense and in every sense.

SUBJECTS OF DESIRE, SUBJECTS TO DESIRE

Wireless networks, wireless memories, cordless phones and other cloud computing devices are building the physical territory of symbolic, emotional and dreamlike frames, changing the communication modalities of *inhabiting* (Di Felice, 2010) into geographies of experience, into forms of lived experience. It is equally obvious that these modalities are above all sensitive and sensual. How else can we interpret the implementation of geolocation techniques by applications like Tinder or Happn. Geolocation facilitates erotic encounters fitted to specific tastes, affinities and styles, but also moods, sizes and fetishes.

Today, more than ever, or rather more precisely and coherently to the expectations of individuals, this system of reticular communication potentially allows everyone to cross metropolitan streams (La Rocca, 2013). Individuals are now post-urban, attuned with affective and sexual desires to be realized immediately, through the coincidence between data and body, fantasies and encounters, visions and experiences.

These software and apps manage to provide their users, in real time, the map, the availability and the profiles of the people who might interest them for a closer encounter.

This perspective causes a perfect superposition of the sensitive environment, of imaginary and eroticism to the physical environment. We are therefore immersed in an integral landscape where the invisible, the desires, affects and senses become, as surrealists augured, material territory (Alquié, 1955; Breton, 1962/2005). What happens here is very similar to what many magazines offered in the eighties, with bonus X-ray glasses, a gadget supposed to allow their owners – according to the advertised promises – to look through clothes.

Nowadays, the thirsts, caprices and fantasies of those who are geographically close to us or that could be after a rapid exchange of messages have become transparent even naked. It is the case even in systems characterized by opacities, links and initiations of the neo-tribal type. In this context, two neighbors in the subway are not only more or less anonymous individuals that share space at a specific time. They are also virtual erotic partners (in the most interesting and precise sense of the word, “which exists in power”, which tends to actualize itself (Lévy, 1996). Proxemic then becomes a science, a consciousness and an experience impregnated with eroticism. At the same time, the relationships that make up the being-together appear and emerge essentially as dense links of eroticism.

Connective affinities are also, immediately or even primarily, erotic affinities. The smart city, is also – or even above all – an erotic and erogenous city: *smart*, precisely. It is moved and shaken by the flesh. We are all subjected to unpredictable and uncontrollable desires that are able to modify our urban journey by attracting us into spurious cobwebs. As desiring subjects, but above all as subjects of desire, we become subject to the desire of others, whether that other is an intriguing passer-by or insolent software.

SENSUAL IMAGINARY

Quite curiously, similarly to the absorption of narcotics such as cocaine (Bagozzi & Cippitelli, 2008), immersion in *pornscapes* generally occurs between 9 am and 5 pm (Wired, 2014). Thus it occupies and distorts the time formerly devoted to work. It is erected as a receptacle where to deposit and coagulate the traditionally nocturnal substances of collective imagination.

The invasion of the night in broad daylight is an alteration of the Apollonian harmony. Through dissonances, disgust and distortions, a shadow spreads, threatening the heart of the social system. A specter lurks around the world: the sensual specter of *porn culture*.

These tumults cause disorder within political, cultural and productive systems. They are directly proportional to its growing materialization on the main stage of culture. Escaping from the interstices where it resided clandestinely for years, this ghost is headed out of the underground. It is less and less ethereal and more and more tangible. It is part of the capitalist model of development, of cultural industry and, more generally, of the modern world. Nevertheless, porn, in its always threatening irreducibility to the logic of economic production and social reproduction, has now become a crazy cell. A perverse effect. Cancer.

Porn has been suddenly become an economic model. But the imaginary which emanates from porn undermines the foundations of established power. It carries values, ethics and aesthetics that directly threaten it. In spite of cunning attempts orchestrated by neo-liberal ideology to subdue its violent, savage and dissipative character, aiming to making it an exutory, porn culture still holds an irrefutable quality. It is an ungovernable force and its heart remains fundamentally unproductive. It is clearly devoted to waste, fatally destined to expense. Its finality is vowed to Dionysus and his most current avatars.

We have to think, as a clear illustration of what has just been said, of the typical way in which the practices in question insinuate into the professional condition of our time. They transform the worker, respectively, into a porn-actor, porn-user or porn-producer. Everyone casts a glimpse at the screen of a computer, compulsively rippling from one window to another, between a report to write and a Skype conversation with a colleague. It is lodged between current events and the weather forecasts, between a serious hashtag and a ridiculous emoji. This provocative image disrupts the zealous accomplishment of imparted tasks and invites the employee, creative or self-employed worker, through a single click, to open a bubble of pleasure within the space-time devoted to work.

Attention is immediately and therefore totally moved to a sexy slope updated in a showcase of display. It is a pulsating fragment of pleasure that deconstructs and infects the mosaic of tasks, professional functions and even politically and economically acceptable leisure. Pornoerotic pleasure does not invite to mere distraction, but rather to masturbation. Let us not forget that the abstraction necessary to analysis should not distract us from the material plane! This activity, even though it is intellectual, distracts the body from labor by wasting its energy into leisure. It is a time bomb because of its dangerous wandering and explosive effects for the elements that gravitate around it. Being too close to its trajectories, they are necessarily contaminated by this insidious, invasive and contagious presence.

This is not without crucial repercussions on the development of pornographic content. It has to be calibrated according to the accelerated fluidity of electronic communications (Di Marino, 2013). This explains the reduced length of porn videos. They provides instantly the user with what he needs, the substance he longs for. The latest generation of electronic *pornscapes* – even when they recycle materials from other sites or films – features videos of short or medium duration. They do not include typical intervals or transition scenes that can be found in classical pornography (Baudry, 2016; Servois, 2009).

We can argue that, in one way or another, such articulations permeate into the images and into the narratives of the cultural forms that punctuate the rest of mainstream media and everyday life. Advertising, design, politics and television, from *La Ferme aux Célébrités* to the *Master of sex* series, *True blood* (Attimonelli, 2012) or *Californication* (Pireddu, 2015), together with other media, constitute simultaneously the premises and the continuation of the purest and hardest porn universe. In any case, there are no more barriers but instead porosities and reciprocal affinities between porn and the rest of the communicative system.

The multitasking nature of digital culture means that at the same time, through various media, we carry out different actions. While writing, for example, we listen to the

last track of Jamie xx, as we tag the online photographic album of the last party we attended, and book our next transalpine trip while participating in the conversations of our research group. Moreover, this encourages us to pay only partial attention to each of the activities carried out, as they are all interconnected directly or indirectly.

One site refers to another, information leads the user to a new source, a tweet leads to a whirl of voices, and a barely consulted post causes conversations with multiple sedimentations. Then, the captivating image of a banner urges us to Google the technomagic formula “porn”, ineluctable fate of electronic navigation. Wandering from one side of the web to the other leads easily, if not automatically, to a place where our lowest instincts are tickled. It is also where the most marvelous visions of swirling meanderings of the flesh become an inexhaustible transit.

The nineteenth-century voyeur wandered the streets of the metropolis between prostitutes and shop windows. Nowadays, the body of the virtual passer-by indulges in the fascination of digital flesh in which he is plunged (Abruzzese, 2010, p. 207).

Internet emerges as a provocative mesh with infernal veins, iconology and sonorities. Its sparkling images show, as an oil stain, exorbitant bodies, excited neo-satyrs, buxom nymphs, transgender figures and licentious cabotins. They are celebrating a quest for pleasure often coinciding with the crudest expression of Human nature. They use the means of aesthetic shock and slangs which the canons of good taste have long since classified in the registers of the filthy and disgusting. These aesthetic provocations, unlike those depicted in the indecent acts of the avant-gardes of the twentieth century (Abruzzese, 2010; De Micheli, 1986/2005), appeal above all to the senses. They have renounced any conceptual or abstract leverage.

In a pornocultural context, the supply (Youporn, Xporn, Pornotube, Shufuni, Youjizz...) is not only plentiful in the Web archipelago. Furthermore, it permeates the various online narratives, mediatic and urban spaces, whose narratives are, more and more marked, innervated by sexual footprints and *aguichages*. The dynamics of the market thus lead to a spiral where only those who generate excess are heard and seen. It is them who manage to grasp the most precious merchandise of contemporary economy: sensitive attention (Gorz, 2003), empathy and an even scarcer resource, the excitement of the users.

The mediatic scene is a crowded and noisy place populated by old and new pornographers: *spin doctors* of politicians, creative publicists, storytelling demiurges (Salmon, 2008). They are able to endow any object, body or experience with an exciting biography. There are also the post-journalists of the web 2.0, who are none other than the users of social networks are ready to use any object, body or experience to gratify their morbid scenographic drive. Finally, there are the terrorists of ISIS, who exploit the spectacular devices of our culture (De Sutter, 2016) with the unconscious and sometimes inconsiderate complicity of the media and Western cybernauts, as they try to impose their discursive order of a spectacular economy of catastrophe².

² Concerning the relationship between media, catastrophe and imaginary in contemporary culture, we refer to the doctoral thesis of Bertrand Vidal, *Les représentations collectives de l'événement-catastrophe : étude sociologique sur les peurs contemporaines*, Paul-Valéry University, Montpellier 2012.

We have to remember the recent overexposure on television, but especially on social media (mainly Facebook and Twitter) of the macabre images of dismembered bodies, swollen and profaned. They were photographed or filmed in Nice on the *Promenade des Anglais* the night of July 14th 2016 after the attack claimed by ISIS. They were less a representation than a hyper-presentation. Far from being foreign to our discourse, this obscene *mise-en-scene* of corpses is the dark side, the most sinister dimension of the porn culture that envelops our epoch.

By using and abusing the body of others, that had been already consumed by the homicidal anger of Mohamed Lahouaiej Bouhlel, the *mise-en-scene* transmutes it into media material. It shows the emergence of a type of relationship undisclosed until then: a private mode of distance and abstraction. It is marked by an empathy that is at the same time very human, filled with compassion and emotion, and post-human, as it persists in the reification that it implements, to assimilate human life to the others things of the world.

DAILY LIFE, THE OBSCENE AND THE TRUTH

Perhaps the definition of obscenity would then be the fact of becoming real, absolutely real of something that had been metaphorized or had a metaphorical dimension. Sexuality always has a metaphorical dimension as well as seduction. In obscenity, bodies, sexual organs, the sexual act, are brutally “staged”, and immediately given to see, to devour. They are absorbed and resorbed in the same stroke. It is a total acting out of things that are usually subject to a dramaturgy, a scene, a game between the partners. There is no game, no dialectic nor gap, but a total collusion of elements. (Baudrillard, 2000)

The communicational system is supposed, according to its pioneers, to guarantee the triumph of Western science and conscience (Lévy, 1994). Nevertheless, the obscure side of humanity, its cursed part, proliferates and expends within its bowels. This is one of the most meaningful paradoxes of our time. Cyberspace and its techno-societal derivations thus exacerbate in a barbaric way the burden of sensual pleasure, which the hard core of modern culture has simultaneously stigmatized and attempted to domesticate in order to use its living energy to the benefit of her system of power and knowledge. This process is microphysical, as Foucault (2004) argues, that is to say, invisible to all those who seek social mutations in revolutionary uprisings or within the great works of culture.

The network has mobilized and continues to reflect and exponentially multiply sensitivities and imaginaries that were hitherto relegated to the margins of history (Susca, 2016). It is the scene of a generalized body-to-body where both sex and violence cohabit frenetically, together with all the iconology of sperm, vaginal secretions and blood that come along. In addition, blatant metaphors of the liquefaction of humanism constitute both dawning promises of jubilation and warnings about the progressive decadence of

the West. Thus, through all these sarcasms addressed to good taste, these orgiastic rituals and *debauches*, electronic sociality (Casalegno, 2007) deploys itself. They manifest festive effervescence as they perform a macabre dance, a *carnavalesque* dimension of collective life, updating and dilating forms experienced in the Middle Ages.

The resulting pornoculture permeates all the meanders of the social body and flows in the veins of contemporary societies. It alters their souls and their forms, their ethics and their policies, their aesthetics and their economies. Indeed, electronic media have primarily played the role of diffuse eroticization, typical of everyday life since at least the late sixties (Debord, 1988, 1967/1992). They have subsequently become multipliers of this erotization, spreading contagiously, in real time and on a large scale: between a download and a share, between access and participation, between sexting and matching. It has altered the contents, the containers and languages, to the point of also influencing environments that were previously immunized against the most lustful sex appeal, such as the world of luxury, fashion or merchandise.

Thus, porn is no longer merely one of the structures underlying production, consumption and entertainment, as we have suggested above. It appears above all as an existential paradigm of our time: a lifestyle forged in the flames of pleasure. The body is split between hedonism and cruelty, displays of atrocities and orgiastic rites, throbbing art and butchery. It is inhabited by excesses, which tend, through a vertiginous revival of desire, to flay and burn the flesh. It satisfies the subject as it dissipates; it condenses emotions beyond and below the socially and politically correct.

It is not by chance that the permanent and integral portrayal of pornoerotism – subjective and objective genitive – leads to disgust. It proceeds to the rhythm of continual and irritating provocations. Disgust after disgust, shock after shock, it closes the curtain revealing its deepest content, the most scandalous for us, as sons of modernity and humanism.

The obscene is the truth and the truth is obscene.

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