

Sexuality & Cyberporn : Towards a New Agenda for Research

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Abstract

This article presents theoretical considerations based on cultural analysis approaches to studying pornography and sexuality as a means of starting to suggest a new agenda for cyberporn research. By bringing to the forefront concepts of how subjectivity and sexuality are produced within the computer/Internet apparatus, I hope to diversify the focus in cyberporn research away from social science approaches and pre-Foucaultian assumptions of the subject which obscure understandings of new media and cyberporn use. Through a summary of visual culture studies and reception studies of pornography, I argue that cyberporn must be understood as contingent within the encoding and decoding processes and discourses of sexuality (Foucault) in which it is produced and consumed. My focus here is the home office/terminal as the site of reception/cyberporn use. While there is potential for a great variety of cultural analytic approaches to the study of cyberporn and how new media use influences sexuality, I end with specific suggestions for researching cyberporn reception in the home.

The computer's allure is more than utilitarian or aesthetic; it is erotic. Instead of a refreshing play with surfaces, as with toys or amusements, our affair with information machines announces a symbiotic relationship and ultimately a mental marriage to technology. Rightly perceived, the atmosphere of cyberspace carries the scent that once surrounded Wisdom. The world rendered as pure information not only fascinates our eyes and minds, but also captures our hearts. We feel augmented and empowered. Our hearts beat in the machines. This is Eros.

- Michael Heim. 1993. The Metaphysics of Virtual Reality.

As of October 2001, there are an estimated 169.4 million people with home Internet access in the United States alone (Nielson. 2001). Although the exact numbers are not known, it is certainly true that more people have access to pornography today via the Internet than ever before, and many of them are exposed to cyberporn, intentionally or accidentally, every day or every week.¹ Studies claim that "sex" is the most searched for topic on the Internet (Cooper, Scherer Boies & Gordan. 1999), and as many as one third of all Internet users visit some type of sexual site (Cooper, Delmonico & Burg. 2000). For connected individuals and families the existence of cyberporn cannot be denied, and it is difficult to ignore. There are four angles from which cyberporn, a.k.a. pornography available via the World Wide Web and other Internet technologies have primarily been studied. The first is behavioral-psychological research looking at uses and

¹ I define pornography as any sexually explicit representation. There are several Internet technologies which allow access to pornographic representations such as images, video clips, and text, and sexual interaction between individuals. Cyberporn is most often associated with pornography on the World Wide Web. There are perhaps well over 60,000 adult oriented web sites loaded with many types of pornographic materials (Nua. 1998, Nov. 5). Lane (2000) gives an excellent review of the rise of the web porn industry. Web porn ranges from professional, for-pay site hetero- and homosexual oriented sites, to free 'Thumbnail Galleries' and less mainstream sites representing more marginalized sexualities. Usenet, also known as Internet Newsgroups (see Mehta and Plaza. 1997) is another online source for pornography as are file sharing applications like Hotline, and BearShare. Text-based Internet chat can be used for sexual conversations (often called 'cybersex'), and video conferencing programs/services are now being used for sexual interaction among Internet users and for users to view and direct real-time online sex shows. These sexualized cultural spaces are not mutually exclusive, but 'blur' together at both the side of production/distribution and the site of reception/use, and can also blur in the same way with non-cyber pornography on both sides of production and use.

addiction. Alvin Cooper (2000, 1999a, 1999b, 1998, 1997) has pioneered this field, which essentially has an established agenda for research in attempting to describe the range of “healthy” and “unhealthy” online behaviors, then to identify and to proscribe possible remedies for “compulsive” and “addictive” use of cyberporn. The second area is concerned with the exposure of children to cyberporn. Much of the work considering pornography and children has come out of the effects tradition of empirical media research (*see* Griffiths. 2000). Articles in this category usually offer “solutions” such as adult supervision of children at all times when they are using the Internet and the use of filtering software.² However, children and adolescents are undoubtedly consuming cyberporn without supervision or discussing pornography or sex with their parents. Research must account for this by analyzing what kids are looking at and how it is serving to influence their identities and sexualities. The third area of research takes a political-economy approach, studying cyberporn as a highly networked and self-conscious industry. Fredrick Lane’s Obscene Profits: The Entrepreneurs of Pornography in the Cyber Age (2000) is the best example of this political-economy work. The final area of research that has focused on how cyberporn and cybersex are used by members of identity groups through both social scientific and humanistic approaches. Coming largely out of Computer-Mediated Communication research, such studies look primarily at the textual/verbal discourses of online communities. Most work that has tried to deal with pornography where the Internet is the specific medium in question remains deeply and often problematically indebted to the assumptions of such work – and therefore verbal

² Filtering software, such as Net-Nanny (www.netnanny.com), compile lists of sites rating them according to content including pornography, violence, hate, intolerance, drugs, online games, and profanity. When this software is installed on a computer and set to filter out certain types of material, users will be blocked from visiting those site’s that are listed as having that kind of content.

rather than visual logics. Laurence Otoole's fairly popular Pornocopia : Porn, Sex, Technology and Desire (1998), perhaps the closest thing we currently have to a unified book-length "analytic" work on the topic, is prototypical in this regard (*see also* Woodland. 1995).

The limited scope of existing cyberporn studies suggests the need for a new area, or agenda, of research that should focus on, and apply rigorous and innovative methodologies to, the question of exactly how cyberporn works to produce and maintain sexualities. Considering the fact that we are dealing with multimedia, hypermediated visual and tactile experiences, not just text-based social spaces, there are many important and interesting questions that need to be addressed considering the current state of cyberporn in society. Does increasing acceptance and proliferation of sex on the Internet and TV signify that we are entering a post-pornographic era?³ How are these widening pornographic spaces affecting individual formation of sexualities that are negotiated in increasingly heterogeneous sexualized spaces? **This paper offers some theoretical considerations based on socio-cultural understandings of pornography and sexuality as a means of starting to consider how questions like these could be answered within a new agenda for cyberporn research.** Furthermore, by bringing to the forefront concepts of how subjectivity and the sexual subject are produced from theoretical perspectives within visual culture studies I hope to shift the focus away from social science approaches and also pre-Foucaultian assumptions of the subject which obscure understandings of new media and cyberporn use. First, a summary of visual cultural

³ What I mean by post-pornographic is a technological and discursive era when the definition of pornography has expanded beyond its own descriptive coherence. Linda Williams has argued that society might be entering a post-pornographic era where sexually explicit representations are no longer ascribed to secret and limited domains and are no longer always kept away from the larger population by taboo and regulations. She follows the work of Walter Kendrick (1996) in this reasoning.

analysis approaches to the study of pornography is given to help inform a new agenda for cyberporn studies and to introduce a second area of focus which can be called porn reception studies. Here, several theories and observations are articulated in arguing that the processes and contingencies of reception are important considerations to be studied towards understandings of (1) how and why cyberporn is integrated into daily lives in different ways, and (2) how the subject is always formulated – moment to moment – within these contexts of the moral economy of the home and the computer terminal/Internet apparatus. Lastly, a final call for further research within this new agenda for cultural cyberporn studies is issued.

The Cultural Analysis of Pornography : Some Brief Examples

The Web offers sexually explicit materials produced all over the world, encoded within a wide range of symbolic meanings and decoded within an equally wide range of negotiated understandings. Pornographic texts are being used for arousal and pleasure, but these experiences also serve to reinforce sexual and cultural identity for some, while serving to produce new and transitional identities for others. Four scholars whose work are distinguished from other streams of pornography research in this focus on the cultural and historical positionality of pornography are Laura Kipnis, Thomas Waugh, Walter Kindrick, and Lynn Hunt.⁴

⁴ The work of these four authors is not by themselves exhaustive of a particular area of scholarship. They are examples from a diverse field of cultural analyses of pornographic representation. I choose to look at these four because of the influence that each author has had on my understanding of pornography, and because they share an interest in analyzing pornography within the discursive and social terrains of everyday life.

Laura Kipnis has worked to reveal the cultural/social aesthetics of pornography. The principle idea offered in her book, Bound and Gagged (1996), is “that the differences between pornography and other forms of culture are less meaningful than their similarities. Pornography is a form of cultural expression, and though it’s transgressive, disruptive...it’s an essential form of contemporary national culture. It’s also a genre devoted to fantasy, and its fantasies traverse a range of motifs beyond the strictly sexual” (p. viii). Thus, this work offers considerations of the political and aesthetic value of various forms of pornography, such as the marginalized sexuality represented in ‘fat’ porn, and the social causes taken up in the cartoons, editorials, and pictorials of Larry Flint’s Hustler Magazine.

Hunt, Kendrick and Waugh all take historical routes. Hunt (1996) looks at the pornographic novels and political pamphlets during the period of the French Revolution. She finds that while pornographic literature before and during this time was fiercely political, used to defame and criticize political figures, pornography after this period was mostly limited to non-political entertainment. Kendrick’s project in The Secret Museum (1996) is to look at which cultural text have been considered pornographic from the nineteenth century up to the video porn of the 1980s. He reminds us that definitions of pornography are culturally specific and are always loaded with social and political implications; pornography arises at different historical moments to respond to public and private negotiations of what is obscene and what can be made pleasurable. Waugh, on the other hand, has produced a published archive of homoerotic, sexually explicit images from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Hard to Imagine: Gay Male Eroticism in Photography and Film from Their Beginnings to Stonewall (1996).

Motivated by a Foucaultian project to analyze historical changes in how and why bodies are produced and displayed, these pictures of working class men represent recovered artifacts from a lost history of gay culture and sexuality. Although the work of Kipnis, Hunt, Kendrick, and Waugh vary from each other in their theoretical focus and objects of study, they share a common concern with analyzing pornography within the various cultural constructs and social spaces in which it appears, and in which people encounter it. People have produced pornography in many different forms for many different purposes, and the reasons why people use it or do not use it, and what meanings they make of it, are equally diverse. A new agenda for the study of cyberporn and cybersexuality, therefore, must acknowledge this fact, and must seek to understand the social and cultural matrices of the production and consumption of sex on the Internet.

Considerations for a Foucaultian Porn Reception Studies

Considering that most cyperporn is experienced/consumed in the home (and in the workplace) suggests that reception studies is another area of scholarship that can offer concepts and methods for positioning the reception of cyperporn within the political economy of domestic media diets. With few exceptions, approaches to the study of pornography have failed to take these issues into account. The concept of the “moral economy of the household” offers a very powerful way of describing how patterns of domestic consumption of media are determined by the rules and rituals of media use within each home (Silverstone, R., Hirsch, J., Morley, D. 1994). Issues of access (who gets to use what medium, at what times, under what social situations and power

arrangements) are constantly present within each economy but are also always influenced by social, cultural, and financial components of media production and consumption within local and global communities. In this section, I look to Michel Foucault, Jonathan Champaign, Jane Juffer, and Linda Williams all of whom seek to understand how the social and discursive architectures of places and modes of reception work to construct and enframe sexuality. Champaign, Juffer, and Williams each draws from Foucault's explication of a modern science of sexuality centered around the body to conceptualize the intricacies of the reception of different forms of pornography.

Michel Foucault's conceptions of how sexuality is produced within certain social relations and mechanisms is central to the understanding of how pornography may be vertically and horizontally inscribed within different matrices of society. The focus of Foucault's intellectual project was to locate and describe the nature of knowledge, power, and the individual in modernity.⁵ Foucault considered the notion of 'sexuality' to be a construct of a western bourgeois concern with health and procreation in the nineteenth century. From this concern a science of sexuality developed – *scientia sexualis* – in the form of medical, academic, and legal regulation and interrogation of anything defined as being within the realm of the sexual. In the Introduction of The History of Sexuality (1979), Foucault describes the emergence of a 'technology of sexuality' which submitted the social body and individuals to surveillance thus allowing for disclosures of sexual knowledges of the body (p.116). He argues that in the mid-nineteenth century the family became the main component for the deployment of sexuality: as a site where sexuality is

⁵ In Discipline and Punish (1977), Foucault argues that discipline via training and surveillance are the technologies of (productive) power which provide cohesion in modern social institutions such as prisons, schools, the military, factories, etc. He delineates several disciplinary techniques and modes of surveillance (panoptic) that formulate power relations while producing knowledge and the modern subject.

regulated and observed by members of the family and members of the legal, moral, and medical communities. “We have at least invented a different kind of pleasure” Foucault writes, “pleasure in the truth of pleasure, the pleasure of knowing that truth, of discovering and exposing it, the fascination of seeing it and telling it, of captivating and capturing others by it, of confiding it in secret, of luring it out in the open – the specific pleasure of the true discourse on pleasure” (p. 71).

For Foucault, sexuality is understood as “a historically constructed apparatus: a dispersed system of morals, techniques of power, discourses and procedures designed to mould sexual practices towards certain strategic and political ends” (McHoul. 1997. p. 77). It is the articulation of pleasure, desire, and identity which is produced through relations of power and mechanisms of this technology of sexuality. Two writers who have tried to integrate Foucault’s conceptions of knowledge, power, and sexuality into their work on the uses and reception of pornography in a late-twentieth century context are Jonathan Champaign and Linda Williams. In, “Stop Reading Films: Film Studies, Close Analysis, and Gay Pornography” (1997), and his book The Ethics of Marginality (1995), John Champagne critiques “close” readings of gay pornographic texts within the discipline of Film Studies. As an alternative method of studying gay pornography, he suggests analyzing the sites of reception where these films are utilized: such as the porn video arcade. Certeau’s notion of ‘the tactics of the everyday’ and Foucault’s spatially conceived technologies of discipline-knowledge-power are Champagne’s theoretical tools for gay porn reception studies. He sees adult video arcades as one locality where (homo)sexuality can create spaces outside of dominant disciplinary structures. One observation that Champaign fails to make, however, is that arcades also allow for the

functioning of mechanisms which produce and reinforce gay sexuality and subjects. Whether or not sex with other men is exchanged, gay behavior is normalized, knowledge is produced through surveillance, and pleasures are produced through disciplinary ritual (buying quarters, inserting quarters, flipping through the channels of porn in the booth, masturbation) within the domain of the arcade. The complete range of sexualities, those that are dominant and those that are marginalized in society, are perhaps being constructed and maintained via the relations and technologies of power and sexuality in gay and straight video arcades as well as through the home or work computer. Thus porn reception studies must look not only at the arcade, but as Jane Juffer has done, must consider domestic spaces where sexual representation is mediated through social, cultural, and technological architectures in which Internet technologies are increasingly integrated.

Jane Juffer (1997) has brought the concepts and methods of reception studies to bear on the use of pornography in the home. Her dissertation analyses the use of pornographic texts by women within their everyday lives.⁶ By looking at how and why women use pornography in the form of literature, the Internet, video, and cable television, Juffer illustrates how women “as consumers and producers are increasingly entering and slowly redefining the traditionally male domain of pornography” (p. iv). Following from Foucault’s notion of discourse, she writes:

The objects that together constitute the genre of domesticated porn exist not as a coherent unity but in a field of regulated dispersion. The objects are regulated at a series of dispersed sites of production rules about sexuality and subject formation—government discourse, popular women’s magazines, the gay and lesbian rights movement, etc (p. 36). These texts in their contexts

⁶ Juffer published her dissertation research as a book : At Home With Pornography : Women, Sex, and Everyday Life. 1998.

demonstrate that domestic bliss can perhaps best be achieved through the proliferation of information to sexual pleasures and practices. The pornographic home may well be the real site of family values (p. 39).

To construct a partial understanding of cyberporn reception we can look to the work of Linda Williams's whose 1999 book, Hard Core, has been particularly influential to scholarly understandings of film pornography. She argues that "pornography is 'fundamentally a discourse, a way of speaking about sex' (p. 228) in which patriarchy is over-represented but open to colonization by nonsexist, non-patriarchal voices" (McNair, 1996, p. 91). Pornography is further conceptualized as continually engaged in processes of interrogation of the female body; always trying to get more knowledge and to tell the truth about sex. This concept of the "frenzy of the visible" draws partly from Foucault (knowledge-power and *scientia-sexualis*) but also from psychoanalytic feminist synthesis of Freud's ideas about the origins of male fetishes.⁷ Despite Foucault's explicit project of 'overturning' Freud's repressive hypothesis, Williams's argues that both his conceptions of mechanisms of sexuality and Freud's explanation of pleasure and desire can be used to understand the complexities of pornography:

I call the visual, hard-core knowledge-pleasure produced by the *scientia sexualis* a "frenzy of the visible." Even though it sounds extreme, this frenzy is neither an aberration nor an excess; rather,

⁷ Psychoanalytic approaches to the study of cinematic pornography articulate an understanding of the male gaze which dominates both production and reception practices. Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1988) and her work that looks specifically at porn are some of the best known work in this psychoanalytic feminist line of research. With regard to cyberporn, the majority of online representations are produced for and catered to a heterosexual male audience. However, in general, I see the gaze as more closely tied to a modality of modern vision than being essentially 'male.' Although cultural and gendered practices are very influential, all bodies are objectified – becoming the object to subjective consciousness – in representations across media forms. Women have increased access to the gaze as the operationalized viewpoint and modes of control of web surfing and television use which these particular apparatuses can engender.

it is a logical outcome of a variety of discourses of sexuality that converge in, and help further to produce, technologies of the visible (p. 36).

One of Williams' goals in Hard Core, therefore, is to illustrate the role of the cinema and film pornography in the construction of a particular stage of *scientia sexualis*.

William's explication seems definitely revealing when applied to the Internet where huge archives of pornographic data depicting almost every possible sexual representation, fetish, flesh tone, and body type can be quickly access and consumed. Cyberporn can be seen, perhaps, as always being engaged in telling us the truth about sexuality: and this 'truth' is quantifiable by the mega-byte. In the Introduction to The History of Sexuality Foucault observed that:

the confession was, and still remains, the general standard governing the production of the true discourse on sex... It was a time when the most singular pleasures were called upon to pronounce a discourse of truth concerning themselves, a discourse which had to model itself after that which spoke, not of sin and salvation, but of bodies and life-process – the discourse of science (p. 63-4).

Foucault thus posited the discourses on and about sex within realms of medicine, psychology, Christianity, and the home, as being the principle technologies of sexuality: *scientia sexualis*. Confessions of sexual desires and behaviors solicited in the church, at the psychoanalytic therapy session, and the medical examination all served as mechanisms for rendering the 'truth about sex,' while at the same time inscribing the subject into strategically and historically developed sexualities of dysfunction (perverts, hysterical women, homosexuals) and 'normal' sexualities (heterosexual marriages, sex for procreation and only in the home, non-sexual children, etc.). What Williams' articulation of pornography's obsession with telling the truth about sex calls into question is how pornography functions as a confessional mechanism, working to produce

sexualities within a *scientia sexualis* which has since its inception, perhaps, been in a constant process of hybridization.⁸ Far from acting as a point of resistance to technologies of power and sexuality, pornography has in a way become integrated into them by filling a vacuum of knowledge of the body and of pleasure that the confessionals of medicine and morality could not fill.

Politically speaking, the proliferation of cyberporn is antithetical to conservative interests in safeguarding their license to define and contain ‘the obscene.’ Furthermore, gay and lesbian pornography offers important significations resistant to dominant heterosexual discourses. In both these cases, however, even when porn is socially resistant to certain social power structures, it works as a mechanism that helps to produce specific sexualities, desires, and modes of pleasure. Foucault observed the multiplication of pleasures produced via the new knowledge created by the *scientia sexualis* of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (p. 71). Looking to the Web, we can observe a similar multiplication of pleasures in the heterogeneous bodies and sexualities available. The Web browser can function just like Prince Mongogul’s magic ring, eliciting the truth of sex in whatever fashion or fetish is desired.⁹ The truth that is revealed by porn is not only carnal, but we can in fact posit the ‘truth’ of pornography as possibly functioning in three areas: (1) anatomical – descriptive of bodies, desires, and behaviors; (2) political and social ‘truths’ which can be divided into two parts: that which can be drawn about through deep readings of the text, and that which we come up against in our reactions and

⁸ This process of hybridization can be seen as being possibly facilitated by global changes in cultural spaces and social organization in the last half century couple decades. However, this article does not attempt the rigorous analysis needed to provide evidence of specific micro or macro ‘shifts’ in the *scientia sexualis* as a phenomena of Modernity.

⁹ This is a reference to Denis Diderot’s 1748 novel *Les bijoux indiscrets*, (The Indiscrete Jewels). In this book, the genie, Cucufa, gives the Sultan a magic ring that makes women’s genitals tell the Sultan the truth about their desires. Williams (1989) uses this as a metaphor to describe how the articulation of sexual ‘truths’ are produced in hardcore porn films.

uses of pornography; and (3) the ‘truths’ of the architectures of knowledge and technologies of power and sexuality which pornography as a participant in the construction of the subject’s desire and sexual identity works within. Thus, the truth being told is not always a literal one, although most commercial pornography seeks this as its preferred reading. Women do not lie around, spread-eagle, waiting for men to fuck them, as many main stream, heterosexual, porn industry representations suggest. Pornography not only shows the naked body, discarding the symbolic and physical clothes that traditionally obscure/cover sex(uality), it also reveals and affects the ‘truth’ about the sexuality and desires of those who see it and seek pleasure and those who feel embarrassed, dirty, or violated by it too.¹⁰

More so than anatomical truth and truths about desire, porn can be understood as revealing the technologies and politics of sexuality within peoples’ sublime reactions to it. Looking to Roland Barthes essay *Le plaisir du texte*, in which Barthes describes sublime ecstatic movements of pleasure (*jouissance*), Jameson posits that it is important, “to restore a certain politically symbolic value to the experience of *jouissance*, and to make it impossible to treat the latter except as a response to a political and historical dilemma, whatever position one chooses (Puritanism/hedonism) to talk about that response itself” (1983. p. 9). Thus, regardless of whether one is aroused, or appalled, the plethora of ‘teen’ porn on the Internet, for example, can remind us that not only is adolescence largely about the emergence and production of sexuality, but also that adolescents are, and always have been, inscribed into spaces of adult sexuality, both voluntarily and not so. Our individual reactions to porn also reveal something about the

¹⁰ Although I am trying to make a point about how porn solicits reactions, not all pornographic material causes reactions at all times for all people. Reactions are always contingent on the moments of exposure and the power relations that they take place within.

mechanisms of sexuality and relations of power that have served to produce reactions of pleasure and desire to some, and shock or repulsion to others. Exposure to pornography both elicits moments of reaction and produces the subject at the same time. Porn serves as a mechanism within a technology of sexuality by eliciting these responses while also attempting to solicit a preferred reading for its text – thus, along with the broad socio-cultural and political economic discourses that it is embedded within, encouraging future encounters with pornography.

Since Hard Core, Williams has tried to move away from psychoanalysis as an analytic basis for understanding pornography. “What we need rather,” she argues, “is a model of vision that can explain pleasurable sensations that are primary to the experiences of viewing images without, implicitly or explicitly, judging them as either perverse or excessive” (Williams. 1995. p. 6). To start this project, she looked to Jonathan Crary’s book, Technologies of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Ninetieth Century (1990). In this work, Crary describes the historical period of scientific studies of vision and light inspired by the *camera obscura* as initiating the modern epoch of vision where sensations are produced by, rather than external to, the body.¹¹ Williams applies this notion of sensation to manually operated visual technologies like the kinoscope. The totalizing experience solicited when using one of these machines is a:

‘carnal density’ of one kind of modernist and postmodernist vision: an ecstasy that is in the body but produced in relation to the image...touch is not dissociated from sight; sight engages carnal

¹¹ Aristotle observed a camera obscura in its simplest form: the physical phenomena of an image being displayed on a white surface that is placed at the focal point on the other side of a hole that light can shine through. Later in the sixteenth century scientists used camera obscura devices with lenses, like the telescope, to make observations. This led to the development of modern camera obscura based technologies like the camera. Ken’s Hillis’ Digital Sensations (1999) also offers an excellent account of the camera obscura and other visual techniques that situated the metaphysics and metaphors that shape our modern obsession, vision, and engagement with new media technologies.

density and tactility as well as gender and sexuality, precisely because it is decentered and ‘unloosened’ from a unified field (p. 15). Just as modernist vision in general entails a new awareness of the body’s own production of perceptions, so in the flipping, cranking, and manipulation of cards the body itself becomes a machine producing views. This body moves, and is in turn moved by, the machine (p. 20).

Thus, for Williams the way people consume and experience visual media, particularly pornography, is tied to “the tactility of the body’s engagement with the particular apparatus of vision” (p. 17).

This acknowledgment of the importance of understanding the ontology of media reception can be a powerful tool for helping to understand the intricacies of people’s uses and experiences of pornography (and in this case cyberporn) – particularly when fortified by some of Foucault’s notions of mechanisms of discipline. Foucault (1977) writes in Discipline and Punish:

Our society is one not of spectacle, but of surveillance; under the surface of images, one invests bodies in depth; behind the great abstraction of exchange, there continues the meticulous, concrete training of useful forces; the circuits of communication are the supports of an accumulation and a centralization of knowledge; the play of signs defines the anchorages of power; it is not that the beautiful totality of the individual is amputated, repressed, altered by our social order, it is rather that the individual is carefully fabricated within it, according to a whole technique of forces and bodies (p. 217).

Certain mechanisms within the ‘technique of forces and bodies’ affect the body and the subject as the individual interacts with machines within ascribed spaces (p. 140-153).

The computer room/office within the home is such a space. The postures and gestures of the body at the desk/terminal are routinized. The hands are always busy with the mouse

and or keyboard. The architecture of the operating system, applications such as web browsers, and web sites themselves also inscribe specific disciplines and discourses upon the subject's hiatus in cyberspace. All of these various mechanisms are constantly producing knowledge. Just as the panopticon generates knowledge about the prison's inmates and medical science generates knowledge of the body and the psyche via various forms of 'confession' and inspection, your browser creates caches of information from sites you have visited and web servers create cookies and log files of which pages you have been to, as well as the sites you have previously visited. If you ever enter your email address on a web site, an electric member profile is often created from all the information you supplied, and this profile is often sold to other companies who send you unsolicited email. In Foucault's work, technologies and mechanisms of power and sexuality generate knowledge of the body – knowledge that is then dispersed upon the body and within social disciplines and relations. Thus, although the knowledge generated through computer and Internet interactions does not gather around the body in quite the same way Foucault describes, as with our knowledge of sexual development and the functions of the genitals, but information does gather and linger in the extension of the body, the machine: the computer/Internet apparatus that, functionally, you cannot separate from the body during times of use. These information-gathering technologies conduct their surveillance on the body's representation in digital space, the subject. For the panoptic eye of cyberspace, which cannot observe or know about the body, therefore, the subject, within its cyberspace/Internet terminal discourse, is only defined and known by its digital footprints in the virtual snow: the chain of locality/consciousness recorded in databases showing where it has been. These new types of knowledges have many

potential applications in research, and are already being used in the study of online behavior and discourses.

From this theoretical position, traversing the web of cyberporn in these disciplinary spaces may enhance the ‘manual pleasure’ of a mouse-driven search for ever-greater carnal density. Many of us, perhaps, have been pre-conditioned for this cyberdrive with the push-button economies of video games, and more importantly, remote-control cable television. According to Freud desire can never actually be satisfied. The simultaneous madness and glory of navigating ‘so many channels, but with nothing on’ is caught up in the insatiability of desire. The insane speeds that channel surfing can achieve can be seen as part of the audiovisual pleasure produced in the search for a ‘something’ that is desired, but often not so easily described or found. When you are channel surfing rarely do you ever find exactly what you want, but the possibility of doing so combined with the manual pleasure/control of the search keeps us clicking. On the Web there is a vast number of channels to choose from, yet the number of web sites is so great that the idea of ‘choice’ does not seem appropriate because what we actually do is search, wading through millions of documents, images, shops, and homepages to find what we are looking for, what we desire. Even when what we want is not sexual, the Eros of computer/cyberspace is always present (Heim. 1993). Whether we want to be informed, entertained, social, intellectual, artistic, amazed, or turned on, we can turn to the Internet to find satisfaction in multiple ways. Often this involves multi-tasking and sometimes unintended discoveries. The email application is set to retrieve, music is being streamed through the computer to the speakers, and your browser is reaching out into cyberspace seeking various knowledges. In another browser window you are

clicking-through hyper-text links; you are engaged, body and mind are both animated and active.

Some web users might not venture far beyond a few sites that they are familiar with, but for others the Internet has replaced the television, the radio, and CD player, and in some cases face-to-face contact, as the preferred media companion with whom a great deal of time is spent. Following Williams and Barthes, the busy navigation/negotiating of the simulacrum experience of *cyberpornotopia* – particularly when the mechanics and sensations of masturbation are at play and numerous popped-up browser windows are open, all displaying a variety of media textures, orifices, and flesh tones – may often exist in sublime moments of *jouissance* where ‘the frenzy of the visible’ describes a visceral unity of subject and cyberspace, body and machine. These pleasures, which in other contexts are sought through religious fervor, passionate embraces, drug experiences, video games, etc..., are sought out from different personal localities for their life affirming qualities. Perhaps they are therapeutic or coping performances in this way, reacting against a simultaneous fear of the nothingness of death and the uncertainty and pain of life. Yet with cyberporn and in the ways the Internet and new media are inscribed within many discourses (and only for some in use/access) of everyday life, the discursive and ontologic engagement with machines/media apparatuses signifies a difference from other types of metaphysical and pornographic experiences. As Michael Uebel (2000) writes, there is a pressing “need to explain how current technologies are suspending subjects...between a melancholic ‘control society’ and a utopic ‘posts-media age’” (p. 6). Uebel’s fascinating essay “Towards a Symptomatology of Cyberporn” draws from Deleuze and Guattari’s conceptualizations of desire and masochism to argue that

cyberporn is a formation of postmodern, sexualized publication of desire, “condensing them, and then redeploying them across the male body at the points of its connection to technology” (p. 9). While the research interests and theoretical explication of cyberporn expressed in his article are quite different from those presented in this one, Uebel does understand the computer/Internet apparatus and its implications (for access, increased diversity, interactive and on-demand multimedia, and a new tactile and in some ways cognitive relationship with the *screen*, cultural objects, and digital social spaces) as being what is ‘different’ about these technologies and more specifically, cyberporn vis-à-vis earlier forms of pornography.

Through an intimate relationship with sexuality we may argue that pornography brings us up against both the epistemology and ontology of perception and the symbolic and biological primacy of sex. Some of the research reviewed above hypothesizes that representations of sex excite, arouse, or disgust us; they illicit responses; they also help to produce our sexualities and subjectivities; and they are created and used within, and as, various historical social and cultural discourses that contextualize the media/apparatuses that porn is experienced within. These issues have not been newly introduced by cyberporn but rather what is offered is a variety of contexts and contingencies, some ‘new/different’ others ‘old/the same,’ to analyze. What is new is cyberporn’s Triple-A-Engine of Access, Affordability, and Anonymity (Cooper. 1998); the vast social, cultural, and hybrid spaces and sexualities within which cyberporn can be consumed and produced; and the carnal density specific to our relationship with a specific apparatus, the networked computer and other new media devices, a relationship which is further fetishized through techno-evolutionary discourses developed in popular and academic

discussions of cyberspace and the Internet. What is old about cyberporn, i.e. the elements that cyberporn shares with earlier forms of pornography, is many (but not all, or even perhaps, most) of its general contingencies that influence the formation of sexuality and subjectivity. Furthermore, it is important to remember that many cyberporn representations are appropriated from magazines, CD-ROMs, and video porn. All of the researchers mentioned above who specifically studied porn analyzed it as forms of visual culture. In utilizing these authors' works, I argue that in many respects cyberporn is more like other types of pornography than it is not; albeit that the differences, such as the total apparatus of computer/Internet technologies as well as the discourses of new technologies and other reception contexts do deserve rigorous analysis.

Conclusions & Suggestions for Further Research

New communication and information technologies, and the discourses and institutions that permeate and promote them, are changing domestic media diets in connected homes. Identity and sexuality are being constructed within the architecture of a *scientia sexualis* of the moral economy of the networked home which is whirling through the spaces of signification of cyberspace like Charlie in the Chocolate Factory, each to her or his own delight. It is to this phenomena, where cyberporn is caught up within multiple spheres of influences and uses that a new agenda for research can begin to address some of the challenges Michel Foucault offers in the History of Sexuality.

Referring to mechanisms within the technology of sexuality he writes:

[w]e need to take these mechanisms seriously, therefore, and reverse the direction of our analysis

. . . we must begin with these positive mechanisms, insofar as they produce knowledge, multiply

discourse, induce pleasure, and generate power; we must investigate the conditions of their emergence and operation, and try to discover how the related facts of interdiction or concealment are disrupted with respect to them. In short, we must define the strategies of power that are immanent in this will to knowledge. As far as sexuality is concerned, we shall attempt to constitute the “political economy” of a will to knowledge (p. 73).

In attempting this mode of analyses scholars should not only be concerned with describing the strategic architectures and significations that affect sexuality, and thus the multidimensionality of pornography, but Foucault’s attention to technologies of knowledge-power acknowledges that such processes, and phenomena like cyberporn, are always likely to be immersed within a whole range of broader discourses and mechanisms. This agenda should thus also seek to be informed by how cultural products are weaved into social fabric and everyday lives through emerging forms of social interaction and immersing media experiences. Although mouse-driven quests for knowledge merge in and out of pornographic zones and sexualized discourses, identity and the subject are always being constructed; mechanisms of discipline created through Internet terminals, software design, and the moral economy of the home are always at play albeit in different ways and with various possible outcomes. Therefore, this agenda for the study of cyberporn should be set within a broader search for understandings of the social and cultural implications of networked communication and information technologies. With this said, however, a point must be made to argue against research practices which privilege the Internet/Cyberspace in theory or method. Although this paper has considered some aspects of cyberporn which are different from other types of pornography, there are just as many similarities of form and use with other types of pornography that have been discussed or implied. Otherwise, advocating new

applications of modes of cultural analysis that were used to study film, print, and arcades would not make sense. Furthermore, scholarly studies of Internet use too often mark a false dichotomy of online verses offline. Really the ‘online’ is just a subset of the ‘offline,’ of the whole range of social and cultural interactions – a fact that reception studies helps to foreground.

This paper argues that an agenda for the study of cyberporn must consider what is going on at the site of reception: Are people browsing the Web together? Are individuals able to have long browsing sessions alone, and if so, do they talk to others about these sessions? Is the viewing of cyberporn a hidden, or discussed use of the Internet? What varieties of cyberporn are consumed by individuals? And which users consume other types of pornography as well, or only consume cyberporn? By locating a performative agency in the body’s role in the reception of cyberporn or other Internet media, an explication of the carnal density of mind/body-cyberspace/computer experiences may help to bridge the gap between pre-Internet porn theories and attempts within critical new media studies to describe how interaction with/in cyberspace is at the same time different in some ways from the use of other media but also similar or ‘the same’ in other aspects. A theory of carnal density can place the focus back at what is taking place at the site of reception, the home or work terminal, but it cannot by itself provide evidence of what is happening at the site of reception and how this influences the construction of sexuality and subjectivity. Thus we must find new ways, or apply old ways, of ‘getting into’ the home, work, and other environments of new media use. Looking at the intersection of representation and reception, cultural analysis can also play a major role in this agenda. To begin with, future studies could consider in what ways cyberspace and the

pornographic and sexualized areas within it are heterogeneous (postmodern?) spaces vis-à-vis the more traditional social organization of the sexual. In fact, we may find that the 'more traditional social organization of the sexual' is in many ways already in transition, and 'cyberspace' and 'cyberporn' function as metaphors which seemingly describe the totality of heterogeneous cultural and sexual spaces within the discursive field of cultural commodification and techno-utopia fetishism.

The cultural and social spaces available via these technologies may be vast, diverse, and intermingled, but they are also understudied from critical cultural viewpoints. Further research can describe and chronicle these spaces, and how and they interact with non-cyber spaces, discourses, and experiences. With this said, it is likely that attempts at deploying methods within a porn reception study could be very challenging precisely because of the politics of the domestic economy of the home and the possibility that cyberporn consumption is a hidden or at least individual practice. One approach could be to perform an extensive study of Internet use in the home deploying both observation and surveys of which one component could be concerned with the use of cyberporn. Browsing of porn sites thus might not be observed but the practices of use and the moral economy of each household will be while individual surveys might reveal hidden uses like the consumption of pornography online. Furthermore, software installed on all Internet terminals in each house could monitor all applications used and sites visited. Self-report surveys have been used by Cooper to distinguish between heavy and moderate users of cyberporn, but the use of more qualitative methods like long interviews and extended qualitative surveys might allow for collecting data to answers questions on if and when couples browse adult sites together, the types of sites that couples and

individuals prefer, the variety/types of pornography that are viewed, differences among genders, as well as for research focused on specific groups of women, gay, lesbian, and other cyberporn users.

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