

POV paper

Articles and texts written between 2015 and 2018 under various different aliases, by Mathias Clivaz.

Translated by SJM.

POV #4 : Arousal and shame in porn culture

Know your shame

POV #5 : Sex-positive (disambiguation)

The Sphincters of perception

POV #6 : Life on another planet is difficult

POV #7 : First comes practice, then comes law

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<http://dualroom.ch/work/>

<https://fdsfestival.ch/>

POV #4

AROUSAL AND SHAME IN PORN CULTURE

By Eskar Loop

To undertake a “critique” of mainstream porn is to propose a filter [SKIN]; to create a perspective that will sort through the images showcased by this type of production, and make us question the behaviours inherent to its consumption. Not that consuming porn necessarily means reproducing the actions therein [LIGHT], but foremost that something happens *when we look at them*.

Arousal, yes, but of what ilk? Our sexual preferences are the result of the body becoming aware of itself; of finding ourselves throughout the experimentation of how we desire to feel and be felt. Thus emerges a structure of appraisal, which pronounces qualities and produces a hierarchisation of tastes. In this regard, although porn can be a door opener inasmuch as it tenders to the eye a glut of creative and versatile works, it is also a tool of standardisation and control insofar as it distributes roles according to lines of exclusion/assignation, endlessly self-regenerating within a specific apparatus. — Is anyone wielding this tool? *Everyone*, says everyone. — Present company excepted? Surely you must be hiding something... This our manner of thinking — in which we lean towards the largest common denominator — is what enables us to conceive of such a thing as a *normality*. It is not a question of lawfulness or the common good, but of how we each envision others to be. The question is thus no longer what we watch, but when. When I set my gaze *before* the action, I am effectively reducing the world of my experience to the preemptive contents of my vision. In that case, the destruction of appraisal brought about by standardisation is also the destruction of the consubstantiality of the individual and the social: if there is no more appraisal, the individual and the social are out of each other’s field of vision. Yet it is the body - precisely because it is the locus in which these dimensions can fathom each other - that best resists this destruction. Standardisation consequently attempts to humiliate the imagination, in order to compel the mind to stifle the body. The perpetual floodlight directed at the body [MEAT] thus amounts to its obliteration, and to the creation of a *nulle prosequi* in the jurisdiction of desire.

Zum Beispiel. Mainstream porn produces a standard apparatus which couples a scenic action comprising of *n* persons with a pseudo-referential position of the spectator as exclusive voyeur. Bodily expression becomes an enactment of the system; from the outset, the accent is on the spectator’s expectation of finding something *arousing*, inducing the following circularity: that which is not arousing, is not porn. Constantly solicited as a third party (excluded/included), the spectator thus inserts himself between the camera and the “arousing”

image. The fact that the staging offers itself up *as* staging, as a phoney scenario, and thus tends towards a zero degree of representation, reinforces the totalising dimension of the spectacle: everything presents itself as immediately assimilable [THE REAL]. It is within this coalescence that the spectator evolves and establishes distinctions. Certain scenes provoke a catharsis, others a mimetic desire, others a feeling of disgust, etc. and we commute between these functions of affect. We thus experience a form of activity — limited though it may be — which is strengthened by the technologies that mediate this experience. Indeed, from the outset we are a *spectator-operator*, who can slow the action down, rewind, skip forward, loop, cut: each person creates their own edit. There follows a separation from the meaning as narrative continuity (as story and as production), setting itself up instead as a performance, adjoining realities conceived of in their deconstructibility. We think of ourselves as the creators of meaning. In this sense, the will to understand what arouses us in porn belongs to the people who produce porn - only rarely through the gaze alone - and are struggling with a will of their own, within a disjunction: the spectator makes his eyes disappear, in order to be, at the moment when he is looking, an all-powerful gaze [CONSUMMATE]. Thus we always consider the other to be too slippery when we attempt to focus, or too sharp when we are surfing on the wave. We make it known, we make it felt, this inadequacy. And this disjunctive reflex deterritorialises itself through an affect which is revealing of this impotence: shame. In a society where the sense of community has changed fundamentally, where isolation has become the rule rather than the exception, shame has replaced culpability as the dominating collective affect. Through it, at any given moment one is permitted to invoke the gaze, not of God, but of others; however, whether alone or in company, it always boils down to a preemptive gaze “of the others”. If God as a supreme authority is dead, then the justification for a certain type of community and its goals has disappeared with him; and where culpability used to come into play, now comes into play the asymptotic shame of not being able to be God, that is, not being able to be together [TABOO IS SKIN DEEP]. Scopophilia would thus become coupled, in a capitalist environment, with a drive that I would call *pornic*, and which has to do with the manner in which shame is integrated in order to produce an arousal which has itself become normative.

We generally believe that watching porn consists of watching something that arouses us, in order to satisfy an urge. I rather think that we are aroused *at* watching something, that we are aroused in *being able* to arouse ourselves. Let us take a detour via the political: whereas the majority (“everyone”, sic) declare pornographic images to be shameful, pornophiles brandish these images and declare them to be admirable. From this conversion emerges a pleasure that will become the main characteristic of the *pornic* drive — its consumable part — which therefore involves shame in a constitutive manner: if there is no more shame, it ceases to wield any influence. Through the conversion of a pattern of shame into one of pleasure-taking, the individual thus experiences his power to admire in a paroxystic manner [GOD IS IN THE TV]. But how does this qualify as a drive? Insofar as we recognise that it contains a repeated motif, a desire that creates the conditions of its own perpetuation: it is “perverse” in this precise, non-moral, sense because it diverts the ebbs of desire in order to trap them inside a loop. In light of

this, the pornic drive implies a systematic dimension because it creates opportunities for shame, through any cultural production that might do. The goal here is for the shameful to be pointed out, pre-packaged for consumption. The border between mainstream porn and niche porn is thus constantly solicited: since each instance of gratification requires a dose of shame, we go searching for it ever further, at the very margins of the system. This does not, however, change the nature of the majority norm, since it is actually by promulgating these margins as catch-and-recycle basins that it is able to position itself as norm. At the end of the cycle — ta-dah! — the majority *pronounces itself* pornophilic (this is the moment when “mainstream” is synthesised) and thus offers itself up as the wielder of the power to admire, that is, to look upon what deserves to be done (and repeated). Already it is being swept up in other cycles, which all feed off each other: privacy porn (reality TV, facebook, snapchat, NSFW, etc.), news porn (photographs of dead children, celebrity rags, political scandal-cum-spectacle, etc.), waste porn (the destruction of the planet), ruin porn (the destruction of the present), shaming of all kinds (towards those who won’t allow you to enjoy your normativity), without forgetting poverty, deformity, etc.

These processes concern identities as group effects, which reenact majority normalisation in small circles. The question “who am I?” thus becomes linked to the question “what are my shames?”, inside the larger “with whom am I ashamed?”. Within this sphere emerge an *of whom?* (antipathy) and a *for whom?* (sympathy). The stakes being, each time, to make shame consumable (without which the perpetuation of this mode of subjective production cannot take place): shame speaks out, in what now no longer resembles a confession (“I am also that”) but rather a revelation (“I am what I am”). If we deconstruct this process, we could say that, whereas shame renders its object mute (silence as a pact with the object of shame, “(I watch) porn”), the pornic drive gives a voice to shame (conversion of the pact into a p(erformance)-act, “*I watch porn*”) and perverts this speaking (truth by majority, “we all watch porn”) in a stylised repetition. But, since anything can be trapped in one of these loops, one must already insist on the eventuality that from these infinities might be wrested subversions. Taking advantage of the centripetal force of the drive concerning the motifs of shame, these subversions start out with it, but then give up before the consumption [**ABSTINENCE**], in order to reconnect with the body as a measure of the action. A general impetus, then, towards the concrete, where it is empirically understood that the majority is, in fact, *nobody* (cf. Mille Plateaux, 1980).

The question therefore concerns not a general attitude to adopt towards shame, but of how shames are produced within us related to certain situations [**JUNCTION**]. Reliving an instance of shame can be salutary as much as destructive, *according to the circumstances*. From here on out, the question that is contemporaneous to us is the following: what should be repeated, and how? But the culture of mainstream porn obstructs the emergence of this question, by producing de facto a justification of the shameful thing that was pointed out into existence ; the object becomes divided from its causes (this is the phase of obliteration in the edit) — the only thing that remains is the shame that speaks — of itself (“I am my shame”), while the pseudo-situation

is reproduced in this now vacant space [AN UNCONSCIOUS]. This culture thus inhibits our relationship to our shames and therein alienates individuation: the justification of the relationships of shame passes off as a necessary and perennial cause, that which is actually constantly re-negotiated in the present, when shame is felt and interpreted. One of Lacan's formulas grasps the problem well: "traumatism is not the memory of the *trauma*, it is the *memory* of the trauma." What this means is that there are no initiating situations per se, but only ways of being in the initial. Although certain types of repetition eschew difference, creating the effect of a primary reality offering itself up to us in its infinite virginity [THE UNICORN], it goes without saying that the site of a shame is always already that of a relationship of forces, implying relationships of power, just as it goes without saying that a dominant culture is the expression of those same relationships. This culture is the poison and the stimulant that makes one want to *return to it*. Zum Beispiel: to mainstream porn culture.

So, as in a Faraday cage: safe from electrocution, but trapped nevertheless. From there, three behavioural regimes arise, combining and mitigating/emulating one another. 1) Regime of *panic*: we accumulate as many sites of passage of normative arousal as are needed to shield oneself from the violence of a too-strong discharge, to the point where a network is created, which tends towards supplanting the body. The habit consists in not surpassing a certain dose, in order to maintain the intoxication under the critical level. (a) This omnipresence forces us into forgetting: looking-as-consuming, so as not to have to see anymore, then a folding motion pointing at repression ("isn't this what you wanted?"). (b) This omnipresence is claimed: we attempt to subvert that which has been captured, in a mode of infinite reappropriation, analogous to gentrification since we are ourselves doing the work of the capturing apparatus. 2) Regime of *negation*: we operate a transposition of shame towards an external cause ("capitalism", "porn", "patriarchy" etc.) that becomes the vector of a humiliation, consented to according to an axis of tolerance-indignation. 3) Regime of *operation*: neither fascination, claim, nor purism, the question is no longer whether to give shame a voice, but to make shame speak in the circles within which it moves [CONTEMPORANEITY]. The operator, technician, analyst and subject all at once, subtracts his shames from the drive, and leads them elsewhere, to the crossroads of *what do I do/what do we do*, whose acuity and intensities grow as we practise them.

The instrumentalisation of arousal is a biopolitical issue. In the full light of day, pornic production ultimately justifies its existence because *it sells*, in a capitalist ecstasy; but as we have seen, that is but one stage in the cycle. Furthermore, shame is a vector of drifts, towards fear and towards hate; but being trapped in a system where considerable masses of desires are captured, their consequences only appear as new variables to the eyes of those who speculate on the frontiers of the acceptable. In this economy, we find safety values, first and foremost the archetype of the young virgin, that is, the teenager or first-timer; and prohibitions: zoophilia, necrophilia and paedophilia. But in fact, these also serve on occasion. Beyond the question "Is this the porn I want to arouse myself at?", can also be posed that of the subversion of the dialectic of the centre and of its margins. The aim is to find a continuum, which can steer

through the lines of the system; to think *in the immanence of life as perversion*, to unseat the moralisation/transgression alternation that holds back our shames and stresses their reproduction; and, at the opposite end of what the advertising model encourages, to make the machine malfunction by feeding it with radical strangenesses.

If we need shame to take pleasure in sex, then the power of sex is dispossessed. If however, sex is able to transform shames, through and with the gaze of another [TRUST], sex and sensuality acquire plasticity, intensity, capillarity. Other porns do exist, other forms of sexual arts, innumerable. Images that invite the body to be its own stage, kindle it, enter into play with it. The exercise of the imagination, a constructivist relationship to arousal and the search for that which is unconsumable are some of the keys jingling in the set. They allow us to open certain doors, and to close others.

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POV #4

KNOW YOUR SHAME

You won't find in this list everything that makes you ashamed to watch mainstream porn. You might find some motives of shame concerning other things, such as eating in McDonalds, going for a shit, not having shaved. So go ahead, underline, circle, strike out, add even. And move the statements around, asking yourself which part of you or of the world these motives concern. Some of these statements might not be motives of shame for you. Probably, as you read them, you will understand why these elements are reasons of shame for others; but you won't be able to say whether those people are right to be ashamed of those things, and for those reasons. To conclude in such a way, you would have to be sure that: a) these things exist as they are described (do your research!), b) those people feel shame in their relationships to these things (ask them!), and c) that we are indeed such as we comprehend ourselves (know thyself?). But — ah ! — are we ever right to be ashamed ? The almost-too-easy answer boils down to this : in front of whom. Your partner, your friends, your family, your colleagues, your neighbours, your driving instructor ? Or maybe, more interestingly, in front of what. To feel shame in front of a window. A cat, a pepper-grinder, or in front of the planet. Or in front of the universe. Yes, the grand universe, with its quanta and its black holes.

1. « I am ashamed to watch mainstream porn » because (and/or) :

Women are treated as objects of satisfaction for a male heterosexual and sexist gaze (cf. L. Mulvey), which tends to justify inequalities and sexist behaviours in everyday life / it's full of racist stereotypes about Asian and black women / the same goes for black men / the white male is assigned the role of an agent of the norm / men are presented as dicks on legs, their sensuality is not explored / lesbian sexuality is presented for the sole pleasure of the male gaze / the actors are hugely overexploited / the actresses' bodies are surgically enhanced in order to correspond to the dominant aesthetic criteria (silicone, botox, etc.) / the evolution of the actresses goes through ever more extreme performances, whose marks are exposed in an ostentatious manner and presented as arousing / it's the voice of a man, often off-camera, that dictates the action / it encourages arousal through humiliation (generally of women by men) / the mainstream is reactionary / the goal being to make money, the most common tastes serve as / it is the tool of a biopolitics of pleasure : you are told how to have pleasure... and how to think (cf. P. B. Preciado, M. Foucault) / in the mainstream, the workers are not in possession of the means of production ; these are in the hands of production companies (alienation in the Marxist sense) / it is a pornocracy (Proudhon), "everything is for sale", even and especially that which is most intimate / it is an instrument of American soft power, fuck-ertainment, and other countries

follow suit / “first-timers” are on constant rotation, discarded like Kleenex / it encourages sex tourism / ... / because it turns me on.

2. « I am ashamed to watch mainstream porn » because (and/or) :

The body is shown in an immoral manner (religion, beliefs, culture) / watching porn makes me feel dirty / it influences my imagination / I feel like I am ruled by my sex drive / it is social and mental intoxication / I am confronted with the tastes of others / ... / it turns me on.

3. « I am ashamed to watch mainstream porn » because (and/or) :

I compensate the frustration of not being able to touch by satisfying my scopophilia / I hide myself from the sight of others to see a substitute for what others do not want to show / having devolved from the upright position, I sit in front of my computer, touching myself with one hand and controlling images with the other / I don't find pleasure in masturbating without images anymore / my eyes have become panicked organs, I look for sex everywhere / it changes the way I look at people / ... / it turns me on.

4. « I am ashamed to watch mainstream porn » because (and/or) :

I don't dare to imagine myself doing what the actors are doing / the things I like to watch do not match my sexual orientation / do not match my values / I would rather be with someone than masturbate alone / I begin to see images flashing before my eyes when I make love with somebody / I compare myself negatively to the actors' “perfect bodies” / I have more difficulty dealing with my frustration in a relationship / I raise my level of tolerance toward things I find unacceptable / I am afraid of developing a porn addiction / it makes me light-headed, like a tranquilizer / hiding my porn habit from my family and friends makes me anxious / I need to lie / I am ashamed / ... / it turns me on / or not.

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POV #5

SEX-POSITIVE (DISAMBIGUATION)

By Kathryn Stockhausen

Let's allow ourselves to be naïve for an instant and ask ourselves what exactly is positive sex? Well, probably the opposite of negative sex, as in you're sweet but the sex was really bad: a kind of personal appreciation. With time and experience, you develop a kind of ethics: there is good sex that feels good and is good for you and a bad sex that you avoid. In a nutshell, it's simply a question of criteria and proportion.

Maybe positive sex is the kind of sex that gushes an ecstatic "yes!", that is soaking wet or rock hard, that is perky, dilated, etc? This could be referred to as the positivity of arousal: a term derived from "positivism", the 19th century philosophical doctrine that declared tangible proof as a necessary basis for all scientific knowledge. It is positively there, since it is manifest. But the negative therefore reveals everything for which we do not hold proof, and that contains both our mistakes (the Earth is flat, after Galileo) and our ignorance (the Earth is flat, before Galileo). Sex and sexualities in particular, as well as so many other things in general, are without a doubt subject to both our mistakes and ignorance.

To this, one can add yet another ambiguity: aroused genitals do not necessarily mean consensual sex. Genitals can be in a state of arousal during rape, even when an individual has expressed their disagreement. Certain drugs (cannabis, mdma, ghb, ketamine, popper, cocaine, depending on the individual and to name but a few) can arouse the body regardless of willing assent. The disinhibiting effect of these drugs makes this issue even more complex: for under their influence, an individual may consent to experiences that they would not have contemplated otherwise. For that matter, alongside these primarily chemical vectors, there are many powerful psychological ones: whether derived from ideological or moral justifications, feelings of fascination or shame, or even certain forms of hypnosis, the positivity of consent itself calls for some consideration.

And what about a positive attitude? Go with the flow, chill out, we love a flowing conversation, when body parts slip and glide like soap, when shit goes down in big old blocks. Of course, being positive about everything and anything, is to be stupid at best, but also to be the worst of egocentrics and hypocrites: it's all nodding and withheld opinions so as not to have to deal with what doesn't work. On the other hand, being anal-retentively critical is another form of hypocrisy, in the sense that it avoids any clear standpoint, confining one to a reaction nihilism.

It is amusing to notice that even though we tend to attribute a *positive attitude* to hippies and to personal development, an overwhelming majority of the aesthetics and rhetoric of advertising uses the same tricks: the accentuate the positive slogan leads to a conforming attitude since socially speaking, to see only the positive side of things means to accept all forms of enslavement, as Herbert Marcuse so rightly pointed out. There is nothing different about how political propaganda happens, where smiles are used in turns with phobistics, the science of fear; that, by the way, is quick to use sex and science for its purposes.

And yet, being positive can also mean being enthusiastic! "To have god in one's self" as the etymology says, is something else: it is the passion that allows us to see the potential in things and in people. It is the energy that is communicated and that helps us do those things that we would never have tried if we had looked at them with cold rationality. In this sense, enthusiasm is the opposite of discouragement and disheartenment, and not of pessimism, which is a philosophical stance.

After all this, to ask if you are a proponent or an opponent of sex per se is absurd. If you are a proponent - no need to be aroused right now - it does not mean that you believe it to be the key to all your problems. If you are an opponent, that does not mean that you believe sex is responsible for all the world's problems. What we are lacking here is context, something to flesh out this stance. So here it is: a society marked by the domination of men over women, and in which women have rebelled against this domination. Yet, if we ask them this question: are sex and sexuality areas in which feminism must do something?", every feminist will answer yes. Dissension will appear with the next question: "what should be done?", and this is where being "sex-positive" begins to make a difference.

The convention would be to compound the two words with a dash, so as to make the expression speak itself as one word. It comes from the expression "sex-positive movement". Another way of saying it is pro-sex feminism, which is even more opaque. What does it mean to be pro-sex? Who isn't for sex? But anyway, both expressions lack clarity and precision, so much so that the people who identify as sex-positive find that they often have to explain what this means and what stems from it. This has not always been the case.

The expression sex-positive first appeared in the 1970s and 1980s to qualify a dissident feminist movement. The quarrel was (and still is) about what attitude to take on vis-à-vis prostitution and pornography, fields in which women have historically been exploited to the benefit of men. Feminist tradition - also called radical feminism - believed that the abolition of prostitution of women and of pornography was a *sine qua non* condition to equality between men and women. The idea that pornography was nothing but the continuation of prostitution through different means was put forward. Pornography was equated to prostitution since it offered the spectacle of women as objects to be consumed by white-heterosexual-males who shake their money bags and jizz and project themselves as masters of the future.

But voices have made themselves heard. By pursuing abolition, they say, we are only fighting one battle, we are condemning ourselves to trench warfare, a very real “sex-war” where each and everyone tries to hold their positions and ends up mired in the images of incommensurable differences (something that a book like “Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus” is a paradigmatic example of). That is because they also see in the phallogocentric construction of society - centred on the power of men in charge of the functionalities of language, in institutions, administrations, companies, churches, families -, as much of a will to lock women into the mother / prostitute sex dialectics than a desire to force men into certain types of activities. These activities are made to produce as men the agents of this dialectics, that is, as those through which women pass from one pole to another: marrying a prostitute epitomises this idea, whereas turning your wife out onto the streets to work would be the ultimate degradation.

Given the situation, one can posit that male domination is founded in practices and in representations of the body and of sex, and therefore that this is where one needs to strike, but not head on of course, because men, who do not have other activities to distract themselves, and who do not feel the weight of oppression the way women do, tend to hold back any evolution (this is also the case of some women, since all women are not feminists). What needs to be done step by step is to reinvent sexuality as a whole, gender roles, gender itself, our social organisation, our styles of representation, the entire libidinal economy. The strategy is to voluntarily enter the knot that problematises this power, and from there to draw lines to the out-sides to which to transfer power, so as to *in fine* modify the forces in presence and make society slide into new configurations by sets. We would not be liberated from any normativity absolutely, but rather active in the disposition of the normative through a multitude of sources that operatively make up the system of signs and the interpretative metabolism.

It is a Trojan Horse, in a world where sex is ubiquitous, gushing forward on the momentum of liberalism, trade, advertising and mass media. There are attempts to give positive value to activities that are reputed dirty and degrading, prostitution being one of these: the term *sex work* is preferred when an individual has consensually chosen this activity, and the social benefits of the profession are highlighted. This practical subversion means the person (woman, man, trans*, ...) who “prostitutes” themselves becomes the agent of their work and, on top of that, by a strange marxism, they are also the owner of their means of production: their body and their image; whereas on another front, the prostitution of domination is still fought, that is everywhere where people (mainly women and children but not only) are trapped, alienated and abused. Concerning pornography, sex-positive feminism aims to produce images that shake and fracture traditional representations: (feminine, but also lesbian, gay, queer, pansexual) sexuality is explored, stylisations are experimented, things are hidden, saturated, emptied out, to destabilise our relationships to taboos and to open the creation of a new and dynamic balance. Different modes of exploration feed each other. Alongside straight productions, lesbian porn,

queer porn, you-name-it porn is being developed. Also, in the same emulative perspective, equal rights, equal salaries, equal careers, equal spaces as well as the transformation of the family unit are being promoted, by for example supporting gay marriage and the normalisation of gay and lesbian couples with children.

This valorisation is problematic for several reasons, first because it is recuperated by the other side: - prostitution is great, enrol under the banner of “sex work”, we men will benefit from it, and what’s more, in all political correctness. Many people have spoken out to question the relationship between sex-positive feminism and the capitalist market. If we remember what Marcuse said about conformism and the *encourage the* positive slogan, we can see where the potential pitfalls lie: that “alternative porn” become a consumer product like any other, whose political potential has been completely defused. What’s more, whether in prostitution or in pornography, the search for influence necessarily involves an audience, people who will consume the product. And who buys porn, and sexual services? Statistically, those who have the most buying power, so in this context, men. We have come full circle. - Unless it is a spiral?

Sexe-positive feminism is particularly weak in its culturalist, most de-politicised version, one that concentrates on cultural productions and sees them as an indicator of change. Carried along in the culturo-relativist mainstream, “to each his own”, sexe-positive productions could end up as merely another way of identifying a group of consumers. This is already the case, yet in a changing world, there are no perfect solutions - only opportunities to fight.

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POV #5

THE SPHINCTERS OF PERCEPTION

By Mathias Clivaz

I tell my eyes to sink into the night. I thrust them down the hallway. Am I merely pretending to see?

I follow the corridor, twisting gutlike left then right, past that freezer I never use, and this clock that never tells me the time.

I'm not sure why, but the MDMA is calling me to the bathroom. I feel like taking a shit, and it is because of this feeling that I am now standing here, on the threshold. I open the door and thrust my eyes into the night.

Is it because the anus dilates? Or maybe because different emphases come into play. To empty this part in order to better feel that one, select one's solicitations, prepare for some and welcome others. A honeymoon of the metabolism.

Back in my room I am writing as I come up, eyes closed, my laptop screen too bright for my dilations. I enjoy this blind gravity. My words, in my hands, are out of them. I am writing and that is all. I will see later.

I will write later, in a future too precise to be real; but for now the possibility of a typo is non-existent, and as long as I remain convinced that everything I type is understandable, it will be so - until I am no longer, and it won't. Yet what would happen if in spite of all this I could still be understood?

What is it, in our eyes, that parses patterns? What - is - a bathroom?

Perhaps I would have been about to turn on the light, out of habit, when I would have told myself: no, the glimmers coming through the window are so beautiful, I can make out the trees, and this matte yellow gleam reflected in the mirror above the great sink which I know, but have never felt in all its mass the way I feel it now.

Am I a moth, captive in the gravitational field of this lightbulb shining out from inside a hole? It is black, although I cannot see it - just as I know that I cannot apprehend the rising day, only the elusive lapping of photons in the brook of my retina, that organ older than any metaphor.

I walk towards the seat. Battle of buckles, trousers and pants around ankles I sit over the pool of night, this other kind of night: a night-time water on which my arse, with its hair and its fold-nestled hole, gently blows. Unsegmented by muscle I let myself go.

Cornered by this concatenation, I fall into the contemplation of decadence. An old idea but perhaps not such a shitty one. Observe, please, two categories: civilisation and culture, the former degenerating from the latter. And so we say of the civilised that they have their arse in their head, such is their distance from their excrement, way back there in the back of their mind; they go to the toilet like they go to the cinema, the café or the club; to Thailand, Luxor or

Cannes, tourists in spacious toilets, perfumed promises of a commodious freedom. Their repression is charming and whimsical, and they unwind by aping *Fifty Shades of Grey*. As for the cultivated - keener and more ironic - their head is so far up their arse that they rarely see the light of the day. As it happens, they do not see any use in work other than repression; and if there is no crown on their head, they prefer a whip to a consensus - never ceasing to ripen their free will.

I tell my closed eyes to measure the distance before instinct. I see the Rubicon, and I see Julius Caesar. The great general unseats himself. Suddenly there are ten, one hundred, a thousand Caesars rushing into the troubled waters, not waving but drowning among chaos-headed fish, biting off their heads, last-ditch offerings to the great Venus Cloacina. The shores of the river jaw-buttressed, tongues of water severing sounds, creating cracks for dice to be thrown. *Alea caca est*.

This, surely, is what shitting in the night means, since even the most enlightened arsehole is out of the reach of sight. Is not this pleasing? Yet what of our shit, when it takes the floor and declares: I feel you feeling me, even as you wonder at the feeling.

I tell my shit that I cannot hold onto it indefinitely, just as I cannot hold onto the MDMA. I buckle back up and head to the sink. The skin of my hands, and under the hot water a density, an almost-clamour of seashells where the voice recalls the lost section of its journey in order to exist in the next.

Who will tell the story of all these failed attempts to “see”, to “shed light”? Who will tell all these stillborn eyes?

Enter into a cloud of light and capitulate, O Eye. Forget that you are looking, relieve yourself of your conscious burdens, of all you claim to see yet have not seen for a long time.

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LIFE ON ANOTHER PLANET IS DIFFICULT

An interview of Dr. Alfred Postfreud, by Eskar Loop

Eskar Loop : You have just published a book, “Theorie der künstlichen Realitäten”, in which you propose a new approach for understanding virtual worlds. Perhaps we could begin with something I found surprising: to hear you speak, in this context, of religion, and more specifically what you call *technical transreligiosity*. What do you mean by this?

Alfred Postfreud: You see, at the center of every debate about technologies, there is a sort of visceral ecumenism. A libidinal call to come together, a *will to cum* together. And in fact this is what Christianity has always aimed for. Have you ever heard of the Parousia? It is a sort of infinite collective orgasm imagined by Christians, which shall advene at Christ’s Second Coming.

Eskar Loop: So, after the Final Judgment...

Alfred Postfreud: Exactly. Now for instance, take the American start-up *eterni.me*. They promise to create your “eternal digital avatar”, by gathering up all your photos, videos, social media accounts, telephone conversations, etc. Thanks to algorithms, they are able to recreate your individuality in a digital matrix, so that your great-great-grand-children — or some random stranger — may have a conversation with you in a hundred, or a thousand years.

Eskar Loop : A virtual abolition of death ?

Alfred Postfreud: Indeed. The idea seems to have emerged to conjure the digital graveyard. For example, all the facebook accounts of deceased individuals which remain on the web — ghostly, static, not so different from the photos you would find in a cupboard — except that they are on the net, and so they can be accessed and eventually used, including for commercial purposes. Eterni.me offers to invert the problem, not by creating a web-based funeral service, but by inviting us to stay together in a world where everyone will be present forever. However, this “everyone” constitutes the first crux of the problem. For the experience is not free, and since its public launch in early 2016, the waiting list is already long. Now take the other market of immortality: cryogenics. Prices range from 28’000 \$ with Cryonics to 200’000 \$ with Alcor, for a full body accommodation. A growing market should make these prices fall, making it possible for the middle classes of rich countries to project themselves into a future where clinical immortality will be a reality. Meanwhile, this future will undoubtedly see the deaths of hundreds of thousands in wars for resources and the annexation of markets, thus allowing the aforementioned middle classes to prosper sufficiently in order to buy their tanks. In the end, digital and/or neurological eternity will benefit only a happy few of the post-biological era.

Eskar Loop: It is never a question of “everyone” then, only of a number of privileged individuals. But you maintain that, in our technological paradigm, there is a sort of a drive towards orgasmic symbiosis?

Alfred Postfreud: Yes, and we will have to ask ourselves what our technologies are. But let us first notice two constants. The first is that no one is willing to experience eternity, if it means experiencing it alone. The second constant, is that human beings want to be independent and free in their *identity*. But what is identity? It is the awareness of oneself in context. The awareness that we are alterable and fragile, but also determined by phylo- and ontogenetic factors. Everything that makes us think in terms of beginnings and endings, in terms of what is good or evil. Indeed, it is because our body is “such as it is”, that we can die of poisoning or a heart attack. That is where our capacity to learn comes into play, as well as our memory and our know-how: antidotes and pacemakers. But also those techniques which we name technologies, because they imply a second or even a third level: they are techniques which manage other techniques. This will to cum together, of which we spoke earlier, turns up again in this convergence of techniques. Last but not least, we can also find it in the Anthropocene. This new geological era described by Paul Crutzen is also that epoch where, typically, the metaphors which we invent to describe our lives refer more to human productions than to phenomena or images observed in nature.

Eskar Loop: Among these technologies, there is one which is increasingly making headlines: virtual reality (VR). What do you make of it? With VR, it is possible to immerse ourselves in the body of another, and essentially live our life as if we were in their head.

Alfred Postfreud: It is certain that there is a qualitative leap operating here, since VR is the apotheosis of the *Point of View*: we can inhabit any body we like, we don't have to be “this” or “that”, or only because we chose to be. Until now, this was only open to people with a particularly active imagination, whether awake - alone or with the help of a book, music, drugs - or in their dreams. Now, with VR, anyone can try on different points of view. The great Leibnizian dream is being carried out, with psychosocial consequences that are still difficult to predict; but we can already see its applications from a pedagogical, empathetic point of view, but also medical and professional, and of course in the field of entertainment.

Eskar Loop: And yet everyone will tell you that this is not “real life”.

Alfred Postfreud: As a matter of fact, I don't think this is the problem at all; in a way it is more like the solution. The fact that VR (but this is valid for all artificial realities) is not “real life”, is precisely that which gives us the space to manoeuvre, in reference to “real life”. In other words, if real life didn't exist, we would have to invent it. For what remains essential, is our will to create these kinds of spaces. What is at stake is the manner in which we play within our relationship to identity. And I would like to add: wherever it takes place.

Eskar Loop: This is the epistemological reversal to which you devote a chapter of your book, with the question “when does an artificial reality become the *primo loco* of the production of identity”?

Alfred Postfreud: Yes, that is to say: how I will think about my condition as a human being, starting not from what I see before me, but by positing for example that “Allah created me, he did it with a certain goal in mind and gave me certain rules for life”. Or Buddha, or Nature, etc. Except there is never just one reversal, there are always several, and what’s more they are all intertwined. Typically, there has never been a pure religion; it has always been mixed with elements of popular wisdom, political events, social structures, the climate, etc. The same holds true for technologies, which are, as I said earlier, the techniques of techniques. That is how we can speak of religions as technologies: not as simple tools, but as tool-realities within which we attempt to “live”.

Eskar Loop: So human beings are moving back and forth between “real life” and artificial realities which do not exist of themselves but, as you write, only insofar as human beings open the door to them, intercede in their favour. Are we speaking of something like a “door of the possible”?

Alfred Postfreud: Yes, but a door where the real enters into the possible and finds itself transformed, before passing back through the door in reverse. Because human beings wants to free themselves from their condition, but that is not all: they want to shape what they are! And it is to this will that we owe, since millennia, the creation of artificial realities, of fields where the desire for freedom and independence can practise at full capacity. Take the great stories of pre-historic periods, but also the cosmologies, the first wisdoms and philosophies, all the religions, all the arts, all the sciences: with the intention of understanding the world, of finding truth, of expressing it, we are giving ourselves the means to act within our own experience, by the intercession of elaborate conceptual and symbolic language. Take the example of writing technology: first it was parchment, then came a revolution with the invention of the printing press, then a second revolution with the democratisation of reading and access to books. In both cases, we witnessed an explosion of artificial realities, with considerable psychosocial and political impacts. In this respect, computer science and the internet are at the heart of a revolution of hitherto unseen scope, which is creating havoc with our horizons of expectation and realisation. All of these, therefore, are realities - the “virtual” as well as the “material” - because they impact; and they are all artificial, because they are produced by human beings. I therefore name artificial realities (AR) all that which humans use to modify their experience of the real; they systemise their being with them, until they begin to see these realities as “natural” and take them for granted. You see, these systemisations will result in productions of all kinds: buildings, organisation models, representations, social roles. There are gigantic forces of sedimentation and inertia at work. And of course, there are interests at play which are colossal: computer science and robotics are taking advantage of the favour of the modern States for population and territory control, and of that of the great capitalist businesses, who find therein an improvement in productivity, and a source of information and new markets.

Eskar Loop: So artificial realities are, in the end and at once, what determines our “condition” - through education, assignment of roles, passports, etc - AND what we use to extend our playing space, and modify our identities?

Alfred Postfreud: We produce ARs to “escape from reality”, as we say. That holds true, but as if we went to live on another planet, where we create feedbacks that will return to inform our tastes and our decision making right here. Culture, in the philosophical sense, is this engineering of our conditions of possibility, via productions placed outside of us, and which find themselves, de facto, ahead of the future. We are all, in our own ways, crafters of feedback. We have the possibility to increase the plasticity of our referential modes, in order to weave selected relationships between, for example, an emotion and a way of comprehending and expressing it; a mood and a made-up melody; a body in VR and a sensation.

Eskar Loop: Earlier you mentioned the political consequences, revolutions caused by the irruption of artificial realities, and perhaps we could end with that. Are there risks inherent to this human practice of transformation?

Alfred Postfreud: Yes of course. Take VR for example: it is destined to become a major psychopolitical instrument, just like television, the internet, pharma and porn - to reference Paul Preciado, and incidentally Michel Foucault. But then the problem comes from the fact that we can very well prefer mediocre experiences over demanding ones. VR, like video games, books, or music, opens that possibility. Real life - I mean the total life, which includes ARs - is the most demanding game of all. You can't press reset. And as our tastes develop, they include an instantiation - by creating a new one, but from the inside, *intus et in cute*; like a snake whose every sloughing is the result of a life which has overtaken itself. So on the one side, the ARs are operating at full throttle, and we are afraid because on the other side, on planet Earth, one wrong move can send the whole setup flying. Each and every one is searching for their balance, the right interplanetary dosage, creating spaces to manoeuvre. What matrices for what effects? Into which realities should we project ourselves, in what contexts and circumstances? How should we understand them, what identities should we take on - we who live off the life of human communities and terrestrial ecosystems? It is a war, and it is the only war; it takes place in each word that we use, in each face that we meet, and its goal - immanent - is the determination of the real *in utero*.

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FIRST COMES PRACTICE, THEN COMES LAW

By Alex Weiss and Root Sobiesky

According to Mary Becker, a law professor and coauthor of *Cases and Materials on Feminist Jurisprudence: Taking Women Seriously* (1993), the main point of the patriarchal legal order is the domination of men over other men, the domination of women being a byproduct of this competition. This can be seen in the manner in which courts treat rape and gender-based violence cases, since women who undergo these assaults are systematically discouraged from filing complaints, and face denigration, not only from justice officers, but also from neighbors, friends, and family, as they threaten to tarnish the idealized image of the family (= the patriarchal family). What is important to understand, is that *power*, as shown by Deleuze and Guattari, does not solely belong to the armed branch of the State, but that it “lives thanks to thousands of tiny or ‘molecular’ forms of consensus” (Umberto Eco, 1979). The patriarchy and its laws endure not because of State-enforced laws but because laws follow the practices of each and every individual.

For persons under a certain age – which varies according to the different European law systems – courts can claim “lack of informed consent”. What does this expression imply? First, that the capacity to choose is subject to maturation, hand in hand with a reality where “rational choice” is predetermined by convention. If you are unable to reach these criteria in the “rightful” eyes (of the court, but also of doctors, policemen, professors, etc.), you will qualify as having a lack: an intellectual deficiency, a mental disorder, young age. Let us recall that this idea of “lack” was (and still is) applied to women, who were viewed as unable to decide, as well as to other social groups (= sexism, racism, classism, specism). Thus the State, the protector of the law, commits itself to “informing” those it judges capable and/or deserving of being informed, via education and institutions. Yet, very clearly, we do not give ourselves the means to fulfill this ambition, out of fear that the changes this education would lead to may upset the *status quo*. The case of sexual education is symptomatic: sexual education should be theoretical as well as practical, informative and reflexive, based on a taboo-free relationship to the body. This type of sexual education would eventually entail that sex could no longer be used by industries and governments to intimidate, beguile, or/and control human behavior. Besides, in order to be “informed”, any child should be able to have a reflexive experience of power and its abuses, between persons and between social groups. We’re far from it. The question we are asking is therefore: what, in our social organization as well as in our individual behaviors, undermines or favors our capacity to make choices?

When Nina Hartley explains that before any instance of sexual intercourse, one has to talk and come to an agreement “with [one’s] clothes on”, is she talking about a form of agreement that nudity might threaten? We understand that the criterion is not only clothing, but the fact that speech can exist in a context where the other person is not merely or foremost the object of sexual desire. This starts by setting aside the idea of “possessing” the other person’s body, and by recognizing them as another self; allowing sensual desire to come second, or rather, to be enveloped in another desire: that of the consciousness of sharing. This consciousness expresses itself in words, gestures, and looks, thus producing a space in which each person can make sure at any moment that their voice, as well as the other’s, are perceived as legitimate. A space of rights, the extension of which is continually adjusted. A practice of creating continuities between thoughts, speech, and actions. A circulation between sense and the senses.

Most women have had this experience: because of the way they have been socialized, their male partners take more initiative, thus pushing them to act through reaction, to only have to say yes or no. Men can then be heard complaining (since men complain at least as much as women do!) about their partner’s failure to initiate, despite the fact that they are taking up all the space. “Men” first encounter sexuality in the form of an either/or: either they ejaculate, or they do not. And to ejaculate, only means one thing: to fill up an empty space... You couldn’t make it up! Therefore “men” want to take up space. One consequence is that “women” learn to address them in a language they understand: yes/no, here/not here. To explore the issue of consent, through this perspective, implies taking into account the differentiated understanding of consent that men and women can attain. For every person, the danger lies in conforming to an implicit consensus; the remedy, in sex as well as in the streets or at work, resides in an *active* socialization.

If a person consents to an action, does it mean that they are giving their full agreement to it? Not necessarily. The common meaning of consent is to accept that something is taking place, to go with the flow. It differs from consent as a practice, and is closer to what one does through the effect of circumstances. A person may suffer and still continue: while they do not express their disagreement, consensus prevails. European laws thus consider that consent can be extorted: if someone is threatened physically or morally, and accepts that something is taking place in order to protect their life or the life of another person, no one will think that they are agreeing fully to what they are consenting to do. How can we know whether consent was extorted? To help us understand what is at stake in this question, let’s take an example that is seen as problematic within our society: let’s imagine a woman who is a sex worker in a massage parlor in Geneva. Quite in the same way that a bank employee can *not* give his full, informed consent to the aggressive capitalist practices of his employees and clients, this sex worker can *not* give her consent to the practices due to male domination. The reasons that made her take

up this job are various: the historical, economic, and cultural conditions in which she grew up, her material and psychical resources, her path and experiences; her desires, hopes, and fears. Furthermore, one should be able to know the actual alternatives afforded to her in order to determine how much of a choice she has, and how she was able to negotiate her situation and within what power relation. On the one hand, it is obvious that circumstances extort a part of consent from every human being; but on the other hand, learning and the maturing of one's ability to consent is always shaped in relation to circumstances. Some circumstances are more necessary than others: she cannot choose not to breathe nor to stop eating if she wants to stay alive, etc., but she can in part choose her job, and with that choice come human determinations, in all their arbitrariness. European societies, dominated by the patriarchy, make female prostitution a precarious job, which is then practiced by some women among the poorest, who travel to richer countries or within their own country, according to the distribution of resources. Therefore, we must acknowledge that a woman's decision to take up this job, includes: a) a part of natural extortion, because she has to breathe and eat to survive, b) a part of cultural extortion, because the patriarchy determines the conditions of her work, and c) a part of psychosocial extortion, because she is negotiating her own interest within a framework of affective and significant bonds. In a contemporary liberal society where human beings are obsessed with the idea of their self-determination, point c) tends to be seen as more important than the others, which is quite useful for the enforcers of point b), and silences the questions inherent to point a): how to survive and why.

« What if a model doesn't want to do what I ask of her ? » is one of the questions on the FAQ of the mainstream porn site Brazzers, about their camgirl service. The company answers that considering the sheer number of models « you should always end up finding someone who will fulfill your desires! » — Therefore what matters is not whether a specific person consents, but rather that consent may be obtained by finding the right « model ». Diversity driven logic? No, market driven logic. Where those who have the most purchasing power can assert their desires, and where the others — i.e. women who need an income and perhaps don't have so many alternatives — should adapt in order to « consent » to this demand. Is consent just a marketing alibi, void of any substance? It would be if it weren't for the — *de facto* and *de jure* — « male consumer » at the other end of the line, who ratifies these terms and in doing so validates the domination of men over women.

Consider the case of a person who is about to have sexual intercourse with another person and who, while wanting to say no, does not say no. Is it rape? It is not enough to state that the absence of an explicit yes constitutes rape; firstly because a yes can be extorted; secondly because the absence of proof does not constitute the proof of absence. Conversely, to equate the absence of a no with consent, is to concede too much to the world of proof — the world of discourse — and to leave nothing to feeling and experience. Not saying no can happen for a

number of reasons: under the influence of a threat, or fear, embarrassment, ambiguity, indecision, drugs, social pressure, pressure from family, etc. Some factors can be proven, or at least reasoned; but others have nothing « obvious », since it is about what happens in the inner-self of a person, for oneself. An outsider might ask: should we take this person's word for it? Friends would, family might, but what about everyone else? What about the courts? You can swear that you are sincere, but one might always argue, as would Roland Barthes, that « sincerity is only a second degree imaginary ». Such a situation can lead to extreme isolation; and could lead to re-producing the act, in order to test one's self in defeat, or to exercise the no arbitrarily in order to reinforce the feeling that an alignment between inside and outside is – if only that – possible. Anyone can understand this, since everyone experiences such moments. There are those who deny it. Are they afraid that acknowledgment will remove the advantages that ignorance protects?

Since the advent of capitalism, the contract has become the major legal form of our societies. The contract, by reifying the conditions of possibility of the relationship it formalises, defines the balance of powers, and follows the movement's conservative trend. It's no wonder justice costs money, since wealth is a key advantage in the bourgeois system. Furthermore, any signatory person is supposed to do so « in full knowledge of the facts », grand pillar of modern justice behind which an action will be repeated without ever asking the question of the historical conditions of its becoming. The authors deeply hope that you found food for thought in this article. What to do? That's the whole question.

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