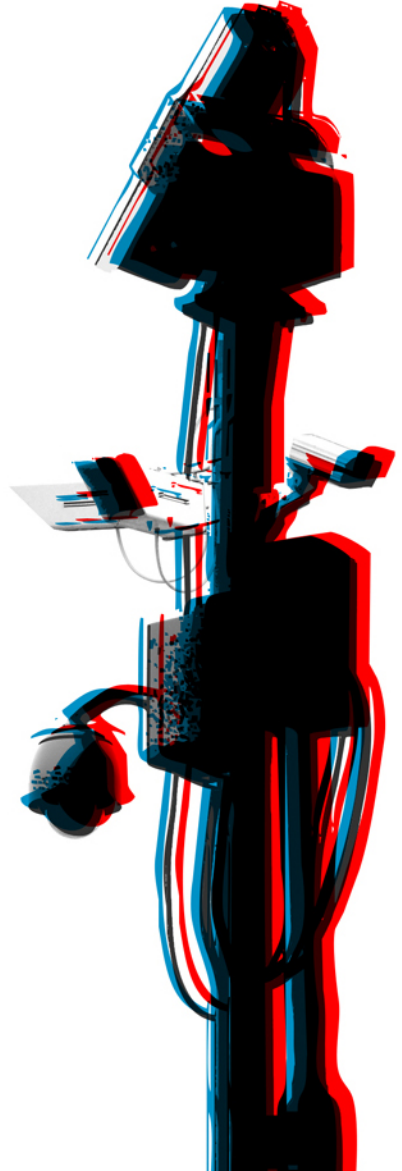


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UNCONTROLLED SEXUALITIES AND UNPALATABLE PRACTICES: BIOPOLITICAL CONDENSERS

Corpus Deleicti corpusdeleicti@gmail.com
(this time, Elena González Polledo, Desiré Rodrigo and Judit Vidiella)

Corpus Deleicti: the Body of Crime and Desire is a transdisciplinary research and production platform formed in Barcelona in early 2004. Corpus Deleicti's first experiment was *Genderlab_Protopoesía_01* (2004), which explored medical imagery and rhetoric and its relationship to pornography. The second, which is in development stage, is *Support Local Porn*, an analysis of the capitalist logic of sex tourism (through the fictitious low-cost agency "Porno Jet") and the re-sexualisation of public space, which generates particular sexual practices in urban contexts. The group's artificial life highlights include their participation in *MIDDLESEX*, *Confrontaciones Sociales Feministas*, *Diásporas Queer y Narrativas del Género*, in Zaragoza, a video-performance at *Fugas Subversivas*, *reflexiones híbridas sobre las identidades*, an exhibition at the Universidad de Valencia, and a presentation and performance at the closing of the seminar *Desacuerdos: sobre Arte, políticas y esfera pública en el Estado Español*, organised by Arteleku. Publications: the catalogue of the exhibition *Fugas Subversivas: reflexiones híbridas sobre las identidades*, published by Universidad de Valencia (2005) with the text: *Corpus Deleicti: Gender Lab: protopoesía_01*, pp. 176-183.

Abstract

Pornography is one of the discourses that regulate subjectivity, the body, gender and desire. Mainstream pornography acts as a control panel that fixes specific identities through heteronormative tasks and programs, defining some sexual practices and body models as acceptable and others as pathological and perverse. Its toolbar produces repetitive and mechanical montages that limit the body, define relationships and invent sexuality by generating guidelines for a (hetero) sexual education that is supposedly universal and true. But these automatic updates sometimes fail.

Keywords

performance, parody, post-pornography, gender, sex, activism, feminism, guerrilla.

Open session

Pornography is one of the discourses that regulate subjectivity, the body, gender and desire. Mainstream pornography acts as a control panel that fixes specific identities through heteronormative tasks and programs, defining some sexual practices and body models as acceptable and others as pathological and perverse. Its toolbar produces repetitive and mechanical montages that limit the body, define relationships and invent sexuality by generating guidelines for a (hetero) sexual education that is supposedly universal and true. But these automatic updates sometimes fail. That's when the game mechanisms create spaces that let peripherals accept the input of new signals, other connections between bodies, desires, practices and positions of the subject. There is a disruption of the binary divisions between natural-cultural, normal-perverse, masculine-feminine... that are contained in the sex-gender division, and the output is sexual DIY, *travolaka guerrillas*, *trans-marica-bollo* festivals, post-operationals and orgiastics that change those bodies of pleasure and crime based on politics and aesthetics, in order to shift the boundaries of pornography towards other folder settings.

Tools: performance, performativity, parody, post-pornography

Programs

The idea, discourse and practice of pornography is framed within certain space-time co-ordinates that determine its effects, uses and meanings. Since its first recorded use in 1857, the word "pornography" has been used to define and embrace different things. For example, the Oxford English Dictionary, tracing its etymological origins from the Greek *porné* (prostitution) and *graphein* (representation), used it for the first time to describe "the life and habits of prostitutes and their customers" (Ruwen:2003). In modern Europe, however, it was used for anti-authoritarian and anti-traditional purposes to parody and criticise power institutions such as the church, the state and the monarchy (O'Toole: 1998). This political use of pornography, regulated because it was seen as seditious, blasphemous and defamatory, rather than obscene, gives way at the end of the 18th century to pornography as we know it today.

Although classifications vary according to who views, produces and accesses material, we could say that mainstream pornography exists in relation to a morality and health regime that answers to the need to control the social frontiers established between the public and private, masculine and the feminine, reproductive and the pleasurable. Pornography emerged at a moment in history that coincided with the toughening of other subjectivity standardisation mechanisms, such as law and medicine. The first pornographic representations, such as the first private collections of erotica and

books revealing all the secrets of female sexuality, were published at the same time as guides to human behaviour and manuals on sexual perversions. Within this context, pornography became a subjectivity-producing discourse that defines, delimits and regulates bodies, not just in terms of the sexual organs-genitals dichotomy and heteronormative sexual practices, but also in terms of race, desire, age and (dis)ability.

Mainstream pornography as a visual and audio discursive mechanism inscribes a hetero-centred system of representation that naturalises particular kinds of bodies, genders and sexual practices, while pathologising and criminalising all those bodies, genders and sexual practices that are outside the margins of that matrix. How does pornography operate? If we were to describe the toolbox of pornographic technology, we could list the following:

\$ Dismembering and resignification of the body into organs that are either “sexual” (only two kinds) or “non-sexual”.

\$ Fetishisation of the body and objects (*underwear, high heels, latex clothing...*).

\$ Exaggeration of body and the facial gestures in order to hyperbolise the dramatisation of pleasure (*especially with women, who don't ejaculate of course!??*).

\$ Male ejaculation as the centre of gravity. The always-visible “money shot” becomes evidence of true sex (*Has anybody seen a female ejaculation in a porn film? – What, you mean women come?”*

\$ Repetitive and mechanical set up of penetration (vaginal and anal) - or an *endless banging away...*

\$ Endless fellatios, one after the other, and close-ups of genitals.

\$ Lack of plot and lack of originality in terms of settings.

\$ Interruption of the diegesis to give way to sex scenes that are repetitive but use virile poses and framing: anal, vaginal penetration, chic lesbian scene, fellatios.

Reduced to these norms and linked to specific buying contexts, pornography's visual economy uses narrative and visual conventions to produce “the truth of sex”. Sex that is reduced and limited to a predetermined aesthetic and representational canon, aimed principally at satisfying the scopical, voyeuristic gaze of a supposedly male viewer. With these technologies that construct and standardise the body, sex, gender and desire, porno becomes politicised territory. In pornographic representation, sex enters the stage to occupy the public sphere as a biotechnological mechanism for reproducing social norms and conventions, but the same ubiquity makes it possible for pornography to become a potential field of subversion. Understand sex as representation opens the door to possibilities for intervention, negotiation and resistance that displace, confuse and question the normative, naturalised and universalised representations of the regime of compulsory heterosexuality.

A proliferation of pornographic representations and the growth of the industry in the first few decades of the 20th century led various sectors of society to position themselves in relation to the threat to liberal morality that was posed by the circulation of pornographic representations. In the seventies in the United States, Andrea Dworkin and Catherine Mackinnon led a campaign to censor and ban all pornographic material, alleging its objectification of women and capacity to provoke and incite rape. This perspective gives representation the performative capacity to produce truth, that is, it claims that the citational repetition of the codes of aggression, possession and violence against women's bodies in film and photography have real consequences on bodies and the ways this is read in the social.

The pro-censorship discourse was one of the positions taken within feminism in relation to pornographic representations, but there were also others. For example, Laura Mulvey (1975) defines her position through a film project that destroys and interrupts the possibility of pleasure in the male gaze. In her analysis on the relationship between film narratives and visual pleasure, Mulvey sees sexual difference as the focal point that structures images, eroticism and ways of seeing. From this point of view, men are constructed as active subjects (in their sexuality and also in social and work terms) and women as passive objects (objects to be looked at, consumed, desired and linked to domestic-family work). This kind of visual and narrative organisation obstructs any possible escape channels that could generate other representation and reception practices. For this reason, Mulvey proposes a use of the camera, space, time and diegesis that destroys this (passive/active) organisational logic and thereby breaks any possibility of satisfaction and pleasure for this scopical-voyeuristic gaze that the author sees as masculine.

From these perspectives, pornography is reduced to a women's subjugation mechanism, which allows no possibility of generating other reception practices or identification processes beyond the viewer's sex, one which could include other kinds of active, desiring “female” gazes. These arguments were also used by religious and conservative sectors, who considered pornography to be unacceptable and immoral because it distanced sex from its “natural” context, which is marriage and reproduction. Thus, pornographic representations were attacked from two fronts, with different sources and interests, which came together to attain a legal framework of prohibition and censorship.

In Spain (1), this debate took place later. With the start of the democratic system after Franco's death, a multitude of feminist groups emerged, united in defence of the basic freedoms lost during the dictatorship. From early 1975, people began to hold conferences in which women's collective experience were brought to light,

discussed and reflected on at local and national levels. Specially relevant were the 2nd State Conference on Women held in Granada in 1979 and the 1st Lesbian Conference held that same year, which contributed new gender analysis perspectives (feminism based on equality rather than difference) as well as placing sex, sexuality and pornography on the feminist political agenda. These conferences made it clear that feminism's political subject constructed as "women" had lost its effectiveness, because the term "women" could not respond to the diversity of ideologies, experiences, desires, sexual identities, class interests... of all the people who are supposedly included in this category. Thus, feminism and "women", its subject, became fragmented. For many, this supposed a loss of political strength and power, while others read this as the multiplication of possibilities, broadening of interests and realities and diversification of authorship.

Restart

However, even though anti-pornography and pro-censorship positions were backed up by social realities like domestic violence and increasing difficulty in legislating better conditions for sex work, in the 1990s pornography reached a historic high point of maximum expansion and globalisation. The pornographic industry produces more films than any other film industry while at the same time, new affordable and easily accessible technology like digital video, still cameras, mobiles, Internet, web cams, sms, chats... are changing habits of producing, distributing and consuming pornography.

These new mechanisms allow a proliferation of representations that change people's relationship to pornography (anonymity, immediacy, health, own material...) and make it possible to reconsider it from different gender and sexuality parameters. The appropriation of visual production technologies and the cycles of production and consumption have generated political contexts of visibility for non-standard sexuality communities.

Since the eighties, the proliferation of political and activist actions by lesbian, Chicano and black feminists, sex workers, transsexuals, people with HIV, etc. have started to question how sexuality is understood, not only by conservative sectors, but also some sectors of feminism, defenders of a white, neo-liberal, bourgeoisie morality.

From these new perspectives, sexuality joins gender as a relevant focus in the construction of identity (individual and collective). Sex, sexuality, gender, race and the body are at the centre of analysis and political action, which means that pornography becomes a politicised field, subject to critical review and alternative critical-pleasurable productions. From the 90s, these critical discourses and practices of pornography, which emerge within a broader area of reflection and (de)construction of subjectivisation processes, are grouped under "post-

pornography".

This term was coined in 1990, when Richard Schechner used it to label an Annie Sprinkle performance called *The Public Cervix Announcement* (en Harris, 1999). In this performance, sex worker and porno actress Annie Sprinkle invited the audience to look inside here vagina with the help of a flashlight. With this, Sprinkle cast doubt on that "truth of sex" and used parody to de-naturalise the relationship between visualisation devices used in medicine and those used in pornography. The 19th century medical, psychiatric and gynaecological perspective influenced the perspective and construction of female characters in pornography (see, for example, *Deep Throat* (1972) by Gerard Damiano, starring Linda Lovelace, and the documentary *Inside Deep Throat* (2005) directed by Fenton Bailey and Randy Barbato).

Following this direction, various agents inscribed within or connected to sexual minorities and subcultures, began to see pornography as a radical pedagogy of sex. Sex workers like Verónica Vera, artists like Sandra Bernhard who appeared in the pages of *Playboy*, or Linda Montaro who worked as a *pin up*, along with others like Robert Mapplethorpe, Bruce La Bruce, Mathew Barney, Lydia Lunch, Shelly Mars, Fatal Video, Virginie Despentes and Del La Grace Volcano, together with theorists like Judith Butler, Gayle Rubin, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Judith Halberstam and Sue Ellen Case, make up a production sector with a strong component of theoretical reflection, which delimits the lines of what we'll call (post)pornography. Their work, which takes place amid the tension between aesthetics, politics and theory, conceptualises pornography and representations of gender and sex as a field in which it is possible to intervene in two directions: (a) to break away from the naturalness and essentialism of the binary system of gender and compulsory heterosexuality in contemporary capitalism and (b) to offer representations and experiences of gender and sexuality that differ from this norm.

This shift in ways of thinking about pornography and representations of sex and gender implies important political and epistemological transformations. On one hand, when technologies of visualisation and representation are adopted, the passive objects of hegemonic pornography become active subjects who can speak in the first person. Through this process of self-representation, the actor-subject changes, as do the stories, lives, bodies and practices that are represented. (Post)pornographic production goes beyond the hegemonic pornography industry's conventions and cycles of production and consumption and opens new possibilities for getting assemblage and empowerment in dissident sexuality communities. In fact, new representations create areas in which the fictional has a real dimension, and thus can be experienced, analysed and used to generate the conditions for a more habitable life. We could say that its effects

go beyond the strictly representational and start to embody the interstices between gender identity, the body, socio-medical construction and sexuality.

The strategies and resources used to secure these parodic, creative and heterotopic representations of gender and sexuality are varied and sometimes even contradictory: academic texts, performances, videos, photographs, songs... inhabit and are exhibited in galleries, museums, bars, clubs, libraries, universities, streets or the living rooms of squats.

This *mise en scene* of sex has, in turn, the perverse effects of exoticising, fetishising and the false inclusion of sexual minorities, specially those with sexual identities that are more complex, different or difficult to catalogue because they are constantly changing and defining themselves on the run. Diverse cultural practices (porn studies, galleries, museums, festivals, academic seminars...) have turned pornography into an object of study or desire, attracted by the extent to which it is provocative in terms of contemporary artistic and moral narratives, and perhaps by the possibility of representing, for the first time, "dissident" or "transgressive" sexualities. This institutional use of pornography has implied a re-evaluation of a genre that was, in theory, considered to be marginal and for private use. At the same time, this use has turned (post)pornography into a stylistic genre in the hands of cultural capital, which sometimes assimilates and weakens its political power. In any case, this tension between the aesthetic, the theoretical and the political defines the actions of artists' collectives, activists, academics and often other positions that simultaneously cross these three frontiers of postpornography.

In Spain, the cultural, activist and artistic agenda is generating a framework of possibility that would allow the emergence of pornography and other minority representations of sex, the body, desire and sexuality. In recent years, there has been a strong increase in the number of debates, conferences and performative practices that respond to this de-politicisation from different perspectives, and to a need for theoretical-aesthetic production that is self-generated, critical and reflective.

On one hand, there has been a strong increase in a kind of theoretical/artistic production carried out in more institutional spaces like universities and museums. This would apply to the working procedures of the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Barcelona (MACBA), which produced conferences like *Maratón Posporno. Pornografía, Pospornografía: Estéticas y Políticas de Representación Sexual* (2003) or the workshop *Taller de Tecnologías del Género, identidades minoritarias y sus representaciones críticas* in 2004, which mutated in 2005 into *Tecnologías del género. Micropolíticas Postidentitarias*, abandoning its more experimental side and adopting the more formal format of a seminar.

This would also be the line taken in seminars organised by Arteleku (Basque Country), such as *Sólo para tus ojos* in 1997, *Retóricas del género* in 2003, *La Repolitización del espacio Sexual en las Prácticas Artísticas Contemporáneas* in 2004, and, as part of *Desacuerdos, Sobre Arte, Políticas y Esfera Pública* en el estado Español, the conference *Mutaciones del Feminismo, genealogías y prácticas artísticas* in 2005.

The Universidad Internacional de Andalucía (UNIA), based in Seville, has also organised conferences like *Retóricas del género, políticas de identidad: performance, performatividad y prótesis*, in 2003; or the recent *Crítica Queer, narrativas disidentes e invención de subjetividad*, in 2007.

And in 2006, *Middlesex, Confrontaciones sociales feministas, Diásporas Queer y narrativas del Género* was held in Zaragoza as part of a larger event, *En la frontera*.

At the same time, other events have been organised in Barcelona from less institutional positions, such as *Queeruption 8* in 2005, *FEMACT -Encuentro internacional de Feminismos y Activismos and Festival Tranzmarikabollo*, both held in 2006. Other dissident meeting points include *MAMBO (Momento Autónomo de Mujeres y Bolleras Osadas)* and the Universidad Pirata in the recently evicted Barcelona squat Miles the Viviendas, and Escalera Karakola in Madrid.

In recent years there has been an increase in the number of collectives working from an unpalatable and strategic position: LICIT in Barcelona and Hetaira in Madrid fighting for the rights of sex workers, and Post_Op, ORGIA, Girlswholikeporno, xy mutación, Erreakzioa-reacción and others working in the hybrid area between art and activism. We'd particularly like to mention a group who define themselves principally within activism – *Guerrilla Travolaka*. Based in Barcelona, they define themselves as a post-identity action movement brought together by action and representation as politics through performance, video, still images, manifestos, texts... and they collaborate with other groups around Spain and Europe to question the ontology of sex and its institutional representations. They use new technologies as a medium for talking in first-person about their bodies, their lives, and the way they relate to each other and understand sex, sexuality, gender, identity and political action. Aware that their body is a biopoliticised space, delimited by the control panel of medicine, law and other disciplinary regimes, they use performance and parody to re-signify the technologies that once defined them as mentally ill, as gender dysphorics who have to be cured through psychiatric-hormonal-surgical gender reassignment treatment. In response to this pathologisation with a performative twist, as their name suggests, *Guerrilla Travolaka*, gender euphorics, occupy areas that were previously inaccessible to them. They abandon the role of passive patient and

become political agents, viral generators of new forms of visibility, political action and trans-life. With actions like the *Cómete al psiquiatra* party or the guerrilla office at the 28-J demonstration in Barcelona, they respond to the psychritisation and pathologisation of their lives.

The Guerrilla have publicly declared that it is not enough to have legislation based on state paternalism that offers the option of acknowledging gender dysphoria and, therefore, pathologises gender expressions that are outside the man-woman pair. According to the law, these manifestations must be treated through psychiatry in order to have the option of gender change in ID documents without the need for surgical reassignment. The Transsexuality Act is a step forward, but only if you decide to consider your gender expression in terms of illness, if you let yourself be advised and cared for by the state and its doctors, if you're over 18 and, obviously, if you have documents that accredit you as a full citizen and not as a migrant in a society that tolerates you and takes you in, but in which you have neither voice nor vote. Guerrilla Travolaka has generated an international political movement that claims that the man-woman binary is not enough. Therefore, the gender dysphoria diagnosis is not enough, and neither is the systematic pathologisation of gender expressions that place themselves outside the model of medical-legal reversibility.

Some people today still think that transsexuals "go from one power regime to another" when they subject their bodies to the gender standardisation imposed by the medical-legal system of our late capitalist societies. But in reality, the time has come to consider this "violence" in different terms, from the streets and the proliferation of body politics.

The Guerrilla opens up spaces for negotiating gender norms and their medical, legal and artistic representations. Gender, as a social norm, is and has to be renegotiated over and over at different levels of everyday life (Mahmood, 2005). Gender norms have to be embodied and constantly evaluated, modified and renegotiated in different contexts. The Guerrilla Travolaka has chosen to establish dialogue with agents in charge of gender units in Catalonia, in order to discuss joint representation strategies in national and international medical frameworks. On the other hand, they have also generated collective representation mechanisms through a manifesto agreed by consensus (2) that aims to establish points of dialogue between different ways of inhabiting a trans-body. These collective representation strategies produce immediate effects, reorganising political geographies of for interaction with institutions, and also between different minority communities, whose representation strategies often involve essentialising certain aspects of fixed identities that are defined on the basis of difference.

For their way of understanding gender, the body, sex, identity (individual and collective) and political action, we've wanted to use these lines to bring to light this group that, to us, embodies sexuality representation policies that contest the norm and open new spaces that make it possible to generate that more flexible and habitable life.

We know that we've left out many projects and groups formed for meeting, for pleasure, reflection, visibility... but this article didn't set out to outline a genealogy or prepare an archive of people and groups who are tackling sex, gender and sexuality through aesthetics or post-pornographic representation politics. Even so, we'd like to take this chance to acknowledge all the people who are working active invisibility, and the groups who we've left out in a moment of enumerative paralysis.

[End session](#)
[Restart the system](#)

Notes

(1) For a complete account of this tradition see *Trastornos para devenir: entre artes y políticas feministas y queer en el Estado español*, by Carmen Navarrete, María Ruido and Fefa Vila, *Desacuerdos*, volume 2, 2005, available online at <http://www.arteleku.net/4.0/pdfs/Pages%20from%20Desacuerdos%202.pdf>

(2) This manifesto is available in Catalan, Spanish and French at www.guerrilla-travolaka.blogspot.com.

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