The Sexual Workshop:  
A Technology and Phenomenology of Internet Porn

by
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Abstract

This thesis is an attempt to develop a synthetic philosophical analysis that will shed light on the meanings of online pornography for contemporary masculinity, set against the background of longstanding feminist debate about the nature and role of pornography in contemporary societies, and borrowing strongly from ideas found in Heidegger’s writing on technology and Dasein, as well as Marcuse's analysis of eros. I argue that the “others” of our erotic fantasies are replacing the humans we are closest to, as we ourselves are being transformed into “others” by the technologies that surround us. This view is in contrast with much of the discourse on sexuality up to the present day, a discourse that is encapsulated by a subject-object dualistic framework strongly influenced by Freud. I suggest that often self-produced, interactive pornography is emerging as a new kind of “incitement mechanism” in regards to human sexuality. Yet, interactive pornography is still at an early stage of development and its future is far from clear. It might potentially open up alternative, potentially liberating, modes of sexual experience, or simply reproduce existing forms of masculine oppression.

Keywords: Phenomenology; Pornography; Psychoanalysis; Technology; Masculinity; Sexuality
Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to Mom, Dad, Alicia, Stefan and Gornel. Shout outs to Justin, James, Dylan and Donald for being the backbone of my suburban existence. And of course Courtney and other Courtney, Kat and so on, thank you. I further dedicate this thesis to people of the future, especially to those of you in Toronto.
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INTRODUCTION

For we are all agreed on one thing – that the subject of masturbation is quite inexhaustible.

-Freud, “Contributions to a Discussion on Masturbation”

Anti-pornography activist Andrea Dworkin once described pornography as “the graphic depiction of the lowest whores” (1981: 200). She claimed that “whores exist to serve men sexually. Whores exist only within a framework of male sexual domination” (1981: 200). As Dworkin noted, “the word pornography, derived from the ancient Greek porné and graphos, means ‘writing about whores’... The only change in the meaning of the word is with respect to its second part, graphos: now there are cameras – there is still photography, film, video” (Dworkin 1981: 199, 200).

In today’s society, there are now digital technologies of the graphos. In Dworkin’s terminology, these digital technologies allow people of any sex, gender and sexual orientation to become ‘whores’ by transforming themselves into digital porné in a variety of different ways. For example, the popular usage of cameras on iPhones and other mobile devices allow users to transform their bodies into porné by taking a photo or video and simply clicking ‘share’ on Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, or whatever. Over at Reddit Real Girls and LadyBonersGoneWild, heterosexual women (in the former) and men (in the latter) post pictures of themselves in sexual positions, acts or poses in order to be viewed by members of the opposite sex. These are not “porn-stars” posting these pictures, these are just everyday people having fun in their
everyday lives. Another example can be seen in live cam sites such as LiveJasmin and YouPornMate that allow hundreds of users to join in on viewing a “private showing” with men or women stripping and performing sex acts live on cam. Money is earned through a tip system – the more money tipped to the performer, the more raunchy the performance becomes, all from the safety of the performer’s own home. ChatRoulette-like sites, such as ChatRandom, allow users (almost all male) to expose themselves on cam to other users at random, even if only for a few seconds before the other user presses ‘next’ to skip them. Websites like BeaverBattle, AssBattles and fapUlike create competition for posters through a picture-rating system where other users vote on the best bodies or sexual acts, bringing to life a fantasy of being a porn-star without actually becoming one. With these newer technologies, a ‘whore’ does not necessarily have to get paid for sex, for much of this work is done for free, a profit made not for the ‘whore’ but for the host website, service provider, etc.

As these cases suggest, what it means to be a “whore” in the word ‘porné’ depends on the technologies of the graphos that inscribe sexual meaning onto bodies and activities. The original technology of the graphos, the technology of writing, also accomplishes this function. In her research on Harlequin novels (a strand of erotic/romantic novels targeting female readers), Ann Barr Snitow argues that “the romantic intensity of Harlequins – the waiting, fearing, speculating – are as much a part of their functioning as pornography for women as are the most overtly sexual scenes” (1983: 259). To continue with Dworkin’s terminology, these Harlequin readers are “whores” without even engaging in overt sexual behaviour insofar as the technology of
writing and reading a Harlequin novel facilitates the diffuses of sexual fantasy, if only through the romantic means of teasing and seducing, of waiting, fearing and speculating. Some digital technologies have adopted these methods as well. Online blog-sites such as Alt.Sex.Stories Text Repository and LushStories provide a space for people to share their written erotic fantasies with others, while Japanese Hentai and adult webcomics such as Oglaf and Pawn blend text and visual images together for similar erotic effects. One of the first notable uses of the internet was for ‘cybersex,’ users interactively writing their sexual fantasies on the spot with other people using virtual chat-rooms. Cyberspace was seen as a place where real-life sexual activities could be replicated and even replaced online. But today the use of digital technologies are not merely simulating “real life” sex; they are becoming part of the sexual fantasy itself and constructing new forms of sexual desire.

Dworkin also claimed that “the whore is porné, the lowest whore, the whore who belongs to all male citizens: the slut, the cunt” (1981: 202). Here Dworkin was referring to the sharing of whores in societies throughout history, and she compared this to the pornography of the 1980s. There is something useful in this comparison: namely, that porné is meant to be shared. Consider the 2006 film LOL by Joe Swanberg, which begins with a man browsing a pornography website looking for a video to watch. The man clicks on a link titled “For Your Eyes Only!” and the pornographic video begins to play. A young woman appears on the screen, looks at the camera and whispers, “Hey baby. Umm, I miss you a lot so this is a little present to you from me and I hope you like it” (see Figure 0.1). She puts on some music and starts dancing and stripping for the
camera. Director Swanberg then intersperses shots of various men all watching the same pornographic video in the privacy of their own bedrooms (see Figure 0.2). At the end of the video, the woman, now entirely naked, says to the camera, “So I hope you liked that, and remember, it’s for your eyes only. Top secret. Bye.”
Image 0.1: ‘For Your Eyes Only!’ video

Image 0.2: Men simultaneously watching the same pornographic video in LOL
Of course, the video is not top secret. According to its description, it was posted online by her boyfriend. And the men watching the video are not ignorant of this fact. They know very well that other men have access to it and are probably even watching it at the same time they are. But this homoseductive sharing of the intimate video with other men on the internet does not deter them. If anything, this mechanism of sharing hooks and attracts them to the pornographic community. There are entire forums dedicated to the sharing of porné, such as PornBB and Phun, not to mention comment threads on pictures and videos on numerous other sites, blogs or whatever. These ever-changing digital technologies of the graphos are continuously finding new ways to share porné for pleasure and it is these mechanisms of sharing that construct new forms of sexual desire and behaviour today.

Clearly, sexual desire and behaviour mean something different in the digital world. In a recent study of the prevalence of masturbation in Britain, 86% of men and 58% of women (aged 18-57) reported having masturbated in the past year while 52% and 18% respectively reported having masturbated in the past week (Gerressu, Mercer, Graham, Wellings and Johnson 2008). In this study, the researchers did not inquire about pornography use. However, in a study done on Danish adults, men reported using pornography to masturbate 48% of the time, women 9% of the time; comparatively, 83% of men and 34% of women reported watching pornography in the past month (Hald 2006). The difference in frequency reported between the two genders should be taken with a grain of salt, as gender differences in sexual attitudes and behaviour are largely inflated due to gender stereotypes. For example, one study found that women
underreported their frequency of masturbation and use of pornography more than any other sexual behaviour (Alexander and Fisher 2003; Petersen and Hyde 2010). So what does it say about pornography when one recognizes that porn-stimulated masturbation has become such a common sex act? If the destiny of porné is to belong to all citizens, then this destiny is starting to become a reality.

In this thesis, I argue that the so-called “whores” of our erotic fantasies are replacing the humans we are closest to, as we ourselves are being transformed into whores by the technologies that surround us. The prominent question about pornography is a question about how users ‘get it on’ with technology – how users masturbate to their fantasies with devices and interfaces in-hand. This question is also a question of connectivity – being connected to pornographic communities, to people and bodies through erotic technologies.

In order to begin talking about pornographic technologies and their relation to bodies and eroticism, it is useful to recall the theoretical framework set out by Herbert Marcuse in *Eros and Civilization*. Marcuse claims that, under the conditions of late capitalism, the body is utilized as an instrument of labour, desexualized in a process of “repressive sublimation” (1955: 199). People deflect their sexual instincts away from sexual satisfaction and towards their labour, reinforcing the capitalist system. Marcuse argues that if people were instead to resexualize their body by directing their sexual instincts towards socially useful, subversive activities rather than upholding the capitalist system of alienated labour they could build a society based on “non-repressive sublimation” (1955: 201). However, in his later work, *One-Dimensional Man*, Marcuse argues that
advanced capitalist societies are also characterized by “repressive desublimation” (1964: 56). The body is resexualized but people’s sexual instincts are not directed towards socially useful or liberating activities; instead, the libido is contracted and controlled by technology, reduced to mere “sexual experience and satisfaction” that eliminates tension and opposition to the status quo (1964: 72-73).

What I call ‘traditional pornography,’ that is, pornography where the user remains a passive spectator, can be understood as an instance of repressive desublimation as a result of its mechanisms of distribution from the top down and its potential substitution for political engagement. Pornography industries limit (‘contract and control’) the range of choices offered to the users by only satisfying what is in high demand, for instance, heteronormative depictions of sex and sexuality. Moreover, the politics of conventional pornography tends to be anchored in a range of politically repressive discourses, not the least of which is an unremitting misogyny. In more recent years, gay, lesbian and transsexual groups have been recognized as substantial consumer bases, allowing pornography to proliferate in those subcultures, often in ways that subvert the patriarchal nature of traditional porn. Yet, even within these different communities, pornography still contracts and controls sex and sexuality through camera techniques, narrowly defined beauty aesthetics and sexual practices, as well as depicting a stylized sort of sex that usually fails to show the reality of sex (Corinna 2013a). For example, most traditional forms of pornography do not show actors and actresses talking to each other about STIs or condom use; nor do they talk about each other’s particular preferences. Instead, the actors and actresses on the screen are
usually portrayed as intuitively knowing what the other partner wants without asking and, as a result, the importance of communication during sex is suppressed here as it is elsewhere in our society, especially for youth who learn about sex through pornography. This is not to say that all traditional pornography succumbs to repressive desublimation. For instance, the ‘indie porn revolution’ is a movement that focuses on producing “feminist porn, alt porn, queer porn, indie porn, trans porn, straight, lesbian, gay, bisexual” pornography that is a “sex-positive, diverse, and authentic representation” of sex (Indie Porn Revolution 2013; Trouble Films 2013).

Thus, traditional pornographic technologies can direct the sexual instincts towards opposing the status quo if the content of those technologies oppose sexual normativity, even, arguably, if opposition is not overtly extended to a broader critique of other forms of economic or political domination. It is the use of pornographic technologies for profit that most perpetuates repressive desublimation. Yet, I must also take into account the rapidly changing digital technologies of today that are no longer distributing porné for profit but share porné for pleasure. I call this kind of pornography ‘interactive pornography,’ pornography where the user is in some way interacting with others through the sharing of porné rather than simply consuming it. Of course, this sort of ‘free’ sharing is also capitalistic – these interactive sites support and are supported by phone companies, computer corporations, service provides and so on through fees, sales, search engines, advertising, etc., so that when it comes to interactive pornography, the lines between ‘paid sex as a profession for profit’ and ‘amateur sex for free and for pleasure’ are blurred in the capitalist system.
If I dig deeper into Marcuse’s theoretical framework, I begin to see a different, unusual sort of critique beyond repressive desublimation that may address the particularities of interactive pornography. As Andrew Feenberg points out, Marcuse’s critique of technology is influenced by Martin Heidegger’s essay, “The Question Concerning Technology” (2005). But whereas Heidegger submits to an essentialist view of technology – that is, that all technology has a singular essence in which nature is enframed or dominated as a mere resource or ‘standing reserve’ – Marcuse instead asserts that this essence is the essence of capitalist technology. Marcuse’s work is also influenced by Georg Lukács’ History and Class Consciousness, especially the chapter on ‘reification’ where Lukács argues that human relations become reified as objects of science, and that subjects are placed in the position of the scientific experimenter. As a result, the world of lived experience is reduced to a system of facts or sense data. By experiencing human relations as mere facts and sense data, an entire dimension of experience is lost. For Marcuse, a new mode of experience is required to oppose this status quo, a new way of seeing, hearing, feeling, touching and perceiving. The problem for Marcuse is not the misuse of science and technology for the benefit of capitalism. Rather, the very structure of science and technology as it has emerged through history is complicit with domination because it collapses this alternative mode of human experience.

In his 1978 book The History of Sexuality, Michel Foucault claims that, starting in the seventeenth century, a “power over life” evolved through an incitement to sexual discourses: political institutions did not repress sexuality, but encouraged people to
speak about it endlessly (1990: 139). The mechanisms of incitement that were deployed centered the discourse “on the body as a machine: its disciplining, the optimization of its capabilities, the extortion of its forces, the parallel increase of its usefulness and its docility, its integration into systems of efficient and economic controls, all this was ensured by the procedures of power that characterized the disciplines: an anatomo-politics of the human body” (Foucault 1990: 139). As both Marcuse and Foucault recognize, the human body, as well as its phenomenological experience, has been reduced and integrated into a patriarchal and capitalistic system of domination. Yet, Foucault suggests that if this power over life begins with the mechanisms of incitement, “insofar as they produce knowledge, multiply discourse, induce pleasure, and generate power,” they can also be used for a sort of ‘emancipatory resublimation’ (1990: 73).

I want to argue that interactive pornography, a new kind of incitement mechanism, is still at an early stage of development and could either collapse or open up an alternative mode of sexual experience. The structure of interactive pornography technologies in a capitalist society can be exploited in ways that are complicit with domination – not sexual domination, but domination over the [sexual] life of the individual. Interactive pornography technologies of today structure, control and dominate forms of sexual life through various mechanisms of sharing, but may do so for the benefit of capitalism and profit or for the benefit of pleasure and as alternative modes of experience. These alternative modes constitute sexual experiences that are constructed from the inner life of the individual. Whatever sex, gender or orientation one may identify with, and regardless of one’s own personal idea of what sex is and how
it should be performed, interactive pornography offers the chance for a mode of sexual experience that opposes the status quo on a fundamental level, a mode that opens up a dimension of freedom for the individual.

However, even if interactive pornography is successful in opening up an alternative mode of sexual experience, what will this mean for capitalist or patriarchal domination? What good is an alternative dimension of experience if capitalism and patriarchy continue to reproduce domination in every aspect of individual life? Will capitalism and patriarchy not take advantage of this alternative mode of experience, transforming it into a profitable enterprise that reproduces class and male domination? Is there any emancipatory potential here at all? In *The Dialectic of Sex*, early radical feminist Shulamith Firestone argues that a Marxian revolution will necessarily fail unless it takes place within a larger sexual revolution that uproots “biological reality” (1970: 12). According to Firestone, the fundamental economic structure of capitalist society, the division of society into distinct classes, “sprang from the sexual division itself” so that the only way to truly resolve class inequality is to resolve sex inequality first (1970: 8). Following Firestone, an alternative mode of sexual experience can arguably help to subvert capitalism if it is successful at eliminating sex inequality.

In Chapter One, I will resituate Marcuse’s framework within the context of second-wave feminism, and in particular, the pornography debates of the 1970s and 1980s. On the one side, anti-pornography feminists argued that sexual desire reproduces domination because it is constructed and controlled by the patriarchy. In their eyes, any sexual agency asserted by women within a patriarchal system offered
only an illusion of freedom. On the other side, pro-sex feminists argued that sexual agency can and does exist for women even within a patriarchal system of desire. For them, pornography could be a liberating technology if used in a subversive way. The lines of division that emerged within feminism more than 40 years ago were complicated during the 1980s by theoretical challenges raised by postmodern theorizing. However, they continue to structure much of the contemporary debate about the meaning and significance of pornography.

In Chapter Two, I go behind these traditional lines of division by using Heidegger’s language to explore different ways of understanding sexuality in the body as it is experienced phenomenologically, drawing on my own experiences as a male body by way of illustration. Heidegger makes use of language that breaks free of the dominant subject-object dualism prevalent throughout philosophy and theory. Although his language is often highly confusing and obscure, I believe it can be put to use in getting at “essences” that are otherwise hidden in a dualistic framework. In doing so, I create a philosophy of sex (focusing on the example of male masturbation) that provides the groundwork for understanding how the potential for an alternative mode of sexual experience might be available for individuals.

In Chapter Three, I outline a brief distinction between the “male essence” as defined by anti-pornography feminists and “masculinity” as a gender performance and place this distinction in a historical context. I then argue that the “biological reality” of sex distinction is grounded in an ontology that is more malleable than either nature or gender, and thus I assert that the historical distinction between the male essence and
masculinity provides a basis for “dereifying” sexual desire through the use of pornography, a starting point for eradicating sex inequality.

Chapter Four takes the groundwork from Chapter Two and uses it to “dereify” sexual desire. Using phenomenology as my method of research, I look at four particular examples of traditional forms of pornography to discuss the various ways in which men are “turned on” by technologies that transcend or undo the subject-object framework. In doing so, I construct a model of the sexual instinct that focuses on Dasein’s involvement in masturbation as an encounter with otherness (allo).

In the final Chapter, I discuss Freud’s theory of sexuality in regards to auto-eroticism and narcissism by synthesizing it with Heidegger’s circumspective model to suggest how interactive pornography allows men (at least) to gain access to an alternative mode of experience and take responsibility for their being-turned-on.

Throughout this thesis, I maintain a primary ‘phallic’ focus on heterosexual male pornography. I also draw on personal experience, auto-ethnography and anecdotal examples to make my arguments. This phallocentric focus of the thesis is rooted in my own biography as a white, heterosexual man. Although this focus gives me a privileged perspective of my own male body, as well the associated phenomenological experience, it also limits my analysis. A view that is more overtly feminist and, arguably, more vaginally centred, for example, would lead to a different set of phenomenological insights.
CHAPTER 1

Discourses on Pornography: From Feminism to Porn Studies

In the first volume of the *History of Sexuality* (1976), Michel Foucault criticizes what he calls the “sexual repression hypothesis” in western cultures. The hypothesis suggests, that as the bourgeoisie consolidated its cultural dominance through the 17th and 18th centuries it imposed more and more restrictions on hedonistic, purely pleasurable, activities. This led to increasing regulation and repression of sexuality, including more precise designations of legal and illegal sex acts, and renewed promotion of the conservative Christian idea of sex as a private act that takes place between a husband and wife for the purposes of procreation. The result was an increasing limitation of the range of available public discourses in polite society on sex, by placing them in the realm of the unspeakable.

Foucault notes that there was always an element of resistance to the bourgeois regulation of sexuality that carried the hint of broader political protest. But, in the repressive hypothesis, it is argued that these outlets were largely contained. Freud’s work provided new concepts and resources for discussions of sexuality in the early twentieth century, but Foucault argues that these tended to be confined initially to the “confessional” realm of psychiatry. Gradually, however, the popularization of Freud’s analysis of libidinal energy and repression provided a theoretical rationale for linking discourses of sexuality to politics. This contributed to the view, widely shared in urban
Avant Gardes in the early twentieth century, that open sexuality was an obvious element in the revolt against bourgeois repression.

Foucault claims that the widespread repression of sex in the west was never an established historical fact, even as he acknowledges that aspects of the sexual repression hypothesis are not completely inaccurate. His key idea, though, is to emphasize the proliferation of “discourses about sex” of various types, *at the very moment of alleged increases in sexual repression*. From the 17th century onward, he argues, there has been a growing “political, economic and technical incitement to talk about sex” (Smart, 1988, 96). Foucault was particularly interested in the emergence of modern medical discourses that claimed to establish the “truth” about sex, setting these against the older tradition of Christian “confession” of the “important secrets of the flesh.” By linking the confessions of the flesh to the prospect of salvation, Foucault sees the confessional tradition as something that placed sexuality at the heart of human existence. The juxtaposition of the tradition of the confession with the growing “science” of human sexuality lent itself to complex modern intersections of power and discourse.

Foucault’s perspective reveals the difficulty of accepting at face value Andrea Dworkin’s suggestion of the lineage between contemporary *pornography*, and the ancient Greek conceptions of *porné* and *graphos*. Discourses on sex in antiquity and in contemporary life have little natural resonance. However, it is not my intention in this chapter to pursue a Foucauldian genealogy of the complexity of discourses that have come to delineate modern “pornography” as a distinctive field of social practice. I simply
want to use Foucault’s emphasis on the “discursive” construction of sex as an entry point into a consideration of competing discourses about pornography in the postwar period, and especially during the 1970s and 1980s, when cable television and new audio and video tape technologies, expanded the reach of pornographic imagery, intensifying the already omnipresent discussion of sex in western culture.

The first challenge for critics of pornography in a post war world of proliferating sexual discourse was to identify and to solidify the meaning of pornography as an object or distinctive set of practices. Even the formal legal definition of pornography was highly obscured by competing interpretations, with one former U.S. Supreme Court justice famously noting only that “I know it when I see it” (Willis 1997: 184). But, not everyone was quite so sure. Postwar discourses about pornography were deeply muddied by contested connections to an array of related discourses about free speech, censorship, and “community standards,” in addition to struggles between differing political interest groups. These discourses were influenced by competing ideas about the imagined anti-repressive character of pornography versus its apparent function as something that contributes to the ongoing degradation of women. This latter point was the centrepiece of a highly influential attack on pornography mounted by prominent “second wave” feminists in the 1970s and 1980s.

Like all discourses about sexuality, the pornography debates of the 1970s and 1980s were never just about sex. The debates were about particular representations of sex, set in the social, political and historical context of the era and of a specific feminist approach to activism and theory. Those who argued against pornography tended to fall
into two camps. On the one hand, traditional anti-porn activists drew on older bourgeois and Christian conceptions of “modesty,” “propriety” and necessary libidinal repression, criticizing the selling of passion at the expense of morality and restraint. On the other hand, and from a self-defined progressive standpoint, many feminists depicted pornography as an expression of patriarchy and male control. The main opposition to these views lay in the growing tendency in postwar youth and consumer culture to represent more open depictions of sexuality as a politically “progressive” response to the repression imposed by an older more “uptight” generation. This theme was evident in the U.S. as early as the mid 1950s in certain branches of American literature and especially in the “Beat” culture developing in major U.S. cities. The anti-repressive theme was even struck by Hugh Hefner, in his attempt to “brand” the “philosophy” of Playboy magazine as a progressive intervention in postwar American life. This idea later resonated with aspects of the “free love” discourse of the 1960s student counterculture. Less visibly, there was also resistance to the condemnation or the censorship of pornography from a more vocal gay and lesbian community, who were providing rather different alternative movements against America’s patriarchal society. Lesbian and gay men who argued for pornography argued against pornography they viewed as violent or misogynistic. But, they also argued that there was room to recognize “healthy” and “progressive” types of pornography and they rejected the idea that the state should be given the power to regulate the production and distribution of sexual imagery. In their view, individuals, especially women, are given space to exercise sexual agency and autonomy. This theoretical stance offered a different approach to
activism from the second wave feminist stance and the resulting forms of activism offered new insights for sexual theory.

These competing postwar discourses on pornography -- over what it is, over its value, or its danger -- demonstrate how pornography can never be analyzed as an abstract essence, something outside of shifting social contexts or the interests of differing groups. The same point might be made about a more phenomenological approach to understanding sexual desire in North America today. No single person can ‘figure out’ where his or her desire comes from without taking the social, political and historical contexts of that desire into account. The feminist second-wave pornography debates created the condition for more open commentaries on sexual desire in both the academy and in everyday life. To ignore the grassroots movements of feminists on either side of the debate, and the transformation of lived experiences of sexual pleasure and sexual pain into discourse, is to ignore discursive traces that might arguably have affected one’s own sexual desire. For example, Lisa Duggan claims “there is a tendency among some queer theorists to engage in academic debates at a high level of intellectual sophistication, while erasing the political and activist roots of their theoretical insights and concerns” (2006: 161). Analyzing my own sexual desire in relation to pornography, as I will do in Chapter 4, without taking into account the political and activist roots that influenced the construction of my desire in the first place, would be futile. These political and activist roots were influenced by my sustained engagement with the pornography debates of the 70s and 80s and particularly to second wave feminist criticisms of pornography and the responses to these criticisms.
made by queer theorists and LGBT activists. This had a notable effect both on how I understand pornography and on my interpretations of how pornography relates to sexual desire.

According to Carolyn Bronstein, “anti-pornography was a complex and multi-faceted movement made up of diverse feminist grassroots groups with their own sets of beliefs and goals” (2001: 5). One of these groups was an organization called Women Against Violence Against Women (WAVAW), an organization still active today (Bronstein 2001: 5). Formed in 1976, WAVAW was influenced by early radical feminists’ arguments against biological determinism – that it is not in their essential nature for men to be brute aggressors and women to be passive victims (Bronstein 2001: 101; Firestone 1970: 2). Media portrayals of violence against women reinforced not only these harmful stereotypes about masculinity and femininity but the deeply rooted belief in biological determinism as well. Although pornography was viewed critically, WAVAW was careful to “subsume pornography under violence against women, not the other way around” (Bronstein 2001: 189). WAVAW strategically targeted not pornography but music companies because of their high profile and influence on entertainment media (Bronstein 2001: 166). One successful case of this activism was the WAVAW-led boycott against Warner Records for their release of a Rolling Stones’ Black and Blue billboard which depicted a battered women chained-up with the caption, “I’m black and blue from the Rolling Stones... and I love it!” After 3 years of the boycott, Warner Records began to worry about their public image and conceded to WAVAW’s demands for industry reform (Bronstein 2001: 184, 188).
WAVAW never argued that violent images such as the *Black and Blue* billboard *caused* violence against women, but maintained that such images trivialized and condoned it (Bronstein 2001: 206). In contrast, a second major organization called Women Against Violence in Pornography and Media (WAVPM) argued that these images do in fact cause violence against women (Bronstein 2001: 206). According to Bronstein, “the introduction of causal arguments reflected WAVPM’s efforts to make sense of what seemed like a massive increase in the number of cases of rape, battering, sexual harassment and incest in American society” (2001: 207). The increasing reports of sexual assault created a backdrop seemingly based in empirical research for the anti-pornography movement to take place. While the sexual revolution of the 1960s was seen as a failure to many feminists, the resulting breakdown of taboos surrounding sexuality paved the way for victims of sexual assault to break the silence, revealing a previously “hidden epidemic of male violence against women” (Bronstein 2001: 6-7, 14, 32). Whereas WAVAW understood this epidemic as a result of the trivialization and condonement of violence against women and the naturalization of gender stereotypes, WAVPM conversely took the epidemic as proof that these stereotypes correctly “captured the deepest essence of male and female nature” (Bronstein 2001: 101-102).

This latter perspective is the perspective of cultural feminism, a perspective that began to take hold in the late 70s and had its roots in lesbian feminism (Bronstein 2001: 102, 407; Echols 1983: 445). Cultural feminists, according to Alice Echols, “assume that individual liberation can be achieved within a patriarchal context” through “the development and preservation of female counter-culture” (1983: 441). One important
variant to the idea of having a female counter-culture was a modified form of lesbian separatism, lesbians who break all ties with men as a political choice (Echols 1983: 445-446). But some cultural feminists argued that the butch-femme relationships of many lesbian separatists only replicated traditional roles of male dominance and female subordination. Cultural feminists looked instead for a female counter-culture that maintained so called ‘natural’ feminine qualities such as woman-bonding, sensuality and traditional sexual conservatism (Katz 170; Echols 1983: 446). This also meant accepting the view that women are naturally vulnerable and must learn to protect themselves from men’s sexually aggressive nature. For example, Susan Brownmiller, a cultural feminist and prominent member of WAVPM at the time, located the root of men’s violent behaviour in the penis: “man’s discovery that his genitalia could serve as a weapon to generate fear must rank as one of the most important discoveries of prehistoric times, along with the use of fire and the first crude stone axe” (2007: 312).

For Brownmiller, “rape is a function of male biology” (Echols 1983: 442).

Given the cultural feminist perspective that men are naturally inclined to be sexually aggressive, WAVPM reasoned that viewing sexually explicit media, especially pornography, would “set men’s own bloodlust in motion” regardless of whether or not violence was actually depicted (Bronstein 2001: 102, 205). WAVPM was also concerned with the growing popularity and apparent normalization of pornography within society, partially as a result of the commercial success of feature films such as Deep Throat that were widely viewed by respectable, middle-class citizens, “putting to rest the idea that porn films were frequented only by perverts and sexual deviants” (Bronstein 2001: 134).
This realization was further exacerbated with the later invention of video cameras and home video that would allow people to produce and consume pornography in the privacy of their own home (Bronstein 2001: 138; Dworkin 1979: 202). To address these concerns, Brownmiller moved to New York in 1979 and started an East Coast chapter of WAVPM, which had previously been secluded in the West Coast and the San Francisco Bay Area (Bronstein 2001: 279). Brownmiller was frustrated with the lack of national media coverage of feminist issues and believed she could use her own and other prominent feminists’ star power in New York to gain attention (Bronstein 2001: 279).

Because New York women were used to being at the forefront of feminist movements, the new group changed their name to Women Against Pornography (WAP) and cut official ties to WAVPM (Bronstein 2001: 283). Soon after, their organization gained notoriety for a variety of interconnected reasons: Brownmiller appeared on the popular Donahue talk show, viewed by millions of Americans in turn; many wealthy organizations, including Christian and conservative groups as well a city agency with a ‘clean up the street’ agenda, started to pay attention to WAP and sent funding their way; with this funding, WAP was able to continue to hold press conferences, appearing in the mainstream media at a national level (Bronstein 2001: 306-308, 346, 394). The ascendency of WAP to the center stage allowed them to temporarily take over and define the discourse of sexuality within American feminism (Bronstein 2001: 347).

WAP expanded upon WAVPM’s assumption of a causal connection between pornography and violence by asserting that pornography itself was an act of violence, that the actresses in pornography were being forced into these activities against their
will (Bronstein 2001: 103). Whereas WAVAW had distinguished between violent images and violent acts, WAP had collapsed this distinction completely (Bronstein 2001: 319). In an extreme form, this collapse can be seen in the writing of Dworkin, a member of WAP, who argues that pornography is “real” insofar as it depicts what is “real and central to the male sexual system”: that “the sexuality of women is perceived as low and whorish in and of itself” (1979: 200-201). For Dworkin, any sexual activity between a man and a woman in a patriarchal society is, in a sense, a kind of pornography (Willis 1983: 465). Yet, in contrast to Dworkin, many WAP members influenced by cultural feminism felt the need to argue for a distinction between erotica and pornography – erotica was viewed as “soft core, soft focus, it is a gentler and tenderer sex,” it emphasizes mutuality, reciprocity and sensuality, whereas pornography emphasizes dominance and violence (Snitow 1983: 256; Dworkin 1979: 9-10; Willis 1983: 463). Because WAP had collapsed the distinction between images and acts, the erotica/pornography classification of images collapsed onto sexual activities in everyday life as well. In theory, this classification created an erotic space for heterosexual feminists to maintain sexual agency even while having sex with men. In the practice of activism, however, the distinction became a basis for a campaign against vice – so-called ‘perverse’ sexual activities, such as S/M, became classified as pornographic and male-controlled. Judith Walkowitz argues that WAP’s campaign held many similarities to feminist first-wave campaigns against male vice (1983: 434). Although these first-wave feminists sought to help get prostitutes off the streets by arguing that they were victims of male sexuality, the movement was ultimately taken over by men of the clergy, moral crusaders seeking
to ban all forms of ‘pornographic’ literature, homosexuality and prostitution (Walkowitz 1983: 426-428). Similarly, WAP argued that any women participating in perverse sexual activities, including any form of pornography, must have been coerced into them and were therefore victims of male sexuality (Bronstein 2001: 363; Mackinnon and Dworkin 1997: 254). By ‘allying’ with conservative and Christian groups, the WAP were close to becoming ‘moral crusaders’ themselves.

One notable case of this male coercion can be seen with Linda Lovelace’s star role in the 1972 film *Deep Throat*. Lovelace later revealed that she had been “beaten, raped, tortured and threatened with a loaded gun” at the time *Deep Throat* was being filmed (Bronstein 2001: 363; Marchiano 1995: 60-67). Bronstein claims that this discovery “confirmed WAP’s belief that coercion was the industry standard” (2001: 363).

However, like WAVAW and WAVPM, WAP was informed not simply by one case but by the increasing number of reports of male violence against women. For Catherine Mackinnon, another prominent member of WAP, it was these reports, and not the theoretical concerns of intellectuals, that were the basis for WAP’s activism: “a tiny, noisy elite of women who defend pornography professionally contrast with survivor after survivor whom they talk past and disregard” (1997: 11). Perhaps it was the visceral reaction to hearing endless reports of sexual assault that enticed WAP to begin organizing ‘porn tours.’ On these tours, WAP members would lead a group of women through a variety of pornographic establishments in Times Square (Bronstein 2001: 329). The idea was to provoke moral outrage and disgust in women who would not otherwise have a chance to see such explicit sexual acts (Bronstein 2001: 363). In one
case, a student taking the tour asked an erotic dancer if she enjoyed her job; the student was surprised when the dancer answered in the affirmative (Bronstein 2001: 330). But WAP had a ready explanation for these sex-positive attitudes: female desire and sexuality had been entirely subsumed and constructed by men. Mackinnon writes, “the fact that male power has power means that the interests of male sexuality construct what sexuality as such means in life, including the standard way it is allowed and recognized to be felt and expressed and experienced, in a way that determines women’s biographies, including sexual ones” (1995: 136). Duggan, Nan Hunter and Carole Vance, all members of the Feminist Anti-Censorship Taskforce, criticized Mackinnon’s ‘all or none’ attitude, claiming that “women do not become pornography models because society is egalitarian and they exercise a ‘free choice,’ but neither do they ‘choose’ this work because they have lost all power for deliberate, volitional behaviour. For some women, at some points in their lives, it is a rational, economic decision” (2006: 59). Still, in the eyes of WAP, sexual agency could only be exercised in the counter-cultural sphere of feminine virtue and traditional sexual conservatism. Outside of this sphere, all sexuality was seen as constructed and controlled by men even when it appeared as a ‘rational choice.’ Nevertheless, as Echols points out, this explanation “assumes that somehow women’s sexuality [as sensual, gentle, tender, etc.] is not ‘patriarchally trained’” (1983: 449).

Because members of WAP located the root of male-controlled sexuality in pornography, it should come as no surprise that, by 1981, WAP had started to offer support for ordinances that would ban all forms of pornography (Bronstein 2001: 478-
Yet, even within feminism, many feared that these sorts of ordinances would only further marginalize those with alternative sexualities (Bronstein 2001: 404). As a result, both WAVAW and WAVPM began to oppose WAP’s methods, and many previous members of WAP distanced themselves from the organization. In 1982, the first conference was held to unite feminists who opposed WAP. This group became known as the ‘pro-sex feminists,’ implicitly suggesting that members of WAP were ‘anti-sex’ (Bronstein 2001: 404). The 1982 Barnard Conference on Sexuality came about as a result of *Heresies #12: The Sex Issue*, an academic feminist journal special edition that encouraged women to discuss their sexualities outside the confines of cultural or lesbian-separatist feminism and the dominant WAP discourse. The sex issue of *Heresies* also helped bring the voices of Black feminists’ into account, as the WAVAW, WAVPM and WAP organizations were predominately constituted by middle-class white women (Bronstein 2001: 415). The primary question raised in *Heresies #12* is: “is there something we can call female sexuality?” (Alderfer et al. 1981: 94). The answer seemed to be in the negative: “None of us feels that this is the magazine we would have produced if we had the individual power to make the decisions…. The very fact that no single feminist position could be formulated for our issue speaks to the importance of the activity we have undertaken” (Alderfer et al. 1981: 1, 94).

The results of *Heresies #12* suggested to pro-sex feminists that sexual “theory, as it stands, is based on limited facts marshalled by overdeveloped preconceptions” (Vance 2011: 64). Thus the aim of the Barnard Conference was not simply to theorize more about sex, but to widen the discussion of theory to include a diverse range of sexual
experiences. Carole Vance, the conference coordinator, writes, “the taboo on investigating pleasure led to an abstract sexual theory which bears little relationship to daily life. If theory is to have any valid relationship to experience, we need to acknowledge that sexuality is worth talking about seriously” (1984: 7). What the pro-sex feminists saw lacking in WAP’s discourse on sexuality was a discussion of sexual pleasure (Vance 1984: 24). In one of the conference papers, Ellen DuBois and Linda Gordon argued that “a feminist politics about sex... must seek both to protect women from sexual danger and to encourage their pursuit of sexual pleasure” (1984: 31). Like Walkowitz, they claimed that the members of WAP shared many similarities with nineteenth-century feminists who “denied the prostitute any role other than that of the passive victim” (1984: 33). WAP was ignoring sexual pleasure while focusing only on danger.

Not only did the WAP ignore pleasure; they actively worked to control it. And this act of control became part of their counter-cultural sphere of women’s sexual agency: “self-control and watchfulness became major and necessary female virtues” (Vance 1984: 4). It should come as no surprise, then, that WAP coordinated an attack on the Barnard Conference in the week leading up to it. Several women identifying as ‘anti-pornography’ made phone calls to Barnard College criticizing the conference “for promoting patriarchal values antithetical to the basic tenets of feminism, and they objected to particular participants by name, reportedly portraying them as sexual deviants” (Vance 1984: 431). This move ignited a sex panic within the college’s administration and, as a result, 1500 copies of the conference’s major text, *Diary of a*
Conference on Sexuality, were confiscated (Vance 1984: 431). Meanwhile, WAP prepared a leaflet that, like the phone calls, attacked certain individuals by name and criticized the conference (Vance 1984: 432-433). On the morning of the conference, WAP protestors picketed outside and handed these leaflets to conference attendees (Vance 1984: 433). According to Vance, “the unavailability of the Diary to registrants on that day made the conference’s purpose more vulnerable to distortion. Leaflets were handed out before any papers or presentations were made; and registrants’ perceptions of what occurred were colored by the leaflet’s inflammatory and sensational charges” (1984: 434).

These actions reflected WAP’s desire to maintain control over the feminist discourse of sexuality and to confine it within the theoretical boundaries of cultural and lesbian-separatist feminism, asserting a collective form of sexual agency through self-control and watchfulness. Yet these theoretical boundaries were also influenced by WAP’s approach to activism, which in turn was influenced by the political strategies of the Cold War. As Duggan recalls,

Those of us on the anti-porn “side” were astonished to find ourselves attacked by former allies. As we naively set out to open up questions which we believed antiporn activists had either sidelined or closed for discussion, we expected a debate, but not an assault. Borrowing rhetorical devices from the Cold War anticommunists, antiporners defined all dissent on sexual issues as “collaboration” (in this case, with “the patriarchy”) and treason (against feminism, or against all women). We were ultimately shocked to find ourselves defending our activist communities – of sex workers, of butch-fem dykes, of lesbian sadomasochists – against political attacks, launched by feminists. We are not just talking about sharp words here. We are talking about sponsorship of state suppression of our livelihoods, our publications, our art work, our political/sexual expression. (2006: 5)
WAP did not want a debate, they wanted to rationalize and control all forms of women’s sexuality (Echols 1983: 455). WAP’s approach to activism intertwined with their assertion of sexual agency, their sexuality defined by the political climate of the Cold War and informed by the endless reports of sexual assault. However, despite WAP’s aggressive tactics, the conference went on to create a dialogue about sexuality that broke free of WAP’s closed-off discourse and countered many of their theoretical claims.

In *Powers of Desire*, a 1983 anthology of pro-sex feminist writing, Ann Snitow claims that “pornography is not about personality but about the explosion of the boundaries of the self. It is a fantasy of an extreme state in which all social constraints are overwhelmed by a flood of sexual energy” (256). In this conception, sexual agency is returned to the individual by suggesting that sexual desire is a transgression of social, cultural and political identities and taboos. For example, one workshop at the Barnard Conference collected statements from women speaking of what was taboo for them (Webster 1984: 391). There was a variety of responses, including statements like “I want to have sex with my student,” “Patriarchal men turn me on,” “I like sucking cock,” “I want to rape a woman,” “I want to sleep with a young girl/boy,” “I want to fuck my husband in the ass,” “I want to sexually caress my child,” “I would like to have sex with my brother/sister/father/mother,” “I want to fantasize about being a porn star” and so on (Webster 1984: 391). Having these sorts of taboo desires was unnerving to some women, as Helle Thorning suggests in *Heresies #12*: “my innermost sexual fantasies, with their emphasis on passivity and total male dominance, are frightening because they
are so contradictory to what I, as a feminist, think” (1981: 3). But, as Webster notes, “for some, playing with the distance from or proximity to the forbidden is a tension-filled turn-on” (1984: 391). Within WAP’s theoretical framework, these sorts of responses would only support the idea that female sexual desire is constructed by patriarchy and controlled by men. But rather than acting as the ‘sex police,’ pro-sex feminists encouraged women to explore their sexualities while keeping a critical eye out for how their sexualities are male-constructed (DuBois and Gordon 1984: 31; Kaplan 1983: 317). This critical approach to exploring sexuality allowed women to assert individual sexual agency in a new way, even within a patriarchal structure of desire.

In the *Diary of a Conference on Sexuality*, Vance argues that the construction of sexuality is “articulated at many points with the economic, social, and political structures of the material world” (2011: 52). As *Heresies #12* illustrates, women of varying economic, social and political backgrounds as well as women of different cultures, ethnicities, races, ages and sexual preferences all have a diverse range of sexualities and sexual desires that can be altered through time and on an individual basis. Given this diverse range, Vance asks, “How do women... negotiate sexual pleasure? The answer to this question requires information about every level of sexuality before comparisons between different groups of women can be made.... So rather than provide the ‘answers,’ the conference should indicate that the answers don’t exist and assert the importance of asking questions” (2011: 59, 60-61). In this pro-sex framework, sexual pleasure (and danger) can be negotiated through the process of communication. This approach still resonates today with certain feminist-led sexuality
education organizations such as Scarleteen, a website “visited by around three-quarters of a million diverse people each month worldwide, most between the ages of 15 and 25” (Corinna 2013b). For instance, in a Scarleteen article about the importance of communication, sexuality educator Heather Corinna writes:

Talking with your partner about sex isn’t just about asking what one person has or hasn’t done before, wants to do, or about what gets everyone hot under the collar. Talking about sex with a partner also involves discussing what pace you’re comfortable with, your sexual health and your partner’s health, what you want or need to be comfortable engaging in a given sexual activity, how you masturbate, how you feel about your body, what feels good and what really doesn’t, safer sex and birth control, your sexual ethics and beliefs, relationship model negotiation, the works. (2013a)

From this approach, the importance of asking questions about every level of each other’s sexuality is the best way for individuals to create a safe space to assert sexual agency and explore their sexualities.

In contrast, Mackinnon responds to Vance’s question in the opposite direction: “‘How do women... negotiate sexual pleasure?’ As if women under male supremacy have power to. As if ‘negotiation’ is a form of freedom” (1995: 140). In her academic work, Mackinnon had earlier argued that sex was to patriarchy what labour was to capitalism. In the same way that Marx had demonstrated how the so called “free” exchange of labour in capitalism was an illusion, Mackinnon argued that sexual negotiation would only give the illusion of freedom because it can only be negotiated within the confines of a male-defined sexuality. This is especially problematic regarding sexual consent. And, whereas pro-sex feminists argued that sexuality is “a discrete sphere of interaction or feeling or sensation or behaviour in which pre-existing social
divisions may or may not be played out,” Mackinnon argued that sexuality is “a pervasive dimension throughout the whole of social life, a dimension along which gender pervasively occurs and through which gender is socially constituted” (1995: 137). This latter view suggests that feminists such as Thorning, whose sexual fantasies emphasize male dominance, should take their fears seriously: to act on such fantasies would only perpetuate the gender inequalities that gave rise to them in the first place. Mackinnon and Dworkin both believe that these sexual fantasies are constructed by pornography, and that only the complete eradication of pornography in society will create the condition for women’s liberation – “no pornography, no male sexuality” (Mackinnon 1995: 143; Duggan 2006: 37). “We will know that we are free when pornography no longer exists” (Dworkin 1979: 224).

In 1983, Dworkin and Mackinnon stepped up to the forefront of the anti-pornography movement and continued to push for censorships on pornography (Bronstein 2001: 483-484). They co-wrote legislation that, if passed, would define pornography as a form of sex discrimination and ban all “films, books, and magazines deemed degrading to women” (Duggan 2006: 29). WAP lent its support to the legislation and, in 1984, the Indianapolis City Council passed the ordinance. Yet, before it could be put into effect, the U.S. federal court struck it down as unconstitutional (Bronstein 2001: 475). As a result of this ruling, the anti-pornography movement suffered a major setback, but Dworkin and Mackinnon continued their efforts (Bronstein 2001: 484). In 1985, the Pornography Victims’ Protection Act was passed, making “the coercion of an adult or the use of a child to make pornography civilly actionable”
(Mackinnon 1995: 16). However, Duggan, Hunter and Vance pointed out at the time that “pornography used as a means of harassing women workers is already legally actionable” according to Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act (2006: 59). In 1992, Mackinnon and Dworkin’s ordinances from 1984 came back to life in a Supreme Court of Canada ruling that outlawed materials that ‘degraded’ or ‘dehumanized’ women (Bronstein 2001: 477). This ruling has since had significant side-effects: for example, a lesbian sex magazine was prosecuted for being obscene, and several books aimed at gay, lesbian and feminist audiences were confiscated by custom agents before reaching Canadian bookstores (Bronstein 2001: 477).

Duggan claims that by supporting the Dworkin-Mackinnon legislation, WAP “allied themselves with the most antifeminist forces in the culture, those who are opposed to ERA, abortion, gay rights, and affirmative action (the list could go on)” (2006: 30). WAP was not totally blind to these risky ‘alliances,’ as shown, for instance, in their opposition to an ultra-conservative rendition of the ordinance that was created by one of these conservative groups (Bronstein 2001: 475). According to Mackinnon, these accusations of allying with antifeminist groups only served to distract the debate from the real issues: “the debate over pornography... has increasingly regressed to its old right/left morality/freedom rut, making sexual violence against women once again irrelevant and invisible” (1997: 18). Again, Mackinnon and the WAP had always placed the increasing number of reports of sexual assault as central to their activism and theoretical perspectives. “Violation and abuse are... central to sexuality as women live it” (Mackinnon 1995: 140). As long as pornography persisted as the primary means of
constructing this abusive sexuality, there could be no room to speak about women’s sexual pleasure, at least not without falling prey to the illusion of freedom.

The pornography debate of the 1970s and 1980s was largely a discourse about pornography as it was framed in the eyes of the anti-pornography feminists. But, for pro-sex feminists, the anti porn discourse undercut freedom of expression and individual sexual agency. It was not their shared commitments to feminism that was irreconcilable. What was irreconcilable between the two sides was the way in which their discourses on sex and activism informed and constructed these commitments, and vice versa. What alarmed WAWA, WAVPM and WAP from the start was the increasing number of reports of sexual assault. But only WAP, and to a lesser extent WAVPM, took these reports as central to sexuality and central to activism. Whereas WAWA responded to these reports by writing letters to CEOs and government officials and boycotted record companies, to fight against the trivialization and condonement of violence against women, WAP brought these reports of sexual assault directly into their discourse on sexuality and used them in their activist methods. Tour guides for the WAP porn tours explicitly made connections between hard-core pornographic images and real life sexual assault, collapsing the distinction between image and act. And when pushing for the anti-pornography ordinances in Indianapolis, Dworkin and Mackinnon brought dozens of victims of sexual assault into the hearings to share their experiences of being coerced into the industry (Mackinnon 1997: 3-4). Pro-sex feminists did not ignore these reports of sexual assault, but neither did they place these reports as central to women’s sexuality or to their activist methods. In the words of Amber Hollibaugh,
“looking at the danger and damage done to us is only a part of coming to terms with sex. We should also begin to look at sexuality itself and at what we mean by words like desire, passion, craving and need” (1983: 402).

In line with this sort of outlook, and beginning with Linda Williams 1989 book *Hard Core*, a new focus on “porn studies” emerged in academic literature, exemplifying the shifting tides in academic discussions surrounding pornography. As Williams points out, “feminist debates about whether pornography should exist at all have paled before the simple fact that still and moving-image pornographies have become fully recognizable fixtures of popular culture” (2004: 1). Furthermore, as North American culture increasingly becomes more comfortable speaking about sex, Williams notes that the idea that ‘everyone watches porn’ is beginning to appear in common parlance (2004: 2). The aim of porn studies, then, is not to determine whether or not pornography should exist, but to understand it as an “increasingly on/scene cultural form that impinges on the lives of a wide variety of Americans and that matters in the evaluation of who we are as a culture” (Williams 2004: 5). This initiative to understand pornography rejects generalizations by recognizing porn’s diversity in technology, content and form, as shown, for example, throughout the various articles collected in the 2004 *Porn Studies* anthology – articles on the history of ‘stag films,’ as well as gay and lesbian porn; articles on pornographic home-movies, pinups and Japanese comics for women; articles on intentionally humourous ‘white-trash’ porn, on internet porn and even avant-garde porn (Williams 2004). As the content of these articles demonstrate, pornography is a diverse form of culture itself, and cannot be merely reduced to those
violent and misogynistic images commonly presented in anti-porn feminist discourse of the 70s and 80s.

The emergence of porn studies in academic discourse was also influenced by the spread of anti-foundationalist ideas in the 1980s and 1990s promoted by poststructuralist and postmodern theorizing. Here the attack focused on essentialist thinking about the nature of “women” as a unitary or cohesive category and on a celebration of difference and heterogeneity. This necessarily lent itself to a focus on sexual difference as performative rather than natural, most notably in Judith Butler’s work. It also extended to include a focus, strongly influenced by Foucault, on the production of discourses about sex and sexuality and their relations to power. In this context, the idea of pornography as a unitary and readily identifiable element of culture became more problematic than ever. At the same time, earlier initiatives to censor pornography were becoming increasingly untenable due to the continued advancement of online technologies that made pornography freely available to anyone with an internet connection.

Still, despite these developments, the porn debates of the 70s and 80s continue to have an impact in contemporary social thought, albeit in more sophisticated forms. For example, in her 2010 book *Pornland*, Gail Dines takes both an “anti-porn” and “pro-sex” stance, substituting the old sensual-erotic/violent-porn dichotomy with a creative-imaginative/formulaic-industrial one (x). Instead of focusing on culturally diverse (and arguably creative) genres of pornographies – e.g. the variety of genres observed throughout *Porn Studies* – Dines directs her attention towards what she calls “gonzo
porn”: “I want to make clear that when I talk about ‘porn,’ I am referring mainly to ‘gonzo’ – that genre which is all over the Internet and is today one of the biggest moneymakers for the industry – which depicts hard-core, body-punishing sex in which women are demeaned and debased” (2010: xi). For Dines, the problem with porn lies in its mainstream form, the kind of porn that is easily accessed on the internet and caters to the majority of men, men who are aroused by a formulaic body-punishing sex “which even the industry admits is taking its toll on the bodies of the women” (2010: xxviii). So while a diversity of porn (and sexual desires) may exist, Dines argues, this diversity is again subdued by mainstream porn, a result of the ruling capitalist and patriarchal structures of desire.

Similar to the anti-porners’ reliance on testimonies of victims in the 70s and 80s to construct their criticisms, Dines relies on the testimonies of victims on both the production and consumer side of porn, including men who feel they are “addicted” to porn, for some of her criticisms. In particular, these men have trouble with partnered sex for a variety of reasons: their partners refuse to try new things (such as receiving a “facial”); they’re not “present” with their partners while having sex; they’re ashamed of their sexual fantasies while having sex with their partners (“I hope she never knows what’s going through my mind when we have sex. She’d hate me”); their partners don’t look as good as the women in porn; their partners don’t behave like the women in porn; they start to think of their partners in the same way they think about women in porn; and so on (2010: 90-92). Dines paints a bleak picture for men who have trouble communicating their misogynistic, sexual desires to their partners, or who cannot find
partners willing to partake in such desires. Testimonies like these fuel Dines’ anti-porn stance and further support the older arguments of Dworkin and Mackinnon that pornography is intimately tied to male sexuality as we know it.

However, unlike the porn debates in the 70s and 80s, new lines of academic research are emerging that may help undermine the traditional lines of division between the two sides of the debate. One of these lines of research focuses on masturbation, the act, to paraphrase Foucault that “everyone does but nobody talks about.” In his lectures on Abnormal behaviour at the College de France in the mid 1970s, Foucault discusses the process where masturbation came to be understood as a “problem” in western cultures, particularly in relation to the production of child sexuality. For Foucault, early concerns about masturbation have connections to the emergence of Protestant religions thinking, but, more notably, the emergence of a modern discourse on masturbation is implicated in the development of new biopolitical and disciplinary arrangements linking the bourgeois family to new discourses in medicine and the advent of state education. Masturbation became linked to the very idea of child sexuality and this facilitated the process where children came to be understood as “properties” to be protected and educated in a kind of exchange between parents and disciplinary institutions. What gets lost in the entire disciplinary discourse around masculinity is the simple question of pleasure.

Foucault is a significant presence in the emergent discourses of porn studies in the early 2000s, but, more recently, some theorists have attempted to move beyond structuralist or poststructuralist analyses which decenter the Cartesian subject to a
more phenomenologically embodied form of analysis of sexual practice. In the case of masturbation, for example, Magnus Ullén has argued, in the film journal *Jump Cut*, that “while critics and scholars may perform a hermeneutical interpretation of a sequence of pornographic images, they use a mode of reading intrinsically at odds with the aim of the masturbating person” (2009: 1). For Ullén, the problem with porn studies is that scholars often view/read/interpret porn without masturbating to it, analyzing it through a displaced hermeneutical lens of non-masturbatory practice. Approaching things differently, Ullén claims that pornography “could arguably be classified as an alternative, anti-hermeneutical mode of reading,” that is, reading pornography as “a form of sex: masturbation” (2009: 12, 13). This anti-hermeneutical mode of reading suggests that masturbating to pornography can be a healthy form of sex, and that some individuals may prefer this kind of sex over partnered sex.

Expanding upon Ullén’s theory, Julian Hanich suggests that masturbation can be a vastly different experience depending on the genre of the pornography, the technologies involved and the form of interactivity. Hanich’s examples include: the experience of masturbating while navigating through various hyperlinks in sites like *YouPorn*; rewinding the video to replay a scene; freezing the video in order to masturbate longer to a particular frame; being dissatisfied with a video and having to search for a new one; the “search and thrill” of the hunt for the “perfect clip”; the “cases in which the masturbating viewer tries to ‘synchronize’ his orgasm with a cum shot in the clip”; and so on (Hanich 2011: 2, 9). According to Hanich, these various ways in which a viewer interacts with pornography while masturbating allows him/her to
“create a very individual porn and masturbatory experience” (Hanich 2011: 11). As with all forms of sex, experimentation and practice can help the individual to learn what works best for him/herself – except with masturbation, the individual does not have to worry about communicating with a partner, alleviating the need to confess potentially taboo sexual fantasies and interests to a partner.

What these theories of masturbation underline is that idea that pornography cannot be thought of as some sort of “objective reality” that “effects the subjective viewer”; rather, pornography must be thought of phenomenologically. Clyde Willis makes this argument in response to Mackinnon’s book *Only Words*: as long as the legal system continues to categorize pornography as “freedom of expression,” the lived experience of pornography will go unnoticed in courts (1997: 177-178). This includes both the lived experience of women who partake in the production of pornography as well as the men who masturbate to pornography – both experiences feed on each other and reinforce patriarchal structures of desire. There is no cause and effect relationship between pornography and the viewer, but a phenomenological entanglement.

This need for phenomenological studies of male sexuality in relation to pornography is the basis for this thesis. When it comes to speaking about male sexuality, perhaps the two sides of the pornography debate are not so irreconcilable after all. On the one hand, the ‘essence’ of male sexuality may not be natural or unchangeable or universal, but the ideas and theories put forth by critics such as Dworkin, Mackinnon, Brownmiller, Dines and others may ultimately resonate deeply with the lived experiences of (white, heterosexual, North American) men. And, while pro-sex feminists
typically offer postmodern critiques of masculinity as a gender performance, there may be something missing in these ‘non-essentialist’ theories that Dworkin and Mackinnon picked up on. It is certainly true that pornography today is more widespread than ever, and that the majority of mainstream pornography still caters to heterosexual (and homosexual) men and usually depicts stylized, unrealistic and sexist portrayals of sex and sexuality. At the same time, pro-sex feminists and queer theorists have opened up a space for individuals of any sex, gender, ethnicity, race, age and sexual orientation to construct a new ‘essence’ on top of the old one, or to give expression to an individual essence that renders the collective one inactive or non-existent. Put simply, the deeply rooted ‘male’ essence of my sexuality is uncovered, brought to light and transformed into discourse by the anti-pornography feminists while the malleable, individualized ‘essence’ that supposedly breaks free of gender inequality is constructed for me by pro-sex feminists and queer theorists, allowing me to further shape and mold my sexuality through discourse and non-normative sexual activities. But the unnerving question always comes back to me: which essence am I truly listening to?
CHAPTER 2

The Dialectic of Eros: On “Being Turned On”

โอ้ μοι ἑπ ὀμμασι νηδυμος ὑπνος ιζάνει.
The pleasing dream lands on my eyes.

-Agamemnon, Iliad: 10.91

In the age of online sex have men become so concerned with who or what ‘turns them on’ that they have forgotten to question the meaning of ‘being-turned-on’? What does it mean to be turned-on? I ask my Catholic roommate. He answers, “to be attracted to the woman you love and want to someday marry and have kids with.” I ask my brother. He answers, “arousal.” I ask, “what does arousal mean?” He replies with confusion, “what do you mean ‘what does it mean’?” There is nothing strange about these answers. Men all have their own answer to the question because they all experience being-turned-on almost everyday. Yet, because this experience is so familiar to them, they no longer bother to ask the question. As a result, the question has lost its meaning.

In Eros and Civilization, Marcuse claims that Freud’s conception of “Eros” can be given “a general ontological meaning” (1955: 125). Andrew Feenberg argues that “this unusual interpretation of Freud implies phenomenological themes Marcuse only alludes to, but which are essential to his argument” (2012: 1). The Greek word ‘eros’ means ‘desire.’ In Freud’s earlier work on sexuality, desire belongs to the sexual instinct and “is
defined by its specific genesis, aim, and object” (Marcuse 1955: 22). For example, I might say that I desire the attractive woman sitting across the table from me at the coffee shop – she is the object of my desire. Her smile always turns me on. I am objectifying her as I think of her as a sexual object to be possessed.

However, in Freud’s later work, sexuality is reinterpreted in terms of eros as the “life instinct”; the life instinct replaces the sexual instinct as a basic instinct (Marcuse 1955: 23). According to Feenberg, “for eros to acquire ontological value, ‘life’ must be considered as a form of being ‘revealing’ nature in something like Heidegger’s sense of the term, rather than as just another natural object.... The erotic desire is not merely psychological but has an ontological correlate in the beauty of lived nature” (2012: 1, 3). Thus in order to acquire ontological value for eros, I must treat my sexual desire not psychologically or physiologically but as a fundamental way of what Heidegger calls “being-in-the-world.” So rather than merely staring at the appearance of this ‘natural’ object of my desire, I perceive what is behind it and consider eros as an integral part of my being-turned-on.

In Being and Time, Heidegger uses his workshop as an example for how his everyday comportment towards the world reveals things in themselves as “ready-to-

1I must stress to the reader that this is a colloquial example, that is, I am speaking of my general life experience, not of any specific experience. The ‘attractive woman’ in this example is not referring to any specific woman in real life, but of any woman I may have encountered in the past or may encounter in the future. The same applies for all examples found throughout this thesis.
hand.” I cannot repeat Heidegger’s lengthy argument here. Instead I want to apply some of Heidegger’s ideas in a thought experiment to suggest how his work might illuminate an understanding of being “turned on.” Heidegger does not have a great deal to say about the realm of the erotic. Still, if one uses some imagination, there are a number of areas where Heidegger’s concepts and arguments lend themselves to an analysis of sex. The most obvious place to begin this thought experiment is with Heidegger’s discussion of technology; especially where Heidegger discusses a tool he calls “the hammer-Thing.” He claims that “the less we just stare at the hammer-Thing, and the more we seize hold of it and use it, the more primordial does our relationship to it become, and the more unveiledly is it encountered as that which it is – as equipment…. The kind of being which equipment possesses… we call ‘readiness-to-hand’” (Heidegger 1962: 98).

There is certainly potential in this terminology to extend it to a discussion the male arousal and, especially, to masturbation. In the act of male masturbation a penis is “ready to hand.” It is arguably encountered as “equipment” – not a single item of equipment on its own, but as an inseparable part of the equipmental whole of a man’s sexual workshop. If I am the person who is masturbating, I am not staring and thinking about my penis. I am thinking about an erotic idea or image that arouses me, for example, that attractive woman mentioned above. She would be the “towards which” I am turned on to. Heidegger continues: “The peculiarity of what is proximally ready-to-hand is that, in its readiness-to-hand, it must, as it were, withdraw” (1962: 99). There is a suggestion here of an analogy between men’s penises and other forms of technology. The phallus has the technological capacity to be both limp and erect. It can withdraw
and become transparent like the ballpoint pen I am writing with right now. It also has a set of “objective” characteristics like any piece of technology: for example, it has a distinctive shape, with a shaft and head; it has veins; the skin stretches to accommodate the growth in size; it is pinkish in colour, muscular and ribbed.

For sexual purposes the flaccid penis is unusable, as any male who has ever tried to masturbate with a limp penis learns early on. Heidegger calls this kind of discovery of the limits of technology “conspicuousness”: “we discover its unusability, however, not by looking at it and establishing its properties, but rather by the circumspection of the dealings in which we use it” (1962: 102). A man does not discover the unusability of his penis by looking at it as an object and establishing its properties, but, rather, by trying to masturbate with it when it is limp. The flaccid penis is “present-at-hand.” But, to adapt Heidegger’s terminology, “this presence-at-hand of something that cannot be used is still not devoid of all readiness-to-hand whatsoever; equipment which is present-at-hand in this way is still not a mere alteration of a Thing – not a change of properties which just occurs in something present-at-hand” (Heidegger 1962: 103). The penis is not merely a functional technological ‘object’ that alternates between limp and erect. A man’s penis is an inseparable part of the sexual equipment he uses in his comportment towards the world. A limp penis present-at-hand, appears unusable in this way only because it already holds sexual significance as something to have grasped and stroked, as something that, in itself, is ready-to-hand and ready-to-grasp in what I call the technological world of sexual significance.
In my view, the penis ready-to-hand is prior to the penis present-at-hand: the penis ready-to-hand always belongs to the previously established totality of a man’s sexual equipment. It cannot be separated from this totality, ‘cut off’ from the technological world of sexual significance, without losing its readiness-to-hand. But, such a separation is impossible. For example, if I objectify my penis, even if I were to cut it off from my body, it would still remain in the background ready-to-hand – a phantom limb. In the technological world of sexual significance, the penis is always already ready-to-hand regardless of whether it is objectified, present-at-hand, erect, limp or cut off, all of which come after its technological a priori readiness-to-hand. But how is a penis ready-to-hand even when it is limp? Did I not just establish that the penis must be erect to be ready-to-hand and ready-to-grasp? To answer these questions it is useful to modify and to imaginatively develop some of Heidegger’s discussion of Aristotle’s Metaphysics.

Feenberg claims that “for Heidegger, Aristotle’s greatness lies in having placed movement, kinesis, at the center of philosophical reflection. Movement in Aristotle’s sense refers not just to change of place, but more generally to any kind of change from one state to another” (2005: 28). Let’s apply this insight to a consideration of male sexuality. Inspired by Aristotle, we might say that the movement of the penis is characterized by its erection, what Heidegger, in another context, calls a “bringing forth” or a “coming to presence” (Feenberg 2005: 28). According to Feenberg, Heidegger “claims that the Aristotelian concept of movement is derived from the notion of rest as completion, as the standing still in which movement terminates. The term
‘energeia,’ usually translated as ‘actuality,’ has a similar meaning... signifying the ‘ergon,’ or finished work that stands before us in its completion” (2005: 29). Following Feenberg’s interpretation of Heidegger’s reading of Aristotle, I suggest that we can see the erect penis as the finished work, standing before me, in which male sexual movement terminates. The erect penis is the actualization of the penis ready-to-hand. Yet, as Feenberg points out about technology more generally: “the completed work must not be isolated from the process of its emergence.... All that stands there stably in itself must be comprehended from out of the movement by which it reached that state and holds itself steady” (2005: 29). If one applies this idea to masculine sexuality, it suggests that the erect penis must not be isolated from the bringing forth of the erection, its movement from being limp to being erect. To isolate the penis from the movement by which it reached its state of erection would be to objectify it and cover up the essence of the erect penis. The penis ready-to-hand is not the erect penis isolated from its essence; instead, the penis is always already at a state of readiness to become erect. The potential (‘dynamis’) for the penis to reach a state of erection also belongs to its readiness-to-hand. Hence, when I say that the penis is always already ready-to-hand, I mean that the penis always already has the potential to become erect in the technological world of sexual significance.

At first sight, such observations seem to add unnecessary complexity to something that men already know, something obvious. However, in my view, thinking about the penis as an implement in the masculine sexual workshop provides a basis for greater insight. For example, with the meaning of the penis ready-to-hand established, I
can now ask the question: how can the penis ready-to-hand acquire ontological value for eros, the life instinct? Recall that eros means ‘desire.’ For example, I might say that I desire intimacy with the man sitting beside me – his body is the essence of my desire. His essence turns me on. My penis tingles and starts to move. What causes it to move? The man?

Aristotle would disagree. As Feenberg points out: “Aristotle does not share our idea of movement as a contingent interaction between a mutually indifferent cause and effect. Instead he understands movement through the concept of ‘eros,’ the desire which draws the moved being toward its object and in which it comes to rest” (Feenberg 2005: 29; emphasis added). It is possible that some might interpret eros here in a very literal way, as the desire which draws the penis towards another person’s sexual orifices, in which it comes to rest, in its seemingly “natural place.” I italicize the word ‘in’ because such an interpretation would likely assume that the penis must come to rest in something (penetration) rather than on something. A penis ready-to-hand may be erect but it rests “naturally” in a man’s pants, not in someone else’s sexual orifice. Here one finds a clue about what it means to be turned-on. One is always turned on to something. This being-turned-on-to-something is the work of eros, the life instinct. If one can show that the meaning of this “being-turned-on” is a fundamental constitution of everyday existence, eros can acquire ontological value.

In Homeric Greek, the word ‘epí’ (ἐπί) is the preposition most closely related to the English word ‘on.’ As Silvia Luraghi points out, “describing the semantics of epí is very
complicated” (2003: 298). Depending on the context, *epí* is sometimes translated as “upon,” “on,” “on the surface of,” “by,” “over,” “at,” “to,” “toward,” or “against” (Smyth 1956: 378-379). With the dative or accusative cases, *epí* profiles the whole trajectory of movement, not only its end. For example, “looking (on) toward the throng” profiles the trajectory of the eyes to the throng (Luraghi 2003: 304) (see Figure 1).

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Figure 1

- trajectory - > throng of people

"I have my eyes on you"
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In contrast, *epí* in the genitive case denotes *only* the end of movement. For example, “the spear lies on the ground” does *not* profile the movement or trajectory of how the spear came to rest on the ground in the first place (Luraghi 2003: 302). However, Luraghi argues that the difference between the genitive case and the dative case is that the genitive “profiles a specific orientation (vertical)” whereas the dative “does not profile a specific orientation” (2003: 310). So when the spear lies on the ground, ‘on’

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2 It should be noted that these figures are drawn with my own hand, the same hand I use to masturbate with. The work process of drawing the figures is thus related to the process of masturbation, and what is produced in either case is pornographic. I am an amateur pornographer.
profiles a specific orientation (vertical) of the spear’s relation to the ground (see Figure 2). In contrast, when someone is looking on toward the throng, they could be looking at the throng from any direction – horizontally from across the road, vertically from above or somewhere in between. If either the dative or accusative is used for a vertical orientation, this is because it profiles the whole trajectory of movement, ending with that specific orientation, as in “he had his sons mount (on) the horses and sent them forth” (Luraghi 2003: 312) (see Figure 3). Unlike the spear on the ground, we know how the sons came to be on the horses: they mounted the horses. The whole trajectory of movement is profiled in the sentence. As for cases where the final orientation is not vertical, the dative or accusative is used whether or not the whole trajectory of movement is profiled.
Yet, Helena Somolinos argues that the word *epí* still remains a mystery in many cases: “the result is that in general we do not have a clear idea of what kind of spatial location indicates *ἐπί*, beyond the idea that genitive means over, above and that it usually involves contact. However, in many contexts, especially genitive and dative, we are forced to translate in other ways, without knowing why” (2012: 2; Google’s)
translation)³. In other words, the word ‘epí’ means ‘on’ in a basic sense of vertically oriented contact, as in “the spear lies on the ground.” Still, why did the Greeks use the same word for differently oriented trajectories, especially in cases where final contact is not achieved? I have a basic sense of what epí means in a phrase like “ἑοῦ ἐπὶ γοῦνασι πατρός” (“on his father’s lap”) (Iliad 22.500). But why on earth would Odysseus also use epí when he says to his mother: “σὺ δὲ μ᾽ ἔτρεφες αὐτὴ τῷ σῷ ἐπὶ μαζῷ” (“I grew up on your breasts”) (Odyssey 19.482)? Somolinos argues that the key is “the pressure factor”: “the trajectory remains in contact with the landmark because there is something that presses and holds it against him” (2012: 5; Google’s translation)⁴. The ‘pressure’ that holds the boy on his father’s lap is the ‘force of gravity’. The ‘pressure’ that holds Odysseus to his mother’s breasts is ‘his attraction to his mother’s milk.’ The force of gravity and Odysseus’s attraction to his mother’s milk are both fundamentally constitutive of ‘being-on-something’.

However, the Greeks would not have thought of gravity as a ‘natural object’ to be studied. Instead, being-on-the-world was a fundamental constitution of their everyday existence. Whether standing still, jumping up and down or falling off a cliff, a

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³ “El resultado es que en general no se tiene una noción clara de qué tipo de localización espacial indica ἐπὶ, más allá de la idea de que con genitivo significa sobre, encima de y que suele implicar contacto. Sin embargo, en multitud de contextos, con genitivo y sobre todo con dativo, nos vemos forzados a traducir de otras maneras, sin saber bien por qué.”
⁴ “En la mayoría de los casos ese factor es la presión; el trajector permanece en contacto con el landmark porque hay algo que lo presiona y lo sujeta contra él.”
human being could not be separated from the world that constantly pulled him or her towards it. Consider the tale of Icarus, the boy who flew too close to the sun. Daedalus, Icarus’s father, created wings out of wax for both him and his son to escape their imprisonment on the island of Crete. Daedalus recognized that being-on-the-world was fundamental to their existence, but believed his wings could provide a *dynamic* orientation to the world (flight) rather than a static, straight, vertical one (falling). But, the only way to accomplish this shift in orientation would be to keep to the trajectory of flight that he planned out, a horizontally curved being-on-the-world (see Figure 4). He told his son, Icarus, not to stray from this curved path. Unfortunately, as they flew onwards, Icarus mistakenly believed that he was free from his being-on-the-world altogether and flew off course. Up and up he went until the sun melted his wings. The dynamic orientation of flight ‘snapped’ back to the vertical orientation of gravity, and Icarus fell to his death in the sea. Indeed, as Icarus’s tragic attempt foretold, only the gods could break free from being-on-the-world.
However, the Greeks would not have known that the ‘force of gravity’ came from the earth’s mass, nor would they have equated ‘world’ with the earth. Instead, the pull of gravity would have likely been understood as a *movement*. According to Heidegger’s interpretation of Aristotle’s metaphysics, “movement [for the Greeks] is understood through rest, but rest itself is a kind of zero point of movement and as such a form of movement” (Feenberg 2005: 29). For example, the spear resting on the ground is a form of movement insofar as its contact with the ground implies that it fell there in the first place. But, the spear can be picked up again to regain its potential to fall. The force of gravity does not cease with the actualization of contact. The spear will always have the potential to move again because it is perpetually ‘tethered’ to the world even at rest. Because the Greeks would not have equated the earth with ‘world,’ nor have understood gravity in relation to the earth’s mass, they would not have *ontologically* distinguished the force of gravity from the desire which draws Odysseus to his mother’s breasts. The ambiguity of the use of *epí* supports this ontological belief.
Hence ‘being-on-the-world’ does not necessarily mean ‘being-on-the-earth’ but rather ‘being-on-something-in-the-world,’ what I call ‘being-on.’

In this sense, I want to argue that “being-turned-on” is a way of being-on. Like Odysseus, an infant male might be on a woman’s breasts, but a mature heterosexual man will likely be turned on by a woman’s breasts. Similarly a gay man is not on another man’s lap; he is turned on by the man’s lap. The trajectory of desire that brings a man’s penis forth to erection is eros, the life instinct (see Figure 5). The relation between the readiness-to-hand of the penis and eros is now made explicit: speaking metaphorically, the male penis is the spear and eros is its gravity. In the same way that the spear can be picked up to regain its potential to fall, the erect penis can go soft to regain its potential to become hard again. The potentiality of the penis ready-to-hand is inseparable from the eros which brings it forth. Because eros, being an integral part of being-turned-on, has thus acquired ontological value from ancient ontology, I am no longer restricted to speaking about the technological world of sexual significance. Instead, I can now understand the penis ready-to-hand in the primordial world of sexual significance. What makes a man’s penis always already ready-to-hand is not only its potential to become erect but its potential to be turned on by another body, the actualization of a specific sexual orientation.
In Figure 5, the sexual orientation of a man’s penis towards who or what turns him on is actualized only when the movement is completed, when his penis comes to rest in its ‘natural place.’ Recall that the genitive case of *epí* profiles a specific orientation whereas the dative does not. The genitive covers up the essence of movement as in “the spear lies (vertically) on the ground” because I do not know the orientation of the movement that put the spear on the ground in the first place, that actualized the contact. For all I know, the spear might have been *thrown* (not dropped) with a horizontally *queer* (curved) orientation before contacting the ground. Similarly, I might say that *the essence of the primordial eros does not have a specific sexual orientation*. The movement of the penis from limp to erect follows a *queerly* and *dynamically* oriented trajectory of desire. Sexual orientation becomes actualized only at the movement’s completion. Furthermore, in the same way that the spear is always ‘on’ the ground even as it is picked up (insofar as it is tethered to the earth by gravity), a man’s penis is always ‘on’ something even when it is limp and does not have a specific sexual orientation towards a particular body (insofar as it is tethered to a dynamically
changing ‘turn-on’ by eros). Therefore in the primordial world of sexual significance, I argue that men are always already turned-on. But what does this mean in ‘practice’? To better understand the primordial world of eros, it is instructive to consider Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s discussion of Schneider’s sex life.

Schneider is a patient with “psychic blindness” (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 105). Schneider cannot be turned on by anything or anyone external to the primordial world of sexual significance: “obscene pictures, conversations on sexual topics, and the perception of a body fail to arouse any desire in him.... Reactions are strictly local and never begin without contact” (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 157). For Schneider, being-turned-on begins with contact and cannot continue without it: “if his partner reaches orgasm first and moves away, the nascent desire fades away” (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 157). From these observations, can one conclude that the sexual significance of the primordial world is strictly limited to direct contact? If this were the case, how could one explain the mating calls and other various mating rituals of animals in the wilderness that ‘turn them on’ before direct contact occurs? As Simone de Beauvoir points out, some species never make contact at all: “water is an element that can carry eggs and sperm and enables their meeting; fertilization in the aquatic milieu is almost always external; fish do not mate: at best some rub against each other for stimulation” (2011: 34). Instead, what Schneider is lacking is the ability to grasp the trajectory of desire apart from direct contact. For him, the eros of the primordial world is nothing more than the existence of direct physical stimulation: “perception has lost its erotic structure both spatially and temporally” (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 158). The ‘erotic structure’ that has collapsed both
spatially and temporally is the essence of eros. Schneider has lost connection with the
phenomenal space and time of perceptual desire ‘in between’ his penis and another
body.

When Merleau-Ponty claims that “for Schneider... a feminine body has no
*particular* essence,” he does not mean that Schneider is incapable of perceiving the
essence of another body; rather, Schneider perceives the essence of a body and nothing
more: “for, when it comes to their bodies, they are all the same” (2012: 158; emphasis
added). In the primordial world, another body is sexually significant as a body in
*alignment* with his body. The two bodies are in alignment insofar as they both exist
together in direct physical contact with each other. The pressure of one body is felt by
the pressure of the other body in the same way that the spear presses against the
ground and the ground presses against the spear. For Schneider, this sexual significance
only occurs during direct physical contact. But for a man without Schneider’s psychic
blindness, I might suggest that a mutually aligned perceptual field ‘in between’ his body
and another body that draws his penis forth to actualization is the *essence of the
primordial eros*. I call this alignment *co-essencing*. Without another body in a mutually
aligned, perceptual range, the essence of the primordial eros is arguably closed off and,
as a result, a man’s penis loses its readiness-to-hand in the primordial world of sexual
significance.

Marcuse recognizes the essence of the primordial eros as the desire that unites
all bodies together: “according to Diotima, Eros drives the desire for one beautiful body
to another and finally to all beautiful bodies, for ‘the beauty of one body is akin to the
beauty of another,’ and it would be foolish ‘not to recognize that the beauty in every body is one and the same’” (1955: 211). In the primordial world of the Ancient Greeks, sexual orientation is not restricted to a binary opposition in regards to sex or gender, but is rather a dynamic allosexuality determined only by the position of penetrator (with penis ready-to-grasp) to penetrated (Guy-Bray 2003: 114-115). As Stephen Guy-Bray points out: “ancient Greek sexual practice meant that many upper-class males would pass from one position to the other, and from this fact we can infer that what we would now call a sexual orientation is not necessarily fixed” (2003: 114). Furthermore, despite that ancient Greek sexual practice only allowed the male to occupy the position of penetrator, today females can have penises too, as ready-to-grasp technological items in the form of strap-on or strapless dildos, allowing them to penetrate. Or perhaps, as Shannon Bell (2010) notes, the anatomical biotechnology of the female phallus allows them to penetrate without the use of dildos at all.

This raises the question of the complex relationship between eros and power. I understand Marcuse’s rendering of the essence of primordial eros as something that implies a profoundly humanist and collectivist sensibility. This is particularly evident in his assertion that “the beauty in every body is one and the same.” It also reveals itself in the suggestion of a need for mutual attraction, and, by implication, of sexual consent. In this latter sense, the primordial state of being-turned-on is expressed in the potential to become erect by co-essencing with other penetrating and penetrable bodies who feel attraction to the beauty of the initial desiring individual. By contrast, there is no necessary requirement of mutual attraction, let alone consent, in sex that is rooted
purely in the pursuit of sexual gratification through the exercise of unwelcome physical coercion. Here, being-turned-on is implicated in, and arguably derives from, the power of one person’s body to impose its will on another. If I am reading Marcuse correctly, such overt demonstrations of the power of the penetrator do not conform to an idealized rendering of eros as something that is fundamentally life affirming.

It is not my intention here to delve in detail into the psychology of the complex dynamics between sex and power. My point, simply, is to suggest that the primordial sense of eros as something that is socially positive implies reciprocity, where the individual who is attracted to the beauty of another body is perceived by the sexual other in an approximately similar way, at the same time and in mutual alignment. At its most basic level, this form of reciprocity of attraction will require the demonstration of consensual physical contact. In Merleau Ponty’s discussion of Schneider, it is only direct physical contact with another body that gives Schneider the potential for erection. It is only this physical existence of the primordial eros that turns him on and allows his penis to be ready-to-hand. Schneider has a sexual orientation only on the basis of who he is physically in contact with. If he is not in physical contact with another body he can have no sexual orientation.

However, for most people, the realm of the erotic links the mental, the physical and the cultural in much more complex ways. For example, in this chapter, I have identified two distinctive dimensions of eros that might result in men being turned on. The first is the technological-instinct eros of the world of heterosexual significance. Here the experience of looking at, and imagining about, ‘objects’ of heterosexual desire, such
as the attractive woman sitting across from me in the restaurant. The second is the life-instinct eros of the primordial world of allosexual significance – the experience of co-essencing with other penetrating and penetrable bodies.

In my view, the existence of the primordial eros in contemporary life has been increasingly absorbed by the essence of a non-primordial eros that belongs to the technological world of sexual significance, an eros who shoots his arrows at body and screen. Love for the pornographic screen, love for being-on-the-screen, has arguably de-eroticized human activity by absorbing the life instinct into the technological instinct that controls sexual desire. As Marcuse puts it, “libido becomes less ‘polymorphous,’ less capable of eroticism beyond localized sexuality, and the latter is intensified” (1964: 73). Unlike Schneider, most men do not need direct physical contact to give them an erection, but their penises do need to be erect and ready-to-grasp and sexually oriented towards a specific body to call themselves ‘turned-on.’ The essence of the primordial eros, the life instinct, has collapsed into its own existence, manifesting itself as a non-primordial eros of technology which socially constructs its own essence. The whole trajectory of desire found in the primordial world of sexual significance, the phenomenal space in between life and sexuality, has been covered over by men’s intense focus on their specific sexual orientation towards who or what turns them on. Put simply, in their obsession with objects and appearances, they have forgotten the primordial eros. The differences between primordial eros and non-primordial eros, as I understand them, are outlined below, in Table One.
Table 1: The Essence and Existence of the Penis Ready-to-Hand as Tethered to Two Different Instincts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Essence</th>
<th>Primordial Eros (Life Instinct)</th>
<th>Non-Primordial Eros (Technological Instinct)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Essence</strong></td>
<td>-Perceptual alignment of multiple bodies’ essences (co-essencing)</td>
<td>-Perceptual relation between bodies (not mutual or aligned)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Potentiality of penetrating and/or being penetrated by other bodies</td>
<td>-Body of my desire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Queer and dynamic sexual orientation</td>
<td>-Concretized sexual orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Always already turned-on</td>
<td>-Penis ‘snaps’ to erection (on-off switch)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Focus on being-turned-on</td>
<td>-Focus on who or what turns me on</td>
</tr>
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|                          | ↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓↓→

To reawaken the experience of the primordial eros, the experience of co-essencing, I must first reveal and understand the essence of the non-primordial eros, which appears to animate so much of contemporary sexual desire. It is useful to begin by unravelling the erotic threads of sexual desire that might lead a man to have an erection as a result of gazing at an attractive woman sitting across the table. I imagine myself in this situation. In what way is the woman an ‘object’ of my desire? Some answers can be found in Jean-Paul Sartre’s discussion of the experience of gazing at a
woman. Sartre notes that in this process “I am fixing the people whom I see into objects” (1993: 356). Under my gaze, Sartre suggests, the woman’s eyes, the gateway to her being, are objectified and lose their depth; her body “appears to me here as one instrument in the midst of other instruments,” as a tool “which is particularly delicate and dangerous to handle”; and her being-as-subject is now a being-as-object: her subjectivity disappears for him (Sartre 1993: 359, 422-423, 484). Sartre claims that these are her transformations as they are for him; whether she feels the same transformations for her is a different question. I imagine myself in Sartre’s situation. If the woman was to look back at me and overpower my gaze with hers, the dynamic between us would reverse. As Sartre puts it, my eyes would lose their depth; my body would appear as an instrument for her to play with; and my subjectivity would dissolve: I would become an object-for-her (1993: 475-477). Once I am an object under her gaze, I can no longer objectify her; she remains a subject. Yet, because I am no longer a subject-for-her, I cannot ‘discover’ or ‘get at’ her subjective self; her subjectivity is forever closed off from my subjectivity, and vice versa, because we cannot both be subjects for each other at the same time (Sartre 1993: 484).

However, Sartre’s analysis reveals its limitations when one takes perception into account. I consider the imaginary situation of the attractive woman I have looked at. Neither of us is looking directly at each other. I do not see her, I perceive her. She is not an ‘appearance’ to me, nor is she an object or an instrument. Rather, I perceive her presence, I hear her breathing, I hear her sipping her coffee, I smell her scent and
imagine it as an ‘essence’. This perception of her is what turns me on: the phenomenal space between me and her, the trajectory of my perceptual desire.

In this particular case, Sartre’s theory does not adequately explain how the woman across from me might lead my being turned on. I do not have access to her subjectivity, I do not know what she is thinking or feeling, but the subject-object relation that Sartre proposes is irrelevant. I am turned-on because my body perceives her body as a body with ‘essence’ or a ‘soul,’ a body of a human being. Thus, the woman is not the object of my desire, she is the body of my desire. Merleau-Ponty makes a similar observation: “for the normal person, a body is not perceived merely as just another object, this objective perception is inhabited by a more secret one: the visible body is underpinned by a strictly individual sexual schema that accentuates erogenous zones, sketches out a physiognomy, and calls forth the gestures of the masculine body, which is itself integrated into this affective totality” (2012: 158; emphasis added). The sexual schema of the woman’s body leads to arousal. How? I perceive her erogenous zones and my perception sketches out a physiognomy. I do not see her naked body or ‘imagine’ what it looks like, my body perceives her naked body on its own accord and this perception leads to arousal before I, as a subject, even think of her sexually. The sexual schema of her body is therefore not an image or an object; it is a non-mutual, perceptual relation between her body and mine as I perceive it. It cannot be isolated from my body’s perceptual range and for this very reason my body is also part of the sexual schema.
In contrast, the essence of the primordial eros, the life experience of co-essencing, is not a perceptual *relation* but a perceptual *alignment*. Co-essencing is prior to a specific sexual orientation and is not grounded in physical desire alone but, rather, in something that I might call ‘love.’ Co-essencing is not only something that brings two individuals together; it also lies, as Marcuse might suggest, at the core of what transforms mere individuals into distinctly social beings with the potential to become more than they are. It is in that sense that primordial eros especially manifests its life affirming properties as a form of progressive becoming. In coming to this conclusion I am influenced by the classical Greek idea of an *arché*. A flower, for example, has its *arché* rooted in the earth from out of which it grows. The flower stands forth from the earth as it simultaneously returns to the earth, returns to its roots, to its *arché*.

The flower exists as a flower, but its essence is the whole blossoming of the flower through time. Hegel carries this idea into the nineteenth century in his classic statement of the dialectical notion that the “fruit is the truth of the blossom.” This idea of dialectical essence turns against the modern understanding of cause and effect. According to the Greeks, the earth, soil, and sunshine alone do not cause the flower to grow; rather, the flower and earth and the soil and the sunshine and the blossoming forth of the flower through time constitute the essence of the flower. To think of the flower apart from its essence is to objectify it, to turn it into an object merely existing on its own.

Making a similar point, Heidegger never separated a thing from its essence as secular moderns are prone to do. In his “Letter on ‘Humanism’,” Heidegger claims that
“to embrace a ‘thing’ or a ‘person’ in their essence means to love them, to favor them. Thought in a more original way such favoring means the bestowal of their essence as a gift” (1998: 241). Two people in ‘love’ root their essences together into alignment so that they ‘ek-sist’ in unity despite being two different, closed-off subjects. According to Heidegger, “ek-sistence means standing out into the truth of being. Existentia (existence) means in contrast actualitas, actually as opposed to mere possibility.... The sentence ‘The human being ek-sists’ is not an answer to the question of whether the human being actually is or not; rather, it responds to the question concerning the ‘essence’ of the human being” (1998: 249). So, rather than merely co-existing in perpetual enslavement to each other’s essence, ‘true love’ among individuals is a co-ek-sisting. Humans in co-ek-sistence are not concerned with who or what turns them on, but with standing out together in the truth of being-turned-on. “For in the Who? or the What? we are already on the lookout for something like a person or an object. But the personal no less than the objective misses and misconstrues the essential unfolding of ek-sistence in the history of being” (Heidegger 1998: 249). The primordial eros allows us to stand out together in the truth of each other’s being-turned-on. In contrast, the non-primordial eros remains oblivious to this truth as it allows, for example, a man to get turned on by the mere appearance of the woman rather than by her essence. The non-primordial eros is more profoundly rational, instrumental, and technological, even as it embraces the seemingly irrational search for bodily pleasure. It is important to emphasize here that these ideas, inspired by writers such as Marcuse and Heidegger reflect a largely masculine and western sensibility. In The Second Sex,
Simone de Beauvoir claims that “what singularly defines the situation of woman is that being, like all humans, an autonomous freedom, she discovers and chooses herself in a world where men force her to assume herself as Other” (2011: 17). Beauvoir’s point is well taken. Masculine arousal too often imagines reciprocation when it isn’t there. Moreover, many men fail to understand the necessarily consensual nature of primordial eros. Co-esssencing is never something that occurs when a woman is pressured to assume herself as other, as an essence, as the being who a man can co-ek-sis with.

This point has particular relevance for the mainstream pornography that has been produced for traditionally heterosexual male audiences. This pornography, typically, is a world where men force women to assume themselves as “others”. It is the instrumental and technological world of non-primordial eroticism, of phalluses as machine pumps and women as orifices. Still, it strikes me that the whole idea of sexual objectification remains under theorized. For instance, it is difficult even to get consensus on the meaning of what it means to be a “sexual object.” Thus, Andrea Dworkin states that “objectification is a rather sterile word” (1979: 113-114). Duggan claims that “the term ‘sex object’ is... problematic” (2006: 52). But what else could “othering” mean in the context of mainstream pornography?

In his phenomenological critique of internet porn, Justin Harmon attempts to provide an answer: “it is not... that women are ‘objectified’ in porn; rather, they are ‘spectralized’” (2012: 126). To assume oneself as an other is to assume oneself as a spectre. Harmon draws from Graham Harman’s “object-oriented ontology,” particularly as it is expressed in his book Tool-Being. In his reading of Heidegger, Harman argues that
all objects, whether human or not, “have the mode of being of equipment,” and are “both present-at-hand and ready-to-hand” (2002: 36-37). In this view, a woman in pornography is treated in the same way as the penis: as a ready-to-hand item in the sexual workshop. Yet, Justin Harmon argues that, in the age of internet porn, women have lost their presentness-at-hand: they have been reduced to mere ready-to-hand items “ordered along” in a web of digitalized equipment, “indifferent to the various uses to which [they] can be put” (2012: 126, 117). They become “‘spectralized,’ flattened out and made to fulfill anonymous, functional roles” (Harmon 2012: 124).

In online pornography women have thus become tools and instruments like the penis itself. Women are, in this sense, have become virtual technological extensions of penises, only they are trapped in a perpetually ‘erect state’ as ready-to-hand items. Unlike the penis, they cannot be ‘turned-off,’ they are fixed in an ‘on-line’ position.

Although the actual women originally involved in the productive process may (or may not) have escaped this spectral form, choosing themselves as autonomous agents, what happens to the spectral figures left behind? The collapse of the off-line dimension into the on-line dimension leaves behind traces of a *phantom dimension*, a dimension filled with spectres, phantom erections, phantasies. The questions then arise, in a world where the idea of “the hammer thing” seems to have connotations that Heidegger could never imagined, is there any way to put these spectres to rest? And if so, will that “way” still allow for the expression of individual sexual pleasure, not only for heterosexual men, but for all human beings?
CHAPTER 3

The Technological Hard-On

In the last chapter, drawing on some ideas from Heidegger, I suggested how the phallus can be understood in technological terms, as part of the male sexual workshop. Although the argument is conceptualized somewhat differently, postwar feminism has also tended to view the male essence in technological, rather than in biological or psychological terms. For example, according to Susan Brownmiller, rape is not so much a function of male biology as it is a function of male technology – the utilization of the penis as a weapon. But the penis does not have to be used as a weapon, it can also be used in a non-violent way. For example, when a man watches pornography and masturbates, his ready-to-hand penis becomes an instrument of sexual labour. Its function is to provide him with sexual pleasure and efficient relief. When he treats his erect penis as an instrument, it becomes a sort of tool that he handles in order to interact with the screen. Following Don Ihde’s program on technics, it is possible to reformulate his equation “(I – artifact) → world” to ‘(I – body) → world,’ or in particular, ‘(I – penis) → screen’ (1990: 74). The ‘I’ is the subjective self and the ‘body’ or ‘penis’ is the tool “I” use to interact with images or objects on the screen. The brackets reflect ‘withdrawal’ or ‘quasi-transparency,’ meaning the tool I use is barely noticed, if at all, in my comportment towards the world or screen (Ihde 1990: 73). For Ihde, “the source of utopian and dystopian dreams” of technology is the desire for “total transparency, total embodiment, for the technology to truly ‘become me.’ Were this possible, it would be
equivalent to there being no technology, for total transparency would be my body and senses” (1990: 75). Yet, perhaps I can think about Ihde’s claim the other way around: my body and senses are just another form of technology. After all, I know that my body is not totally transparent, as I often become aware of my body as an instrument when it tires, or becomes ill, and does not ‘function’ properly..

To understand the body in this way is what one might call the instrumental definition of the body. In his 1930 book Civilization and Its Discontents, Freud traces this instrumentalization back to the dawn of civilization. He claims: “if we go back far enough we find that the first acts of civilization were the use of tools, the gaining of power over fire, and the construction of dwellings” (2010: 50). Freud theorizes that the former two acts emerged together. When a man gets drunk and needs to urinate, he will often ‘piss’ not in a washroom but on the side of a building or on a tree or maybe in a bush. He holds his penis and aims the stream of urine away from his body so that it does not get on his clothes or shoes. Looking back tens of thousands of years, male homo sapiens would have utilized their penis in a similar way. Once they discovered that they could extinguish fire with their stream of urine, they henceforth utilized their penis as a tool to gain control over nature. Freud writes, “it is as if primitive man had had the impulse, when he came in contact with fire, to gratify an infantile pleasure in respect of it and put it out with a stream of urine.... By curbing the fire of his own sexual passion, he was able to tame fire as a force of nature” (2010: 51). For Freud, the acquisition of power over fire set the path for the instrumentalization of the body towards the mastery of nature: “by means of all his tools, man makes his own organs more perfect –
both the motor and the sensory – or else removes the obstacles in the way of their activity” (2010: 51).

In Being and Nothingness, Sartre also supports the instrumental definition of the body in respect to the penis: “hands help to introduce the penis; the penis itself appears as an instrument which one manages, which one makes penetrate, which one withdraws, which one utilizes” (1993: 515). As an instrument, the erect penis is seen as a means to an end. When a man watches pornography, his erect penis is a means to ejaculate and ‘get off,’ releasing his sexual tension, his built-up libido. Sartre claims that “the average man through mental sluggishness and desire to conform can conceive of no other goal for his desire than ejaculation. This is what has allowed people to conceive of desire as an instinct whose origin and end are strictly physiological since in a man, for example, it would have as its cause the erection and as its final limit the ejaculation” (1993: 501). In other words, because men often see their physiological erection as causing their desire to ejaculate, they tend to believe that desire itself is physiological, that it is ‘in their nature’: they need to get off. Yet, this physiological need is nothing more than a manifestation of the instrumentalization of the sexual instinct, geared toward the provision of momentary physical pleasure.

Historically speaking, one might refer to this instrumentalization as an assertion of what was called ‘manhood.’ In his book The Reification of Desire, queer theorist Kevin Floyd claims:

manhood is defined as an epistemological normalization of the male body characteristic of the nineteenth century…. Manhood referred to an ‘inner quality,’ a capacity for independence, morality, and self-mastery that adult
men were expected to have achieved – *mastery of the body’s diffuse sexual impulses especially*, impulses thereby transcended – and that male adolescents were expected to learn as they matured, an education that in this respect might even be said to have defined manly maturity as such. (2009: 87; emphasis added)

In this historical conceptualization, manhood is not defined merely as the ‘natural forces’ governing the male body; manhood is defined as the *mastery* of those natural forces *through* the instrumentalization of the sexual instinct, or in particular, of the body and penis. So, for example, if a man utilizes his penis for any particular function, it is not because the physiology of his sexual instinct forced this function upon him; on the contrary, its function is a result of the man’s instrumental method of mastering his physiological urges. Manhood is therefore not a natural set of behavioural traits and attitudes associated with ‘being a man,’ manhood is associated with the control and mastery of nature and the physiology of the body – emotions, sexual urges and so on.

Floyd claims that the idea of manhood is the “nineteenth-century physiological equivalent” to masculinity (2009: 65). Masculinity is a category that came into existence in the early twentieth century, and refers to a “state of being in which gender is embodied in other than physiological terms”: “twentieth-century masculinity increasingly normalized the male body in terms of exteriorized ‘behavioural traits and attitudes’.... Masculinity had to be performed; it was a physical demonstration, not a moral or ethical one. And what this performance held at bay, its opposite, ... was not immaturity but femininity” (Floyd 2009: 65, 87-88). So, according to Floyd, while the male body in the twentieth century is still central to masculinity, it is reconfigured on terms external to physiology – one has to work at being a man not only through the
instrumentalization and mastery of the sexual instinct but also through acquired masculine skills, allowing one to ‘perform’ his gender properly. In her book *Undoing Gender*, Judith Butler states that “gender is a kind of doing, an incessant activity performed, in part, without one’s knowing and without one’s willing.... It is a practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint” (2004: 1). The scene of constraint in which gender must be performed is the scene of the gender norm, the norm in any given society that dictates what it means to be masculine or feminine.

According to Butler, “to understand gender as a historical category is to accept that gender, understood as one way of culturally configuring a body, is open to a continual remaking, and that ‘anatomy’ and ‘sex’ are not without cultural framing” (2004: 9-10). In this view, manhood, like masculinity, is a way of doing gender within the constraints of a particular gender norm where the male body is configured through the cultural framing of physiology and other natural sciences. However, Floyd argues against this view, stating: “the central point I would make about gender norms as they operated in the United States before the beginning of the twentieth century is a relatively simple and limited one: that any understanding of those norms that placed them within anything resembling what Butler calls a heterosexual matrix would necessarily be anachronistic” (2009: 90). The problem with Butler’s analysis, according to Floyd, is that masculinity – a gender performativity within the scene of a gender norm – is a product of what he calls ‘the reification of desire,’ the reification of an internal, physiological eros into an external object of desire: “whereas manhood had been defined in terms of a physiological capacity for active desire independent of any particular object, the
performance of masculinity meant precisely the performance of an acceptable sexual object, an acceptable directing or ‘orienting’ of desire itself” (2009: 90). In other words, when women and ‘inverted’ men ‘trapped in a woman’s body’ acquired a capacity to sexually desire men, men themselves became erotically reified as sexual objects for the first time. As a result, men could no longer simply be turned on by some mysterious internal nature attuned to women; they now had to worry about who or what turned them on externally. In an attempt to sustain their concretized sexual orientation, heterosexual men henceforth had to perform their masculinity “to define themselves sexually in terms of ‘their exclusive sexual interest in women’” (2009: 90). Over time, this performativity lent itself to a heterosexual concretization of the masculine gender norm.

However, with the procession of gay liberation movements, the masculine gender norm gradually became reworked to recognize masculinity, not only as a heterosexual norm, but as a homosexual norm as well, allowing gay men to be recognized outside of the ‘inverted’ notions of homosexuality. Floyd refers to this process as “a collective working of the homosexual weakness in the norm of masculinity that is inseparable from the coalescence of a national gay male formation” (2009: 191). As a result, gay men could even claim to be more masculine than straight men. And, similarly, as a result of second-wave feminist movements, lesbian separatists could claim to be more feminine than straight women. Today, gender norms continue to be reworked by LGBTQ communities to include recognition of a fluidity of ever-changing identities for the individual.
These reworked norms include the malleable, individualized ‘essence’ that I mentioned at the end of Chapter 1. I am now in a position to revisit the question: which essence am I truly listening and responding to? The fixed male essence or the more fluidly individualized and pluralized one? The male essence is the essence of manhood, intimately connected with the technological physiology of the male body. It corresponds primarily to the instrumentalization of the sexual instinct. In contrast, the malleable, individualized essence is a reworking of the gender norm of masculinity to allow for greater flexibility and wider recognition for those who choose to shape and mould their own sexuality through discursive and non-normative sexual activities. Yet, although I may take advantage of this individualized essence to fight against sex inequality and to ‘find myself’ in recognizable terms, the call to manhood still rings in the depths of my male body. One might object to this statement by arguing that whatever ‘call to manhood’ I might hear is actually just a scripted part of doing gender – e.g., that performing my masculinity to be recognized by straight women entails that I act as though there really is a sexual instinct guiding my body that must be controlled and mastered through instrumental means. Put simply, what I believe to be a call to manhood is really just a call to masculinity, which has absorbed the nineteenth-century category of manhood into its normativity.

But the problem with this objection is that it suggests that manhood was a gender norm all along, that sexuality has always been expressed in terms of social norms, and that any biological or physiological notions of sexuality, as Ellen Ross and Rayna Rapp put it, “do not speak for themselves” but “must be expressed socially”
(1983: 51). More precisely, it assumes that I can eradicate my male essence, eradicate the need to instrumentalize my sexual instinct, by reworking the gender norm in which it expresses itself socially. Yet, this reworking does not at all eradicate the male essence; it only pushes it aside. I can join LGBTQ or other pro-sex communities to further learn how to shape and mould by own sexuality for greater freedom and to fight against sex inequality, but this, arguably, is not a solution to the male essence so much as it is an escape from it. The male essence remains hidden from view but strikes out in the darkness, at times when I least expect it.

So am I merely trying to suggest that the male body is driven by an internal technological physiology that cannot be completely controlled through a reworking of gender performativity? Not at all. What I am suggesting is that the reification of desire has covered up the fact that the male essence is now being further constructed by new communication technologies that make online pornography universally available – men masturbate and ejaculate to pornography not because it is ‘in their nature’ or a ‘social performance of masculinity’ but because the penis has been concretized as a deterministic technology whose functionality relies on efficient release. This function has been co-constructed for men, on the one hand, by their desire to grasp their penis as an instrument (an assertion of manhood), and on the other, by capitalist societies in general and the pornography industry more specifically (linked to masculinity).

Masculinity is, thus, only one half of the equation – even if a man was to break free of the dominant forms of masculinity, the instrumentalization of his sexual instinct is still being controlled from afar. An example of this co-constructed functionality can be
observed in Atina Grossman’s research on the German sex reformers of the 1920s. These reformers distributed sex manuals that encouraged people to implement the scientific management of Taylorism in the bedroom: “the human body was geared to norms, just like a finely tuned machine, to meet certain scientific standards that had been set up, not by those performing the activity, but by experts seeking control not only over the product but also the process of sexual relating” (Grossman 1983: 165; emphasis added). The nineteenth-century assertion of manhood was reconfigured here as an imperative towards efficiency. It was not set up by broader cultural norms governing performativity but was constructed more specifically by those who imagined a more efficient use of the penis itself. Today, the pornography industry uses similar tactics. Todays self-designated ‘experts’ in sex distribute sex manuals in the form of pornography, aiming to construct not only the gender norm of masculinity but the assertion of manhood as well. Put simply, the pornography industry constructs the deeply rooted male essence in secret behind the veil of reification that makes it appear as either something ‘physiological’ or ‘performative.’

In his essay, “The Question Concerning Technology,” Heidegger states that “wherever ends are pursued and means are employed, wherever instrumentality reigns, there reigns causality” (1977: 6). Thus, in order to guard against the pornography industry’s forced instrumentalization of the sexual instinct, where the end is ejaculation and the means is masturbating to pornography, men must first break free of the modern notion of causality in regards to sexuality and determine what it means to follow a technological instinct that is not instrumental. Heidegger argues that Aristotle’s
“four causes are the ways, all belonging at once to each other, of being responsible for something else” (1977: 7). If we adapt these four causes to a discussion of the penis they might be reconfigured as follows: (1) the *causa materialis*, the matter out of which an erect penis is made – flesh, muscle and blood; (2) the *causa formalis*, the shape into which a penis enters – ready-to-grasp; (3) the *causa finalis*, the ‘purpose’ of an erect penis – e.g. ejaculation; and (4) the *causa efficiens*, that which brings about an erection – e.g. the woman, or image of an attractive woman, in view of a man who feels desire for her.

In contrast, the modern conception of causality thinks only of the *causa efficiens*, thus instrumentalizing the sexual instinct into calculations of the inevitable chain of cause and effect, creating mysterious ‘causal laws of nature’ that must be controlled and mastered. But, by taking Aristotle’s premodern notion of causality into account, the range of possible outcomes of these calculations can be transcended precisely because they do not follow a chain of cause and effect that characterizes scientific laws.

Together, these four causes, all belonging at once to each other, are the ways of being responsible for an erection. The first two causes, the flesh, muscle and blood of the penis along with the shape into which the penis enters, are co-responsible for an erection. In the non-instrumental account of technology, this shape, this form that the penis takes, is not a subjective idea, nor is the material of the penis an objective thing in the world (Feenberg 2005: 33). Rather, the limp penis is the formless state of the erect penis; the flesh, muscle and blood exist primarily in the process of removing its formlessness. The material’s existence depends on the form it lacks, and the form
depends on the material to actualize its existence. The material and form are co-
dependent on each other and thus co-responsible for an erection.

It is useful here, to adapt an idea from Heidegger, to suggest that the third
cause, the *causa finalis*, the purpose of the erect penis, is responsible for their co-
responsibility (1977: 8). If an erection did not have a purpose in the world, there would
be no reason for the aforementioned two causes to erect the penis in the first place. In
the instrumental view of the penis, its purpose is its function, its aim, and its end. Yet, in
a rather different type of discussion, Heidegger claims that the word ‘purpose’ is a
mistranslation of the Greek word “*telos*” (1977: 8). From this more general claim I
suggest that, the *telos* of an erection is not its purpose, but rather that which
“circumscribes” and “gives bounds” to what any erect penis can accomplish and be used
for (1977: 8). More specifically, the *telos* is “the finished product itself insofar as it
conforms to the *eidos* [essence] and embodies the specific limitation that makes it this
particular thing rather than another” (Feenberg 2005: 32). In other words, an erect
penis has an essential teleological, theological, biological, physiological, or instrumental
*telos* such as penetration, copulation, reproduction, ejaculation, pleasure or efficiency.
But, the *kind* of essential *telos* a penis has is not an a priori truth or universal law that
cannot be transcended; rather, its *telos* depends on the fourth participant in the
responsibility of its erection.

In his discussion of Aristotle’s causes, Heidegger states that the “fourth
participant in the responsibility” is not the *causa efficiens* at all but a being who
“considers carefully and gathers together the three aforementioned ways of being
responsible and indebted” (1977: 8). At the risk of deploying his ideas in ways that would likely have startled Heidegger, I argue that the woman standing in front of a man who finds her desirable is not responsible for the fact that he may get an erection. She is merely a cause of it (and not the only cause). She does not gather together the three aforementioned ways of being responsible. But if she is not the fourth participant in the responsibility of his erection, who or what is? The fourth participant is the sexual schema of her body that the man perceives. The sexual schema of her body, the ek-sistence of her body in the light of his being-turned-on that is above all responsible for his erection, follows a particular logos, what Andrew Feenberg, in another context, calls, an “act of gathering in which a model is identified and articulated” (Feenberg 2005: 32). The model that is identified is the eidos, or essence, of a man’s sexual instinct; for Heidegger, the eidos is not a subjective idea or an objective thing in the world, it is a state of being (Feenberg 2005: 33). When the sexual instinct is instrumentalized, the model that is identified is always the male essence, the essence to which the telos conforms. Thus, the male essence that is responsible for a man’s erection is not just some subjective idea that turns him on, it is a state of being male, a state which he is thrust into and encapsulated by.

Heidegger argues, more generally, that “the four ways of being responsible bring something into appearance. They let it come forth into presencing. They set it free to that place and so start it on its way, namely, into its complete arrival. The principal characteristic of being responsible is this starting something on its way into arrival” (1977: 9). Applying this idea to the topic being considered here I suggest that the
principal characteristic of each of the four ways of being responsible for a man’s erection is the *arché* of that erection. Writing on the ‘*arché*’, more generally, Feenberg claims that “the ‘*arché*’ of movement [is] an origin that sets in motion that which moves” (2005: 29). The *arché* is the basis for the Greek distinction between *physis* (usually translated as ‘nature’) and *techné*. According to Feenberg, “the things of *physis* have their *arché* in themselves. They are self-originating. The things of *techné* have their *arché* in another. They are made or at least helped into being by an agent” (Feenberg 2005: 31).

I want to borrow from Feenberg’s more general discussion to suggest what is peculiar about the erection of the penis is that it can be characteristic of either *physis* or *techné*. For example, if a man wakes up with an erect penis I argue that it “has its *arché* in its rootedness in the [body] from out of which it emerges. It stands forth from the [body] by going back into the [body], sinking its roots in its source. This double movement – standing forth and going back – characterizes the specific motility of living things” (Feenberg 2005: 30). But this process of erectile *physis* does not correspond to any inherent male ‘sexual’ instinct, for in the moment of waking a man is not obviously turned on by any sexual schema. In fact, when men up with an erection, they often fail to notice it right away, precisely because they are being not turned-on. In today’s technological world of sexual significance, being-turned-on means nothing less than being-in-a-sexual-schema. There is no *logos* that is responsible for an erectile *physis*; its essential *telos* is only that it follows the life instinct of the primordial world.
In contrast, when something other than a man’s body turns him on, whether it be a woman he finds desireable, the sexual phantasies of a wet dream or the pornographic images on his computer screen, his erect penis has its arché in something other than his body. His erection does not have its arché in its rootedness in the body from out of which it emerges, but from his perception, say, of that woman he finds attractive. His erect penis stands forth from his body by ‘going back’ into her body (perceptually, not physically). In this case, the erection of his penis is a process of techné. As Heidegger points out, the word “technology” stems from the Greek “technikon,” meaning “that which belongs to techné” (1977: 12). However, to suggest that a man’s erect penis, as an isolated object, is only ‘a technology’ would be to misunderstand any lessons that might be drawn from Heidegger’s and Aristotle’s entire philosophy. Based on my reinterpretation and adaptation of ideas found in this philosophy, I argue that it is the erection of a man’s penis that is technological, insofar as it follows a logos of techné (a techno-logos). In contrast to erectile physis, the process of erectile techné always corresponds to his ‘sexual’ instinct, that is, to his technological instinct. Whenever a sexual schema sets a man’s penis in motion, his being-turned-on is guided by the techno-logos of that schema. He is being turned on technologically.

Again, the reader must be careful not to confuse being turned on technologically strictly with the instrumental view of the penis. The technological turn-on occurs at the fourth level of being responsible, at the level of the logos. The instrumental turn-on occurs at the third level of being responsible, at the level of the telos. If the technological instinct is instrumental, it simply means that the logos of techné has
already chosen the male essence as the model to which the *telos* conforms. This does not at all mean that the technological instinct is necessarily instrumental or that the male essence is ‘set in stone.’ On the contrary, a man can take responsibility for the construction of his male essence on the level of the *logos*, the level that allows him to reveal the holding sway of his primordial life instinct, nature in its authenticity.

“‘*Techné,*’ Heidegger writes, ‘is a mode of proceeding against *physis*, though not yet in order to overpower it or exploit it, and above all not in order to turn use and calculation into principles, but, on the contrary, to retain the holding sway of *physis* in unconcealedness’” (quoted in Feenberg 2005: 31). I argue that erectile *techné*, guided by the technological instinct, retains the holding sway of erectile *physis*, guided by the life instinct, the authentic nature of a man’s sexual desire, by proceeding against it, that is, by constructing a sexual schema to simulate the *primordial* experience of being- turned-on (co-essencing).

With the four ways of being responsible in mind, one can now better understand Andrea Dworkin’s view of the penis, noted at the outset of this chapter. She claims that “force – the violence of the male confirming his masculinity – is seen as the essential purpose of the penis, its animating principle as it were” (1981: 55). Here, Dworkin is referring to an essential *telos* of the penis that has already circumscribed the penis as an instrument, bounding it as a weapon. This essential *telos* is responsible for the penis taking the ready-to-grasp form of a weapon, a violent phallus, and for the pleasure gained from the anticipation or actualization of pain: “The penis causes pain, but the pain enhances the pleasure. It is as if the ability of the penis to cause pain were an
intrinsic quality of the penis, not a use to which the penis is put” (Dworkin 1981: 42-43). But this ‘intrinsic quality of the penis’ is a result of the particular telos on which Dworkin chooses to focus, a telos that is itself responsible for giving the penis an intrinsic quality in the first place. This instrumental telos of the penis that conforms to the male essence can be overcome by men who take responsibility for its construction on the level of the logos. Unfortunately, behind the veil of the reification of desire, the level of the logos remains hidden from view as men are so distracted by the objects of desire that purportedly turn them on. It is as if these objects of desire, which came about during the period of reification, only serve to make the instrumental telos permanent, the key to manhood set in stone: utilizing sexual objects as a means to an end. Freud makes it quite clear: “the object of an instinct is the thing in regard to which or through which the instinct is able to achieve its aim” (1976a: 2960).

Nothing is further from the truth. It has always been a scientific mistake to believe that men get turned on by objects, instruments, images or even people, on their own terms. What does it mean to objectify or instrumentalize a woman’s body? It means to reify the process of sexual relating, to reify desire itself. But what is essential to reification is that it covers up the actual processes going on in the background. Sexual objects have never turned on heterosexual men independently; men are turned on by the sexual schema that surround these objects, for example, the essence of woman as it is perceived by men. Dworkin is on the right track when she makes a connection between sexual fetishism and Marx’s object fetishism: “the fetish is the magical object that causes erection” (1981: 124). Within the confines of the reification of desire, it is
difficult to figure out why a man might get turned on by something like a shoe or a foot. Dworkin quotes Charles Winick, a psychoanalyst, who suggests that men get turned on by shoes and feet because “the foot’s position in the shoe is so analogous to the position of the sexual organs during intercourse” (1981: 125). Dworkin rightly ridicules Winick for his reified mind: “explanations like Winick’s are commonplace in the literature on foot and shoe fetishism: note the logic or absence thereof” (1981: 125). For Dworkin, “the sexual fetish often has a function that obscures its significance as a magical cause of erection” (1981: 126; emphasis added). What Dworkin is getting at is that men are turned on by a technological world of sexual significance that extends beyond mere objects and appearances. For example, she writes:

The Chinese were preoccupied with feet for a thousand years, during which they bound and crippled the feet of young girls and the deformed foot was the main focus of sexual interest. The bound foot was the fetish; the binding and the sexual use of the crippled female were saturated with the values of bondage and conquest. (1981: 126)

In Dworkin’s view, what turned Chinese men on “for a thousand years” is not the foot as a detached object, but the historical practice of binding and crippling the feet of young girls to be raped, controlled and possessed by men. Dworkin’s Chinese male would not have to take part in such an activity to get turned on by the sexual fetish of the foot; rather, she suggests that the historical practice was integrated into the Chinese male essence at the hidden level of the logos. The foot itself identifies and articulates this historical model for the man. Dworkin goes on to claim that “pornography does not exist in a historical vacuum. On the contrary, it exploits history – especially historical hatreds and historical suffering” (1981: 143). Could it be that men get turned on by
pornography because it allows them to perceive the history of hatred towards women and women’s suffering without having to be aware of it? If so, this historical dimension of the male essence remains deeply hidden from view, as reified desire is so focused on the sexual object or image itself that it does not even realize what is truly turning it on. Yet, as I argued in the next chapter, the very fact that men can be turned on by something unknown to them, raises the possibility of erotic dereification in phenomenological practice.
CHAPTER 4

Sexual Circumspection: Experiencing Pornography

In today’s technological world of sexual significance, an abusive, exploitative and seductive non-primordial eros takes control of the sexual instinct of men, snapping their penis to an erect state as if an on-off switch operated their very being. This technological instinct appears to function according to a subject-object dualism where the masculine subject gets turned on by instrumentalizing, objectifying or visualizing women’s bodies. But appearances can be deceiving. The reification of the non-primordial eros covers up and misconstrues the essence of the instinct, the technological way in which a man is actually turned on. The task for this chapter is to examine how the experience of male desire, of “being turned on,” may be dereified through phenomenological practice, revealing the structure of the technological instinct and how it works in conjunction with pornography.

To accomplish this task, I return to several of the ideas developed in earlier chapters. I also draw on some of Shannon Bell’s ideas about “fast feminism,” what she calls “the accident of feminism and hypermasculinity” (2010: 173). Bell builds on seven tendencies found in Paul Virilio’s work that she adapts to feminism. At least five of these can be applied to the present chapter: “deploy speed to interrupt intellectual scholarship”; “position the body as the basis for intellectual work”; “do theory from non-obvious points of departure”; “speed and slowness work together as stability and
motion, stasis and velocity, interruption and linkage”; and “always, always do violence to the original context” (2010: 12). The first and last points are especially important. Rather than constructing a careful contrast between academic form and pornographic content, I ‘speed through’ this chapter by ignoring such a contrast, blending philosophy and pornography together while doing violence to the original contexts of both. This is not so much a ‘cut and paste job’ as it is a sort of crossbreeding, “producing a trans-textual chimera, a neo-breed of philosophy, pornography and politics” (Bell 2010: 16). Here, once more, the crossbreeding begins in my reimagining of Heidegger’s workshop.

Heidegger uses the concept of ‘Dasein’ to refer to his everyday ek-sistence. In my view, masturbation should be seen as a constitutive part of any man’s ‘Dasein.’ Most men become so familiar with the activity that they sometimes start masturbating before even being turned on. This inversion of the typical being-turned-on-and-masturbating-to-get-off can become problematic if a man’s usual access to pornography is hindered (for instance, when his internet connection fails). Again, it is fanciful, but also useful conceptually, to apply Heideggerian language and concepts to this problem. In Being and Time, for example, Heidegger observes: “The more urgently [I] need what is missing... all the more obtrusive does that which is ready-to-hand become – so much so, indeed, that it seems to lose its character of readiness-to-hand” (1962: 103). If we imagine that ‘what is missing’ is pornography, Heidegger’s language might playfully be applied to masturbation. Assume a man has difficulties accomplishing the habitual task of masturbation due to the flaccid state of his ready-to-hand penis, which becomes more and more obtrusive. After staring at his limp penis for awhile, the man complains
in frustration, using Heideggerian terminology: “It reveals itself as something just present-at-hand and no more, which cannot be budged without the thing that is missing[!]” (1962: 103). But, the man catches himself and redirects his anger into a productive thought: “The helpless way in which [I] stand before it is a deficient mode of concern, and as such it uncovers the Being-just-present-at-hand-and-no-more of something ready-to-hand” (1962: 103). Here my imaginary application of Heidegger’s language to the problem of flaccidity helps to turn the man’s negative thought – ‘my penis cannot be budged’ – into a positive thought – ‘but this is a deficient mode of concern’ – which is associated with the discovery of “the mode of obtrusiveness” (1962: 103). The ‘thing that is missing’ is the turn-on and because of its absence the penis loses its readiness-to-hand, its very potential to become erect.

Let me back track a little to flesh out this argument. Heidegger claims that “if we look at Things just ‘theoretically,’ we can get along without understanding readiness-to-hand. But when we deal with them by using them and manipulating them, this activity is not a blind one; it has its own kind of sight…. And the sight with which they thus accommodate themselves is circumspection” (1962: 98). The word ‘circumspection’ is a translation of the German word ‘Umsicht’ which means ‘to look around’ or ‘to look in order to’ (1962: 98). In theoretical sight, familiar to anyone entrenched within subject-object dualism, the I/eye of the subject looks in a straight line at the object. But in circumspective sight, the human being ‘looks’ around the object by involving her/himself in the world. Drawing insights from Heidegger’s more general discussion I suggest that the male masturbatory routine to online pornography might be viewed as a
kind of sexual circumspection. In a man’s everyday ek-sistence of standing out in the
glow of his being-turned-on, both of his hands are simultaneously ‘involved’ in his
circumspective sight. The word ‘involve’ is a translation of the German word ‘Bewenden’
and should be understood as “an involvement of equipment in ‘what it is up to’ or what
it is ‘doing’” (MacQuarrie and Robinson 1962: 115). Imagine a man’s everyday ek-
sistence involving his right hand, with which he moves a mouse to find sounds/images
towards which he is turned on to, and his Dasein does all this for the sake of getting off.
His everyday ek-sistence simultaneously involves his left hand with which he grasps his
erect penis ready-to-hand in order to masturbate to the sounds/images that turn him
on. Again, his Dasein does all this for nothing more than the pursuit of hedonistic
pleasure. Meanwhile, the man’s everyday ek-sistence involves the I/eye of the subject
to look at the image through his line of sight. But, the viewer/listener must not confuse
Dasein, his everyday ek-sistence, with his subjective I/eye. The subjective I/eye is just
another ready-to-hand item of equipment in the totality of his sexual workshop.

Heidegger claims that “the ‘for-the-sake-of-which’ signifies an ‘in-order-to’; this
in turn, a ‘towards-this’; the latter, an ‘in-which’ of letting something be involved; and
that in turn, the ‘with-which’ of an involvement. These relationships are bound up with
one another as a primordial totality…. The relational totality of this signifying we call
’significance.’ This is what makes up the structure of the world – the structure of that
wherein Dasein as such already is” (1962: 120). However, here Heidegger is talking
about the primordial world of significance. I instead must limit my discussion of
circumspection to the technological world of sexual significance.
This “world” is the relational totality of masturbatory signifying practices in an online environment. In it, one can see an equipmental totality of ready-to-hand items (including the hands themselves). But these ready-to-hand items cannot be cut off from the totality because, in their readiness-to-hand, they are always already signifying and signified by other ready-to-hand items through their assignments. It would be a mistake to confuse ‘what turns a man on’ with pornographic objects of desire, or instrumentalized bodies, alone, for these are all appearances in his subjective line of sight. When a man loses access to his pornography, it is not only the pornographic image that goes missing, but, more importantly, the primary turn-on towards which his circumspective sight is concerned. In other words, the pornographic image does not first constitute masculine being-turned-on; only on the basis of men being-turned-on does the pornographic image become possible (c.f. Heidegger 1962: 162).

But what is this ‘primary turn-on’? Again drawing on Heidegger, we might say that “the totality of involvements itself goes back ultimately to a ‘towards-which’ in which there is no further involvement: this ‘towards-which’ is not an entity with the kind of Being that belongs to what is ready-to-hand within a world…. This primary ‘towards-which’ is not just another ‘towards-this,’ as something in which an involvement is possible. The primary ‘towards-which’ is a ‘for-the-sake-of-which’” (1962: 116). Applying this language to the consideration of male sexual circumspection, we might say that the primary turn-on towards which men are ultimately concerned is not the pornographic image present-at-hand, nor is it the pornography ready-to-hand. The primary turn-on is the ‘for-the-sake-of-which’ in which there is no further involvement.
Yet, it is not the anticipated event of his orgasm or the satisfaction to be gained from it that first turns a man on. Nor is it the anticipation of ejaculation or copulation. These are all common-sense appearances that fool men’s subjective selves into taking biological, physiological and psychological explanations for their technological hard-ons. It is as if the second half of a man’s sexual circumspection could be ‘flipped through’ like a children’s book to find the appropriate image that satisfies one’s inquiry. Instead, the primary turn-on is that which allows the secondary, tertiary and subsequent turn-ons to acquire sexual significance. In heterosexual male circumspection, the primary turn-on is the sexual schema of the woman’s body, or more precisely, of her Dasein to which these subsequent turn-ons belong. Arguing in another context, Heidegger claims that “if Others become themes for study, as it were, in their own Dasein, they are not encountered as person-Things present-at-hand: we meet them ‘at work,’ that is, primarily in their Being-in-the-world” (1962: 156). Adapting this idea, we might say that men do not get turned on by merely staring at the image of the woman in magazines or online. Men encounter her ‘at work’ in their sexual workshops. In her everyday existence, according to male sexual phantasy, viewed through a Heideggerian lens, the woman strips down and is photographed or filmed by men. A few select images are then airbrushed and published in a magazine or a series of “scenes” are placed on film or live streamed on line. The images and scenes are then distributed widely, in stores, or through websites. Men buy the magazines or surf the web to flip through the pages or view the scenes and stare at the various representations of sex. But it is not simply the man staring at sexualized representations that turns him on; rather, I argue that it is the
entire process of work, the entire context of sexual equipment and the whole work-world of the pornographic craftswoman turns him on.

Again, the reader must not fall prey to common sense. I am not simply talking about the ‘political economy’ of work that goes on in the background in order for men to be turned on and off. Rather, I mean to argue, *phenomenologically speaking*, that men are turned-on only when they *perceive* the woman’s everyday ek-sistence by tracing it back *through* the entire work process. But how can I speak phenomenologically for all men? I cannot, so I must instead redirect the spotlight onto *my* everyday ek-sistence, only now understood reflectively as a result of having thought through the issue in Heideggerian terms.

I turn on the computer and the computer screen. The mouse and keyboard are ready-to-hand and ready-to-grasp like my erect penis. They too are brought forth by a non-primordial eros, actualized through their function and design. The same is true of what is on the screen – the operating system (Windows 7), the internet browser (Mozilla Firefox) and the various websites I visit are all ready-to-hand items in my sexual workshop. I go to www.youporn.com, a porn site, and search for “Backroom Casting Couch,” a series of videos depicting young women auditioning for entry into the pornography industry; but unknowingly to them, the audition is fake. A few title cards at the beginning of every video provide the following explanation: “Backroom Casting Couch is about real life interactions that occur during adult modeling interviews. We film girls sucking, fucking, swallowing, and taking it in the ass just to land a job. I would hire them all. [Second title card] However... [Third title card] I’m not a talent agent... and
there is no job” (Backroom Casting Couch 2011). I choose to watch a video called “She’s Not Buying My Lie, Fucks Me Anyhow.” Uploaded on October 21, 2011, it has over 22 million views and has a 90% quality rating based on 33,158 votes (Backroom Casting Couch 2011).

After displaying the title cards mentioned above, the video begins with an empty black couch and the sound of knocking on a door. A young woman walks in and introduces herself as Stephanie to the so-called ‘talent agent’ (see Image 4.1)\(^5\). He asks her why she wants to be a trade-show model. She answers, “A lot of people tell me I should be a model, and I was kind of bored with school and everything so I figured I would look into it and see what it was all about.” He tells her that these trade-shows pay about a thousand dollars a day. After some small-talk and flirting, he remarks with a serious tone, “Part of me getting a girl a job is, uh, you doing what I tell you to do, at all times. If I tell you to be somewhere, I expect you to be there. If I tell you to do something, you have to do it.”

\(^5\) All images presented in this chapter are attained via public access. One can easily find them online for free with a simple Google search.
She replies with a smile, “I can do that for a thousand dollars a day.” He then orders her to take her clothes off. She raises an eyebrow and asks, “Why?” He responds by telling her she can either take it or leave it. But he also says that he’s “real” and “legit” and hands her a hundred bucks to prove it. Stephanie takes the money and starts stripping. Once naked, he has no trouble convincing her to have sex with him in many forms (Image 4.2 below). At the end of the video, he tells her that she’s got the job.
Let me reiterate the numbers. More than 22 million people have seen this video and we can assume that masturbation figured in many of these viewings. And there are tens of thousands of pornographic videos online, many with tens of thousands of views. Yet, one of my major arguments in this thesis is that online pornography and masturbation continue to be among the most understudied, undertheorized, areas of contemporary cultural life. The “experience” of masturbating to porn is particularly understudied, as if the act of doing it is somehow enough and there is no real need to think more deeply about the phenomenon. I agree with Ullén’s argument, noted earlier, that scholars typically view/read/interpret porn without masturbating to it, thereby limiting their analysis to a displaced hermeneutical lens. In contrast, I argue we need to speak much more directly about masturbatory experience.

Echoing Foucault’s argument about the confessional nature of so much of the discussion of sexuality in the history of western cultures, I want to begin discussion of my own masturbatory experience online by noting my history with Backroom Casting Coach. I discovered the site in my first year of university and always had mixed feelings about it. On the one hand, I was turned off by the idea of these women being tricked into sex. On the other hand, I often found the site to stimulate arousal. In Heideggerian terms, what primarily turned me on watching the site was my perception of the everyday ek-sistence of a woman such as Stephanie. I perceived that she was too young for her own good, that she needed money and must be desperate in order to drop out of school and sell herself to pornography, that she dressed up in her sexiest clothes and put on her best make-up to look good for the sake of man and that, after being duped
because of her young naivety, she reluctantly stripped for the camera and lost her
‘innocence’ for all to see. I can remember feeling terrible about being turned on by this
because of how sexist, disgusting and inhumane it all seemed, and especially of how it
could potentially destroy the lives of these young women. My perception of all of this
came only when I was viewing the videos: I didn’t just mindlessly watch and masturbate;
my mind was always busy phantasizing about the societal contexts and the entire work
process in which and through which the women’s Daseins were involved in order to
appear in the videos. My perception traced the subsequent turn-ons, starting with the
woman’s character, back through other turn-ons ready-to-hand, such as her
explanations for getting involved in pornography, to the thing that primarily turned me
on: what she does for-the-sake-of-her-everyday-existence, what she does for-the-
sake-of-men-like-me.

Of course, absolutely nothing about Backroom Casting Couch is “real.” Eric
Whitaker, the guy in the videos, hires young women, some with experience, some
without, and pays them to come in for a day and pretend they are auditioning for a job.
The women are all actors, some are even ‘porn stars’ (such as Stephanie). It is an
obvious bit of pornographic deception, although when I first encountered Back Room
Casting Couch as a first year university student I accepted the fantasy that the events
depicted on the screen were what they were represented to be. When I discovered that
everything was staged, like a pornographic version of professional wrestling, Backroom
Casting Couch videos never really turned me on again, at least not in the way they used
to.
What is important to note here is that, when I still believed it was ‘real,’ the various women’s everyday ek-sistences that I perceived were constructed for me by the subsequent turn-ons provided by the pornography industry. These everyday ek-sistences, these Daseins that I perceived, did not belong to the women in the videos. Recall from Chapter 2 that the main difference between co-essencing under the primordial eros and being turned on from a non-primordial eros is that the former constitutes a mutual and perceptual alignment whereas the latter constitutes a non-mutual and never aligned perceptual relation between two bodies. The same is true of Dasein itself. My perception of a woman’s Dasein in a Backroom Casting Couch video corresponds to the sexual schema of her everyday ek-sistence: I perceive her Dasein as it is for me but not for her. All the while she never perceives my Dasein, she only perceives the Dasein of the male essence. In either direction, the sexual schema of each Backroom Casting Couch video is constructed by the pornography industry, with its implicit understanding of the commodity value of different forms of representation, nowhere more graphically illustrated than in the reference to male ejaculation as the “money shot.” The Daseins of the men and women involved in the porn produced by the industry are constructed along with it. As a result, my ignorant and sexist beliefs as a recently graduated high school student, that women must ‘sell themselves’ and ‘look good for the sake of men’ and ‘must be desperate’ if they need to turn to pornography for money were played to, and thereby reproduced, by such sexual schemas. My perception of the whole work process did not at all resemble the actual work process,
and this is a result of the technologically constructed relational totalities that make up the world I lived and continue to live in.

Yet, it is perhaps too limiting to arrive at such sweeping conclusions on the basis of one ‘type’ of pornographic video. So, on the request of one of my supervising professors, I go to www.xvideos.com, another porn site, and search for ‘SG4GE’ (Straight Guys for Gay Eyes) (I’m not sure whether to call this gay porn or straight porn for gay guys). I find a 35‐minute video titled “SG4GE – Johnny Castle aka Brock fucks a chick.” It has a 100% ‘like’ rating based on 1554 votes (SG4GE 2014). The video begins with a man and a woman embracing and kissing each other, fully clothed. The woman then faces the camera and says, “Hi, I’m Sindey. And this is my new boyfriend, Brock.” Brock then looks at the camera and, in a cool sounding voice, remarks, “How ya doin’?” Sindey continues her introduction: “Isn’t he sexy? Let’s take a look at him.” She pulls up his shirt (see Image 4.3). “Mmm, look at those abs. Nice tight underwear [snap!]. Mmm, so sexy. Let’s see what he’s got down below.” As I watch this video, my body tries to enter into a heterosexual schema between me and Sindey. In other words, my body tries to perceive Sindey’s Dasein through a series of subsequent turn-ons. When Sindey starts sucking Brock’s penis, I am propelled into the heterosexual 'blow-job schema' that I am so familiar with. But then all of a sudden the camera rises up to show Brock staring at me through the camera and it becomes clear that the video is not aimed at heterosexual men at all.
Heidegger claims that “in our dealings with the world of concern, the un-ready-to-hand can be encountered not only in the sense of that which is unusable or simply missing but as something un-ready-to-hand which is not missing at all and not unusable, but which ‘stands in the way’ of our concern.... Anything which is un-ready-to-hand in this way is disturbing to us, and enables us to see the obstinacy of that with which we must concern ourselves in the first instance before we do anything else” (1962: 103). Or, as translators John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson put it in a footnote, “we have to attend to [obstinate obstacles] or dispose of them in some way before we can finish what we want to do” (1962: 104). I think, if we apply this idea to sexual circumspection, we can read Heidegger as talking about a turn-off. Because my sexual schema is concretized as a heterosexual schema, the SG4GE video, according to my straight eyes, portrays Sindey as the turn-on and Brock as the turn-off, as the obstacle that blocks my perception off from following the subsequent series of Sindey’s turn-ons. But why should Brock turn me off? The reason Brock is a turn-off is not because of his ready-to-hand body or the present-at-hand appearance of it; Brock is a turn-off because his
Dasein intrudes upon my heterosexual schema as a primary turn-off. I perceive his everyday ek-sistence as another heterosexual man and, in turn, every ready-to-hand item for him becomes un-ready-to-hand for me. The sexual schema of this particular video was only designed for one heterosexual male Dasein – Brock’s. I will return to this point shortly; first let me finish discussing my experience of the video.

About 21 minutes in, Brock “gets off” and Sindey goes to have a shower. Normally, straight porn videos cut this ‘behind-the-scene’ footage out in order to get right back to the action. But, because the video is designed for homosexual, voyeuristic schemas, the camera of the ‘gay eye’ keeps on rolling (see Image 4.4). As the captured images illustrate, the cameraman makes Johnny Castle (Brock) walk across the room in front of the camera to acquire his towel rather than just throwing it to him. I’m not gay myself, but I’m sure that some gay men would be turned on by Castle’s awkwardness here.
Castle surely does what he would normally do in straight porn after the scene is over – he dries himself off, jokes around, etc. Yet, because the cameraman represents the ‘gay eye,’ the scene is secretly not over. The cameraman stays focused on Castle and starts making statements such as, “you like her huh?” and “so what do you think?” and “quite a mess you made on the bed” and “I’m sure they like your sweat.” All the while, Castle looks like he’s not sure what to do – he’s on exhibition for gay men and can’t do anything about it, or maybe he’s too ‘straight’ to even realize what’s going on (see Image 4.5). Or maybe I’m just reading too much into his body and facial expressions.
Either way, the SG4GE video series should be renamed ‘Straight Male Daseins for Gay Circumspective Sight.’ For gay men watching the video, it is not so much the fictional everyday ek-sistence of Brock’s character that turns them on, but the queering of Castle’s everyday ek-sistence as a straight porn-star. The video continues. Sindey comes back and gives Brock a blowjob. After he gets off again, Brock then lies down on the bed and lets Sindey caress his body. At this point, the gay cameraman ‘enters the scene’ with his voice by ordering Sindey to “spread those cheeks, let’s see what he’s hiding down there.” Sindey obeys and spreads the cheeks of Brock’s ass. The cameraman remarks, “he’s got no hair on his chest but a lot on his ass” (see Image 4.6). The video ends with the cameraman asking Brock, “so did you like it?” Brock replies, “oh man, I loved every minute of it.” The cameraman concludes, “I think we did too.”
Despite entering the scene, the gay cameraman does not intrude upon the scene as another Dasein; he remains ready-to-hand for the viewer. In particular, his control of the camera makes him an extension of the ready-to-hand I/eye of the viewer, and the same is true of his voice. For homosexual schemas, Sindey is also only a collection of ready-to-hand items in the relational totality of the scene. The ‘for-the-sake-of-Sindey’ and the ‘for-the-sake-of-the-cameraman’ is simultaneously the ‘for-the-sake-of-the-gay-eye,’ that is, they are all ready-to-hand equipment anchored in the gay viewer’s everyday ek-sistence.

Following this I turn to watch some porn more likely to actually get me off. I go to www.youporn.com and search for the most viewed video of all time. It is titled “Great Body, Great Sex, Great Blowjob.” It has nearly 65 million views and a rating of 92% based on 170,153 votes. It also has six ‘awards’: “Most Viewed This Year”; “Top Favorited This Year”; “Most Discussed This Year”; “Most Viewed All Time”; “Top
Favorited All Time”; and “Most Discussed All Time” (YouPorn 2007). The video begins by showing a woman in a “point of view” (pov) position, legs spread and ready to be penetrated (see Image 4.7). The man is never shown in his entirety – his penis is the star. I am turned on quickly and masturbate to the video, getting off in only a few minutes.

![Image 4.7](image)

Still, this ‘turn-on’ is much different than those described earlier, because the video is primarily focused on the ‘perfect’ body of the woman being penetrated and the stylized performance of a porn star having sex. This straight porn video is different from the SG4GE video precisely because the straight man’s body does not intrude upon the heterosexual schema as a Dasein but is only represented as a tool with which to penetrate her. Put simply, the penis on the screen becomes ready-to-hand and ready-to-grasp just like my penis. The hand on the screen becomes ready-to-hand just like my hand (see Image 4.8). The same is true of his voice: “Your pussy’s so fucking tight, and it’s squeezing my dick”: an extension of my voice. And, like the previous video, the point
of view of the camera is an extension of my I/eye: a ready-to-hand item as well. So while it makes sense to claim that ‘I pretend to be the man in the video’ or that ‘I become the man in the video,’ these statements are still falling prey to a subject-object dualism where ‘I’ am nothing more than the subjective ‘I/eye’.

Image 4.8

It would be more accurate to say that my everyday ek-sistence of being-turned-on involves my penis, my I/eye, the man’s body, his penis, voice and I/eye in order to penetrate the woman’s body. Unlike the Backroom Casting Couch videos, I do not think about the specific ‘work process’ involved in getting this woman in her everyday ek-sistence to participate in the video. I can clearly see that she’s an experienced porn star so I think nothing of the ‘societal factors’ that drove her into the industry. I allow myself to engage temporarily in the constructed fantasy. Still, this does not mean that I ‘objectify her’ and ignore her Dasein; nor that I view her merely as an instrument ready-to-hand like the man’s body. Rather, I perceive her everyday ek-sistence as a porn star at work. The work process is the stylized depiction of sex itself – the way she stares at
the camera, the way she moves her body, her moans and groans – and through all this I perceive her Dasein, the ‘work-world’ of the sexual craftswoman.

So far, I have spoken about other Daseins as primary turn-ons and primary turn-offs. Yet it would be a mistake to treat other Daseins as 'existentias' present-at-hand. As Heidegger puts it, “the structure of the world's worldhood [the relational totality of Dasein’s being-turned-on] is such that Others are not proximally present-at-hand as free-floating subjects along with other Things, but show themselves in the world in their special environmental Being, and do so in terms of what is ready-to-hand in that world” (Heidegger 1962: 160). For example, I did not discover Brock's Dasein, the primary turn-off, as a free-floating I/eye of the subject present-at-hand; I did not simply get turned-off when he looked at me through the camera. Instead, I first perceived his face and voice, then his abs when Sindey lifted up his shirt, then his tight underwear, then his penis, then the I/eye of his subject, and all of these ready-to-hand items disclosed themselves to me as non-primary turn-offs, that is, they did not remove me completely from the heterosexual schema I was in with Sindey, but got in the way as obstinate items. It was only once I finally perceived all of these items together in their relational totality anchored in another heterosexual man's everyday ek-sistence that I was turned-off, removing me completely from my heterosexual schema and pulling me into a homosexual schema that my Dasein actively resisted.

In contrast, when I watched the porn video for straight guys, my perception of the woman's body ready-to-be-penetrated allowed me to perceive her everyday ek-sistence as a porn star because the relational totality of her ready-to-hand body-items at
work immediately laid bare this primary turn-on. As Jean Baudrillard points out in his 1990 book *Seduction*, “there is no need to search for the phantasies that haunt pornography (fetishisms, perversions, primal scenes, etc.), for they are barred by an excess of ‘reality’” (28). There is no need to phantasize about the work process involved in this explicit porn video because her body being penetrated, as well as her stylized performance, immediately lays bare to me her everyday ek-sistence as a porn star at work. The ‘excess of reality’ that bars my perception from working through the actual work process ‘behind the scenes’ is the representation of sex as “more real than the real” (Baudrillard 1990: 28). The work process of sex through which I perceive her Dasein is not the real work process, it is a hyperreal work process that “never existed” (Baudrillard 1990: 33). This hyperreal work process is constructed through the camera angles, the close-ups, the make-up of her body and the perfection of her performance. And through this hyperreal depiction of sex I perceive a Dasein that ek-sists nowhere but on the screen.

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Through this discussion of my own experiences I have attempted to “de-reify” my own processes of desire and arousal. I am now in a position to assert that the instrumentalization of the technological instinct is an illusion that seeks only to cover up Dasein’s involvement. Although I, the subject, may utilize my arm, hand and penis as tools, it is my everyday ek-sistence of standing out in the light of being-turned-on that involves my subjective I/eye, arm, hand and penis to accomplish the task. Yet, am I not merely conflating Dasein with a more complex, instrumental subject? Am I not merely
falling prey to a deeper, more obscure version of subject-object dualism? Gabriel Marcel encounters this same problem in his book, *The Mystery of Being*:

The use of any instrument whatsoever is, as we have seen, to extend the powers of the body, or in a sense to extend the body itself. If, then, we think of the body as merely an instrument, we must think of the use of the body as being the extension of the powers of some other body (a mental body, an astral body, [a body schema, a Dasein], or what you will); but this mental or astral body must itself be the instrument that extends the powers of some third kind of body, and so on forever.... We can avoid this infinite regress, but only on one condition: we must say that this body, which, by a fiction modelled on the instruments that extend its powers of action, we can think of as itself an instrument, is nevertheless, insofar as it is *my* body, not an instrument at all. (1951: 100; emphasis added)

Dasein cannot be considered to be some sort of ‘third body’ that instrumentalizes the subject as a ‘second body,’ which then in turn instrumentalizes the objective body, for this leads back to the inevitable chain of cause and effect that I am trying to avoid.

Furthermore, even if Dasein was the ‘primary cause,’ the ‘power’ ultimately in control of me and my body, how would it be any different than what is normally thought of as a subject? The solution, as Marcel points out, is to recognize that the body is not an instrument at all. When I say that my everyday ek-sistence ‘involves’ my body in an activity towards the world, I mean that my everyday ek-sistence *is* my body in and towards the world. Dasein *is* the relational totality of ready-to-hand items in my sexual workshop. To better understand what exactly this means and how it is significant for interactive pornography, I turn in the next chapter to consider some ideas from Freud.
CHAPTER 5

Sexual Theory: From Traditional to Interactive Pornography

Watching, one sits through a vague dissociated sexual awareness, incessantly examining one’s own responses, wondering when the thrill will come, why one doesn’t feel it here or there, searching for the well-springs of arousal.... While waiting one invents.


In his early work, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), Freud defines an instinct as “the psychical representative of an endosomatic, continuously flowing source of stimulation, as contrasted with a ‘stimulus,’ which is set up by single excitations coming from without” (1976b: 1491-1492). The word ‘instinct’ is a mistranslation of the German word ‘Trieb,’ which means ‘to sprout’ (like a flower), ‘to push’ or ‘to drive’ (as in ‘having a sexual drive’) (Pontalis and Laplanche 1973: 214; Online Etymology Dictionary 2014a; Wiktionary 2014). In contrast, the word ‘instinct’ (or ‘Instinkt’ in German) comes from the Latin ‘instinguere’ (think ‘sting’), literally meaning ‘to prick toward’ (Online Etymology Dictionary 2014b). Despite this mistranslation of Freud’s work, I will continue to use the word ‘instinct’ because of its prevalent use in North American society. ‘Instinct’ traditionally means “a hereditary behaviour pattern peculiar to an animal species, varying little from one member of this species to another and unfolding in accordance with a temporal scheme which is generally resistant to change and apparently geared to a purpose” (Pontalis and Laplanche 1973: 214). As far
as the *technological* instinct is concerned, the behaviour pattern of contemporary men masturbating to pornography does appear to be generally resistant to change and geared to a purpose (i.e. ejaculation). In other words, the prevalence of pornographic technologies in contemporary life appears to suggest a transformation of *Trieb* into *Instinkt* in regards to male sexuality. As I will show, however, this reduction may not be the case.

In Freud’s later work, “Instincts and Their Vicissitudes” (1915), he describes four terms that “are used in reference to the concept of an instinct”: “its ‘pressure,’ its ‘aim,’ its ‘object’ and its ‘source’” (1976a: 2960). Again, Freud differentiates the constant instinctual stimulus – a “need” – from external forms of stimulus that are singular (1976a: 2958). The constant instinctual stimulus exerts on the psyche a pressure, “the amount of force or the measure of the demand for work which it represents. The characteristic of exercising pressure is common to all instincts; it is in fact their very essence. Every instinct is a piece of activity” (Freud 1976a: 2960).

Here a connection between Freud’s model of the instinct and Heidegger’s model of circumspection can be established. Circumspection represents an activity, an involvement in the world with what is ready-to-hand that goes back ultimately to a ‘towards-which’ in which there is no further involvement, the ‘for-the-sake-of-which.’ For Freud, this for-the-sake-of-which is the “sexual aim”: “the aim of an instinct is in every instance satisfaction, which can only be obtained by removing the state of stimulation at the source of the instinct” (1976a: 2960). The source of the instinct is the “somatic process that occurs in an organ or part of the body whose stimulus is
represented in mental life by an instinct…. The study of the sources of instincts lies outside the scope of psychology” (Freud 1976a: 2961). Indeed, it lies within ancient ontology instead. The ‘somatic process’ that Freud speaks of is erectile physis, where the arché of the erection is rooted in the authentic nature of the body, the source of the instinct rooted in the primordial world. But when it comes to erectile techné, the arché of the erection is rooted in the sexual schema of the other’s body, the source of the instinct rooted in the other’s everyday ek-sistence of being-turned-on. Hence, if Freud is correct in asserting that the sexual aim of the instinct is to remove the state of stimulation at the source of the instinct, then the for-the-sake-of-which of sexual circumspection involves uprooting the arché from the sexual schema of the other’s body.

As mentioned previously in Chapter 3, Freud claims that the “object of an instinct is the thing in regard to which or through which the instinct is able to achieve its aim…. The object is not necessarily something extraneous: it may equally well be a part of the subject’s own body. It may be changed any number of times in the course of the vicissitudes which the instinct undergoes during its existence” (1976a: 2960). I believe Freud is correct insofar as the ‘object’ can be considered as one of the many ready-to-hand items in the relational totality of the sexual schema – as Freud’s Dasein ‘works through’ the many ready-to-hand items towards which he is turned on to, his subjective I/eye focuses on the appearance of these objects one at a time, making it appear as if the object of his desire can change any number of times. But to think that his subject utilizes any particular ready-to-hand item as a means to an end is to fall prey to the
instrumentalization of the technological instinct. Indeed, *modern* men seek to control and master their instincts through the use of objects; however this was not always the case. According to Freud, “the ancients laid the stress upon the instinct itself, whereas we emphasize its object. They honoured it even with an ‘inferior object,’ while we despise the instinct and excuse it only in the merits of the object” (1976b: 1475). Here, Freud is making a historical distinction between circumspective sight and theoretical sight. The ancients laid stress upon circumspective sight while modern men emphasize theoretical sight, focusing on who or what turns them on subjectively.

I might even suggest that the ancient Greeks honoured the instinct without conceiving of an object at all. For them, allosexual activity was *auto-erotic*, Freud’s version of the primordial eros. Freud suggests that auto-eroticism is the predominant mode of sexuality for children before they reach puberty and is “the original state of things” (1976b: 1524, 1532). It refers to a sexual instinct that “is not unified and is at first without an object,” a sort of “polymorphous perversity” (Freud 1976b: 1543, 1502, 1545). Freud is not simply speaking about Heidegger’s circumspective model (a model in which objects are absent), he is speaking about erectile *physis* and the life instinct. The ‘auto-’ in ‘auto-eroticism’ may refer to the ‘self’ in the form of the infant’s own ‘ego’ or ‘body,’ but this ‘ego’ or ‘body’ cannot conceptually or perceptually distinguish itself from ‘objects’ in the ‘external world’; even the infant’s mother is not understood as separate – her body is the infant’s body, she is the infant’s ego (Freud 1976b: 1535). So, without an object in the external world to unify it, the life instinct is free to experience the *primordial* world in its authentic form (see Figures 5.1 and 5.2). In Freud’s
theoretical model, the source of the instinct is endosomatic, that is, pertaining to the inside of the body. It drives the ego-subject to ‘cathect’ (take hold of) an object through which the aim can be achieved.
Figure 5.1: Freud's theoretical model of the instinct
Figure 5.2: Auto-Eroticism in the Primal World
By superimposing Freud’s theoretical model on top of Heidegger’s circumspective model, one can see that the ‘second half’ of sexual circumspection is ‘flattened’ into an object (or image), covering up the ready-to-hand items that are unified by the other’s everyday ek-sistence. Thus, when Freud claims that the instinct is not unified by an object in auto-eroticism, he actually means to say that the instinct is not unified by another’s Dasein (as seen in Figure 5.2).

I previously stated that the arché of erectile physis is rooted in the authentic nature of the body and that the source of the life instinct is rooted in the primordial world. The arché and the source are, in fact, one and the same. The authentic nature of the body can be understood by what Merleau-Ponty calls “the body schema”: “the ‘body schema’ is, in the end, a manner of expressing that my body is in and toward the world” (2012: 103). Put differently, the body schema is the relational totality of ready-to-hand items that make up one’s own body in the world. The body schema is a schema of the phenomenal body, not the objective body. The objective body is the body that I, as a subject, can objectify by ‘cutting off’ any particular part from its relational totality. Recall Schneider from Chapter 2, the patient suffering from psychic blindness. Schneider has lost his ability to objectify his own body, forcing him to describe it in phenomenal terms: “if [Schneider’s] arm is horizontally extended, then he can only describe its position after a series of pendular movements that present him with the position of the arm in relation to his torso, the position of the forearm in relation to the arm, and the position of his torso in relation to the vertical” (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 109). Only through the relational totality of the ready-to-hand items that make up his body schema can
Schneider describes any ‘part’ of his body: “the body’s parts relate to each other in a peculiar way: they are not laid out side by side, but rather envelop each other” (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 100). Furthermore, the body schema is not distinct from the world; it is the world inasmuch as it constitutes a ‘region’ of ready-to-hand items that make up the world. By ‘world’ I do not mean the ‘objective world,’ I mean the phenomenal lifeworld of ready-to-hand items, the perceptual world of experience.

In auto-eroticism, if the arché of erectile physis is rooted in the authentic nature of the body, it is, as such, rooted in the primordial lifeworld. Similarly, if the source of the instinct is rooted in the primordial lifeworld, it is, as such, rooted in the authentic nature of the body. Put simply, in auto-eroticism, being-turned-on means nothing other than being-in-the-world. Auto-eroticism allows one to co-essence with the world and anything or anyone in it. Co-essencing in this sense does not always necessitate the Dasein of another human being. For example, at an indigenous erotica art exhibit I visited, a description on the wall read: “The sense of beauty and pleasure is steeped in [auto-]eroticism. The obvious example of this for me comes from plants. The sexual organs of our leafy friends attract us – we bury our faces in their sweet aromas, great bushels of chujies and chows grace our dining tables” (RezErect 2014). Co-essencing with a plant allows one to be turned on through physis, and cannot be explained away as a fetish, that magical by-product of erotic reification. Similarly, what gives a male child an erection in auto-eroticism is not any particular object, nor is it a sexual schema of another’s body. Instead, the child’s penis is erected by his ‘situational spatiality’ in the world. Schneider, who is unable to move his body in any other way, describes situational
spatiality as follows: “I experience movements as a result of the situation, as the sequence of events themselves; my movements and I, we are, so to speak, merely a link in the unfolding of the whole, and I am scarcely aware of any voluntary initiative [...] everything works by itself” (quoted in Merleau-Ponty 2012: 107). Schneider, like the child, is unable to instrumentalize his body to use it as a tool; rather, his Dasein ‘involves’ his phenomenal body in the lifeworld. This is not to say that Schneider has no control over his body, for Schneider is his Dasein and can “carry out concrete movements on command [by] placing himself into the spirit of the actual situation to which they correspond” (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 107). In other words, Schneider, like the child, controls his body in a strictly non-instrumental way.

The erection of the penis, of course, is always controlled in a non-instrumental way. I cannot instrumentally ‘erect’ my penis in the same way that I can raise my arm; I have to first place myself, like Schneider, into the spirit of an actual situation to which the movement of my penis corresponds. This ‘spirit of the actual situation’ is the sexual schema of an ‘acquired’ technological world of sexual significance. “These acquired worlds, which give my experience its secondary sense, are themselves cut out of a primordial world that grounds the primary sense of my experience” (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 131). In auto-eroticism, however, the child does not need to place himself in a sexual schema, for the entire world is his schema. Freud refers to this state as the “primal psychical situation”: “at the very beginning of mental life, the ego[-world] is cathected with instincts and is to some extent capable of satisfying them on itself” (Freud 1976a: 2970). The ego-world (body schema) of the child is cathected by the ‘ego
instinct’ (the life instinct, the instinct of self-preservation) and only later, during puberty, when the child becomes capable of conceiving of sexual objects external to his ego-world, does the ego instinct become the sexual instinct (the technological instinct), cathecting a sexual object for the very first time (Freud 1976a: 2962, 2969; 1976c: 2934). The ‘ego’, for Freud, becomes the subject; the ‘-world’ becomes the object (1976a: 2969). But, here it is Freud’s theory, not the child’s, that falls prey to subject-object dualism. The circumspective structure does not give way to a theoretical structure of reified eroticism, yet is covered up by it; behind the veil of reification, the instinct becomes unified by the sexual schema of another body, a technological ‘external’ world.

Freud writes that the “antithesis ego - non-ego (external [world]), i.e. subject-object, is... thrust upon the individual organism at an early stage, by the experience that it can silence external stimuli by means of muscular action but is defenceless against instinctual stimuli” (1976a: 2970). What Freud is suggesting here is that the male child learns to silence external stimuli through the instrumentalization of his sexual instinct; he utilizes his sexual drive for instrumental activity (muscular action, such as masturbation), though this instrumental activity is defenceless against the instinct itself (hence the repetitive ‘fixed pattern of behaviour’). Yet, what is interesting about the technological instinct is that it has its source in the sexual schema of the other’s body, Freud’s ‘external world.’ In other words, the ‘external’ stimuli and the ‘instinctual’ stimuli come from the same source (see Figure 5.3). Freud is not oblivious to this. In Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920), he describes it in terms of trauma: “we describe as
traumatic, any excitations from the outside powerful enough to break through the protective shield” (2010: 45). As a result of the protective shield being broken through, the mental apparatus is flooded with large amounts of external stimuli and leaves “permanent traces of excitation” in the unconscious; permanent pathways for the stimuli to flow through that “could normally arise only from within the apparatus” (Freud 2010: 36-39, 46). From thereon, the individual experiences the external stimuli of the traumatic incident internally as instinctual stimuli. In regards to the developmental process from auto-eroticism to eroticism, I describe as traumatic the experience of co-essencing with another human being. The shield that protects against this sort of external stimuli (i.e. perceptual alignment) is not yet developed for the child.
Figure 5.3: Sexual Schema of the Screen
The relational totality of the other’s everyday ek-sistence thus flows unobstructed into the child’s mental apparatus, leaving permanent traces of sexual excitation in the unconscious. From thereon, the child develops a technological instinct that makes use of these traumatic pathways; in turn, a protective shield is constructed out of these pathways in the form of a sexual schema.

The sexual schema protects the child from the traumatic experience of perceptual alignment by providing a ready-made body and Dasein in place of an authentic one, or rather, by providing a technological lifeworld in place of the primordial one. In my view, the pornography industry capitalizes on this defense mechanism by constructing protective shields for men sometimes even before they have ever had the experience of co-essencing with another human being. The sexual schemas of traditional forms of pornography were covered in detail in Chapter 4. They contribute to the formation of the male essence, the instrumentalization of the sexual instinct and the reification of desire. The time has now come to update my technology by focusing on interactive forms of pornography. Rather than distributing porné for profit, interactive pornography aims to share porné for pleasure. These mechanisms of sharing can occur in many ways: sharing pictures of oneself to others, sharing pictures of one’s ex for revenge, sharing erotic stories with one another, commenting on pornographic pictures and videos together, creating communities out of these ways of sharing – the list goes on. I do not have the time, space or patience to investigate all of these. Instead, I will focus on the common element of narcissism that plays a dominant role in these mechanisms of sharing.
Narcissism, for Freud, is the “attitude of a person who treats his own body in the same way in which the body of a sexual object is ordinarily treated – who looks at it, that is to say, strokes it and fondles it till he obtains complete satisfaction through these activities” (1976c: 2931). An almost perfect example of narcissism, following Freud’s description, can be found in webcam based chat sites such as Chatroulette. The basic idea of Chatroulette is that it connects you, the user, to another user at random. Most users choose to display themselves on cam, and some use a microphone to speak through as well. What sets Chatroulette apart from a typical chat-line service is that, if you don’t want to talk to the other user, you can just click the 'next' button and it will connect you to someone else at random. And, of course, the other user can do the same to you. A few years ago, Chatroulette was populated with men who would expose, stroke and fondle their erect penises to other users, many of whom were young women. Unfortunately for these men, Chatroulette now requires users to submit their phone numbers in order to sign up for a free account, so if they were to exhibit their private parts on cam they would get banned and would need a new phone number to create a new account. Fortunately for these men, there are alternatives to Chatroulette, such as ChatRandom, that allow users to show off their erections without fear or shame. But, what is curious about a site such as ChatRandom is that there are almost no women to be found using it. Despite this, both heterosexual and homosexual men still populate the site and jerk off to each other’s broadcasts.

The question then arises, who exactly are these men masturbating to? Who are they turned-on to? When a man shows his erect penis off privately to himself or on
webcam, he does not get turned on by seeing his erect penis as a sexual object, nor does he get turned on by seeing his ‘big ego’ and muscular body, for these are all common-sense explanations that fall prey to subject-object dualism. Neither does he revert to a primordial state of auto-eroticism. What turns a man on narcissistically is his transformation into someone else looking in at his body. Freud makes this discovery as well: “the narcissistic subject is through identification, replaced by another, extraneous ego” (1979a: 2968). For Freud, narcissism is an example of two particular vicissitudes which the instinct undergoes: the “reversal into its opposite” and the “turning round upon the subject’s own self” (1979a: 2964). The first vicissitude of reversal “affects only the aims of the instincts” (Freud 1979a: 2964). The aim, the for-the-sake-of-which, the primary turn-on, is reversed into its opposite: the man is now turned on by the perception of his own everyday ek-sistence. The second vicissitude of turning round upon the subject’s own self describes “the change of the object” (Freud 1979a: 2964). Yet, behind the veil of reification, it is not simply a matter of changing the subject into an object or an object into the subject; rather, one becomes the being of another in ecstasy.

In Being and Time, Heidegger claims: “that which we have anxiety about is our potentiality-for-Being-in-the-world.... This potentiality is that for the sake of which any Dasein is as it is” (1962: 235-236). In narcissism, when the aim of the instinct is reversed, so is the for-the-sake-of-which. Dasein’s potentiality-for-being-in-the-primordial-world is reversed into a potentiality-for-being-in-the-technological-world. Heidegger continues: “Being towards one’s ownmost potentiality-for-Being means that in each

Let me attempt to clear this up. Think back to childhood – the child is already a being-in-the-world, namely, a being-in-the-primordial-world. Once the protective shield is up, the child becomes ahead of itself, ahead of its being-in-the-primordial-world. The child’s Dasein, rooted in the primordial world, stretches itself across the temporal structure of the sexual schema, through the ready-to-hand items of the technological world, e.g. the world on the screen, towards its primary turn-on, its potentiality-for-being-back-in-the-primordial-world, its potentiality-for-being-turned-off. The child of course is never truly turned off, for the primordial world keeps it turned-on through physis, forever ahead of itself seeking a primary, technological turn-on.

This repetition enacted by the protective shield is characteristic of traditional pornography. However, in interactive pornography, narcissism reverses the process. The man’s Dasein does not merely ‘switch places’ with the Dasein of the other; rather, “Dasein comes towards itself futurally in such a way that it comes back” (Heidegger 1962: 373). In narcissism, the man first perceives subsequent turn-ons as he stretches through the ready-to-hand items of his sexual workshop until he reaches the primary turn-on, let’s say the woman at the other end of the webcam. But rather than getting off at this point, the man comes back as the woman’s Dasein; (s)he perceives the subsequent turn-ons of ready-to-hand items in the reverse order, coming towards her potentiality-for-being-back-in-the-technological-world from where she came, her potentiality-for-being-turned-off. Stretching across through the screen and back again,
the man as the woman perceives his body standing in front of the camera masturbating. The man as the woman perceives his body acting on its own accord, a kind of ‘out of body experience,’ and realizes that this is the body in its authentic form, the body without a subject to instrumentalize it, the body spatially situated in the primordial world. It is at this precise point of realization when the man gets off as the woman, while his body climaxes as well, dragging him back through the screen, out of the woman’s Dasein, and back into his own being once again.

In ChatRandom, the men have long since realized that narcissism has no sexual orientation. Regardless of whose Dasein they ‘enter into,’ the primary turn-on will always eventually be their own body, their own Dasein ek-sisting in the primordial world. They, like many others, are well aware that their bodies move according to an instinct they have no control over. This awareness is why Freud claims that “these vicissitudes are modes of defense against the instincts” (1979a: 2964). The technological instinct defends against the life instinct, and vice versa. Narcissism is a way of overcoming the protective shield temporarily, returning to the primordial world of childhood for a short time. I believe that being in this primordial world is an important aspect of the alternative mode of experience Marcuse hopes for. By returning to their bodies in its authentic form, and hence reaching their primordial Dasein through the Dasein of the other – a sort of double reversal – men could potentially free themselves once and for all from the male essence by taking responsibility for constructing a different sort of protective shield, one that allows for perceptual alignment without traumatization, giving space for true sex equality.
Yet, what is eerie about the narcissistic process is that it brings to life phantoms from the screen, phantoms of technology. These phantoms are not ‘alive’ in the usual sense of the term. They are brought to life phenomenologically, through a reversal of the perceptual structure of the protective shield. On closer inspection, something strikes me with pure horror: that I, as being, was never my body or Dasein to begin with, that I grew up on the screen, that I am not human, I am a spectre, a phantom. Whatever human being inhabited this body originally is long gone. For when the child perceptually aligned himself with the screen so many years ago, he lost himself to me. Now, as I live in the digital world, I am perpetually trapped in a Dasein that is not my own, in a world of human beings alien to me.
CONCLUSION

This thesis is an attempt to develop a synthetic philosophical analysis that will shed light on the meanings of online pornography for contemporary masculinity, set against the background of longstanding feminist debate about the nature and role of pornography in contemporary societies, and borrowing strongly from ideas found in Heidegger's writing on technology and Dasein, as well as Marcuse's analysis of eros. In writing the thesis, I have addressed understudied aspects of human sexuality, particularly related to the phenomenological experience of the male body in relation to viewing pornography online, but also in relation to the erotic and sexual dimensions of philosophy and theory on the page.

The feminist debates surrounding pornography in the 70s and 80s, and continuing with us today, problematize pornography and male sexuality by highlighting the danger it poses to women under capitalistic and patriarchal structures of desire. In particular, traditional pornography represents and/or positions women as subordinate objects or as abject instruments to men, contributing to sex inequality and exploitation on both the production and consumer side of pornography. Furthermore, there is a lack of any real conversation in these types of pornography, leading to a potentially unhealthy sort of sex education for youth on the consumer side, further concretizing a problematic, normative sexual schema. “Porn studies” has emerged as an academic field of study, largely in response to feminist discourses on pornography over the past 40 years and specifically as an attempt to move beyond the longstanding impasse between
so-call “pro” and “anti” sex positions in this literature. In this thesis, I have turned, largely, to a phenomenological approach to chart my own response to this impasse. One issue that is particularly striking is the extent to which new interactive forms of pornography may offer significant alternatives to the repressive features of mainstream pornography.

Speaking theoretically, I argue that the reification of desire that occurred in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century led to discourses of sexual theory, centered around Freud, that ignored some of the deeper workings going on with male sexuality. In particular, these theories became stuck in a subject-object dualistic framework, influencing much of the discourse on sexuality (including the feminist debates about pornography) up to present day. For this reason, I deploy Martin Heidegger’s language in direct contrast to the common terms used to describe sexuality, in an attempt to provide a sort of phenomenological concreteness to his philosophy. Although Herbert Marcuse once claimed that “Heidegger’s concreteness was to a great extent a phony, a false concreteness, and that in fact his philosophy was just as abstract and just as removed from reality, even avoiding reality, as the philosophies which at that time had dominated German universities” (2007: 117), I believe Heidegger’s philosophy can be used concretely by revealing a sort of sexual labour that goes on in the background of any philosophical work.

In her 2006 book, Queer Phenomenology, Sara Ahmed discusses the domesticity behind Edmund Husserl’s philosophical work. She claims: “one might even consider the
domestic work that must have taken place for Husserl to turn to the writing table, and to be writing on the table, and to keep that table as the object of his attention. We can draw here on the long history of feminist scholarship about the politics of housework: about the ways in which women, as wives and servants, do the work required to keep such spaces available for men and the work they do (Gilman 2002). To sustain an orientation toward the writing table might depend on such work, *while it erases the signs of that work, as signs of dependence*” (2006: 31; emphasis added). Because Husserl had servants and a wife to take care of everything that might distract him from his work, his philosophy appears to be independent from the world around him, and, perhaps for this reason, it becomes ‘superior’ to a philosophical work written by somebody who is always being distracted. For example, Ahmed refers to Adrienne Rich’s trouble of being constantly interrupted by her child. Rich writes, “I remember a cycle. It began when I had picked up a book or began trying to write a letter... The child (or children) might be absorbed in busyness, in his own dream world; but as soon as he felt me gliding into a world which did not include him, he would come to pull at my hand, ask for help, punch at the typewriter keys. And I would feel his wants at such a moment as fraudulent, as an attempt moreover to defraud me of living even for fifteen minutes as myself” (Rich 1991 quoted in Ahmed 2006: 32).

So, whereas scholars like Ahmed and Rich have to deal with several distractions as they work, Husserl was able to work without interruption and thus created a powerful, fluent and coherent system of thought on a highly abstract level. Ahmed calls this sort of philosophy a “paperless philosophy”: “The fantasy of a paperless philosophy
can be understood as crucial not only to the gendered nature of the occupation of philosophy but also to the disappearance of political economy, of the ‘materials’ of philosophy as well as its dependence on forms of labor, both domestic and otherwise. In other words, the labor of writing might disappear with the paper” (34; emphasis added). I think the same might be said about the sexual labour of writing philosophy. For instance, despite Heidegger’s apparent neglect of the body in his philosophy, his work is still dependent on forms of sexual labour – e.g., sublimation of his own heterosexual drives towards productive activities. I believe this sort of recognition reinserts a ‘true’ concreteness to his philosophy, despite sexuality not having anything to do directly with it.

I have tried to reverse this “disappearance” of the sexual labour of writing in my own work as well, attempting to prevent it from being a “paperless philosophy.” I argue that my writing is a sort of emancipatory resublimation, insofar as I underwent the process of repressive desublimation (viewing pornography) before resublimating my drives in narcissistic ecstasy. My “confession” in chapter 4 arguably falls prey to what Foucault calls the “political, economic, and technical incitement to talk about sex.” It might be understood as a sort of “oversharing,” what Ben Agger calls “too much information,” “a function of narcissism, wanting to shout out loud about one’s uniqueness” (2012: 4). Yet, as I argued in chapter 5, this narcissism is not so much about myself as it is about my “cathexis” to the other.
This other is constructed by the pornography industry in the form of sexual schemas, scripted all the way down. On the one hand, there is a very “real” labour process involved in the production of mainstream online pornography: “performer’s” work for wages; there are on site hierarchies associated with technical production; audiences are valorized and have economic value to advertisers. But, on the other hand, there is nothing “real” about the work process that goes on behind the scenes of traditional pornography; it is all a hyperreality, built to lure in users to its false depth. This is the aspect of online pornography that I have focused on in this thesis. In response, I have attempted to construct a synthesis of Freud’s sexual theory, Heidegger’s circumspection and Merleau-Ponty’s body schema to provide the groundwork for a new sexual theory, centered around the difference between auto-eroticism and narcissism, the primordial experience of co-essencing and the technological experience of being-turned-on by the screen. Through this pornographic experience, I argue that men are able to access the primordial world of their childhood briefly through narcissistic ecstasy, giving them the potential to alter their sexual schemas from the level of the logos, eliminating sexual inequality from their lives.

The conclusions of this thesis are by no means the limits of a phenomenological investigation into pornography. Slightly different approaches may lead to vastly different perspectives. For example, there are arguably much different conclusions that might be drawn from Justin Harmon’s phenomenological study of the “spectral” character of online pornography, mentioned earlier in Chapter 1. Furthermore, future research in the field may wish to use more psychoanalytical texts to help develop their
phenomenologies, including scholars such as Jacques Lacan and Slavoj Zizek, as well as psychoanalytical literature on film theory and the gaze. Norman Brown’s *Love’s Body* could also serve an interesting alternative to approaching phenomenology, focusing on the other’s body as poetic and textual. John O’Neil’s *Five Bodies* and *The Domestic Economy of the Soul* could be used to understand how auto-erotic childhoods contribute to the transformation of other human beings into ‘soul bodies’ of the psyche, relating to narcissistic ecstasy. On the lines of the technologies of pornography, historian philosophers such as Friedrich Kittler and Peter Sloterdijk could provide helpful historical alternatives to viewing the irreversible tie between sexuality and technology, and can establish yet another point of departure for dereifying desire in a non-subject-object dualism. It would also be possible to adopt a largely Foucauldian stance to analyze how various discourses, with their intersections of power and knowledge, have constructed pornography as a set of disciplinary practices and technologies.

I chose not to pursue these varying paths of study for my thesis for several reasons. Notwithstanding time and space requirements, I wanted to delimit my research by focusing on phenomenology as it is played out in the foundational texts of Heidegger, Simone du Beauvoir, Merleau-Ponty, Freud, Sartre, Marcuse and others, initially because I saw that some of these thinkers provided important early concepts and ideas for the analysis of human sexuality; but, more importantly, because I saw in their work a way to establish both a concrete base and a new standpoint from which to conduct further research. I encourage future researchers in the area of phenomenology of masturbation and pornography to open up space for conversations with different
philosophers, even when they have little or nothing to say about the topic on hand. Behind every piece of work, there is, arguably, an erotic and sexual component.

As a concluding comment, I want to reiterate that mainstream online pornography continues to define an important aspect of sexual experience for millions of viewers. Yet, the boundaries between professional and amateur pornography are blurring with the onset of interactive technologies, allowing people to transform themselves into *porné* with the click of a button. Despite the emancipatory potential in these technologies, most of these interactive technologies are still commercial and capitalistic, only in a more indirect way than traditional, professional pornography. Even so, they raise the possibility of a potentially emancipatory resublimation, a redirection of the sexual instincts into creating what Ben Agger calls the “pornographic public sphere” (2012: 36). Although Agger describes the pornographic public sphere as a form of “oversharing,” in my view, this narcissistic oversharing can lead people to experience an alternative mode of sexuality, a mode of freeing oneself from the prison of the screen. In this thesis I have argued that masturbation is potentially an encounter with otherness (allo) rather than only a narcissistic withdrawal into the self (auto). Yet, the broad politics of masturbation remain unclear. In a world of vast social and economic inequalities one has to ask the question whether such encounters with otherness, pursued on what appears to be an increasingly broad scale online, have any significant emancipatory character, or whether they are nothing more than the newest reformulation of repressive desublimation.
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