

Does the Porn Star Blush?

Performing the Real in Post-transgressive Cinema

Charlie Blake

has taught Critical and Cultural Theory, Philosophy, Film, Media, Visual Culture and Literature in a number of institutions and was, until recently, head of the Department of Media, Film and Communications at Liverpool Hope University. He has recently co-edited a double edition of Angelaki called 'Shadows of Cruelty: Sadism, Masochism and the Philosophical Muse,' and a collection, Beyond Human: From Animality to Transhumanism for Continuum.

Beth Johnson

is a lecturer in Film, Television and Visual Theory at Keele University, UK. She is the author of various journal publications such as Angelaki and Screen and recent book chapters include 'Realism, Real Sex and the Experimental Film: Mediating New Erotics in Georges Bataille's Story of the Eye' in Realism and the Audiovisual Media (Palgrave Press 2009), and 'Sex, Psychoanalysis and Sublimation in Dexter' in Investigating Dexter (I.B.Tauris: 2010)

The power of the false is delicate, allowing itself to be recaptured by frogs and scorpions.... the elements of time require an extraordinary encounter with man in order to produce something new. (Deleuze, 1989, p.147)

At the heart of pornography is sexuality haunted by its own disappearance. (Baudrillard, 1987, p. 40)

In her seminal study of porn as genre, *Hardcore: Power, Pleasure and the Frenzy of the Visible*, from 1989, Linda Williams opens her chapter on filmic perversion and obscenity with a brief and prepara-

tory digression on Andre Bazin's theory of realism, which may be understood as a substantiation of what Bazin called the 'myth of total cinema.' This 'myth' was based on a projected or intuited *telos* whose effect was to create a cinematic apparatus backwardly generating a progression towards ever greater verisimilitude to the real: the real, that is, as he put it somewhat mystically, of the world. As a number of commentators had observed prior to Bazin, (and with important consequences for adjacent arts such as painting and theatre, let alone static photography), this was a 'real' – however amorphous its denotation – that from its origins in the 1890s the moving image had promised in a way that no other expressive or representational medium in history had even begun to approach. Bazin was certainly no 'naive realist,' though, and was perfectly aware of the artifice that cinema was simultaneously capable of and differentiated accordingly between filmmakers who emphasized the image itself through its spatial and temporal connections and coordinates, such as the German expressionists or Soviet montagists, and those who rather emphasized 'reality' in its more immediately material sense, by combining, say, a long take with a certain depth of field, so to mimic the contours and textures of a projected external reality. Such figures such as Orson Welles and the Italian neo-realists, for example, exemplified this mimetic tendency for Bazin. Williams also notes here in passing an observation by the historian Stephen Marcus who claimed somewhat provocatively but aptly that cinema was what the genre of pornography "was waiting for all along", since language in literary pornography had always been a "bothersome necessity." (Williams, 1999, p. 185)

Marcus represents a general perception of and perspective on the screening of sex which has tended to reappear in much of the critical literature on porn, whether positive or negative, from its earliest days to more recent commentary on the vogue for supposedly authentic sexual depiction in film, a vogue which has since the 1990s colonized so much of the moving image both within and beyond the genre as such. Necessarily, of course, such colonization has a prehistory, and it is a prehistory that has everything to do with the coalescence of a certain and important vision of temporality with notions of authenticity that began to appear in the 1970s. Tanya Krzywinska, for example, cites and discusses Joan Mellen's comments on *Last Tango in Paris*, noting that it:

...is an open essay on the realities, emotional highs and lows of a sexual relationship, and focuses on what Bernardo Bertolucci, the director, has called 'the present of fucking; (cited in Mellen 1974, 79). The intention to capture the suspension of time in the act of sex operates, as Joan Mellen says, as 'a pure cinematic moment of authenticity beside which every other experience in the film is derivative' (1974, 142). The central theme of the book is the search for authentic experience that is masked by the affections and taboos of bourgeois life. Sex is the primary route to existential authenticity. (Krzywinska, 2006, p. 44)

This idea of authenticity through sex and the depiction of sex on screen and the emphasis on the moment of *cinematic time* as the essence of its *real* – or its *authenticity* – is somewhat at odds with the more traditional view of porn as a fundamentally exploitative rather than a vibrantly ontological or existentialist genre of self discovery, whether because of the conventional stress on the harm it may cause to its viewers or the harm it may cause to its actors. And yet it is also in many ways closer to the contemporary exploration of real sex in film and on the web as an aspect of a quest for authenticity and self discovery, (whether of a beautiful truth or of a contemporary darkness), especially in films such as *Atomized* (Roehler, 2006) or *Shortbus* (Mitchell, 2006) or the kinds of early 21st century websites such as *YouPorn* or *Beautiful Agony*, the latter of which we will be returning to in due course. For the moment, however, this exploratory notion of the authentic – which is possibly not quite the same as the more generalized 'real' – nonetheless raises questions about the nature of the real which associate it very closely with notions of cinematic time. Leaving to one side for now the psychoanalytically extended and broadly noumenal tradition of the 'real' in figures such as Jacques Lacan these questions will then be centrally concerned with ontology as much as it is with technology, with philosophy and non-philosophy as much as with erotics, with appearance and disappearance rather than the inaccessible 'other' of the post-Freudian and post-Hegelian traditions, and thus crucially with the realm of chronos as much as that of the scopic or the haptic. Accordingly, and to deal with this ontologically material core of the real in what we have called post-transgressive cinema, this paper will begin to adapt

what Gilles Deleuze writes about the real in his study of film in *Cinema One* and more specifically, *Cinema Two* in connection with what he calls 'organic and crystalline narration,' with 'the movement image and the time image,' and with 'the crystal image' and especially with 'the powers of the false,' and through this it will start to diagram a cartography of filmic desire and sex as a dimension of the post transgressive real of the screen.

There are, then, two items at this stage, two phrases in the subtitle if this paper that require clarification. The first is the notion of 'performing the real' and the second, that of 'post-transgressive cinema.' We will attend to the first in more detail, allowing the second to emerge from this discussion through the illumination that we hope such attention will bring. In brief, however, the idea of the post-transgressive in film sex relates to the notion outlined in the introduction to this collection that transgression per se has been so thoroughly commodified as to have lost its more revolutionary edge - as promoted, say, by Michel Foucault in his early essay on Georges Bataille, 'A Preface to Transgression' - to the extent that even the self-consciously confrontational Cinema of Transgression associated with figures such as Nick Zedd, Kembra Pfahler, Casandra Stark, Beth B, Tommy Turner, Richard Kern and Lydia Lunch - not to mention the prominent post-Deleuzian thinker Manuel DeLanda - in the 1970s and 1980s, can now very easily be incorporated into popular culture or advertising with no evident sense of the shock to the bourgeoisie or 'establishment' or 'straight' culture that was initially flagged up by this kind of quasi-modernist avant garde expression. With porn especially, the transition has been paralleled *a fortiori* by the spread and accessibility of hardcore sexual imagery of all kinds on the web, available in theory to anyone with a phone, let alone a tablet or computer. This has led to an intriguing concern with authenticity in certain areas of pornographic production in the 21st century; an interest in authenticity that takes a number of forms, but has parallels with the growth of so-called reality-television in the same period, in that it will often film ostensibly 'ordinary' people rather than actors and, in a number of cases, will give more control to the viewer/consumer, (or at least appear to do so) than the producer-based porn of an earlier era. It is this democratization of the porn image - and especially the moving image, that that can be said to have transformed the transgressive aura of porn to a post-trangres-

sive hybrid of playfulness, fetishism, empowerment and (ironically) ontological exhaustion, which in itself indicates something important about the reconfiguration of the reality of sex that new technologies and their attendant discourses of pleasure, commodification and consumer discipline have engendered.

In terms of the performance of the real, then, and without getting too deeply embroiled in metaphysically charged debates on the term and its relation to materiality, empiricism, positivism and the noumenal, suffice it to say that there is a provisional sense in which we can consider the real (or its cognates in the authentic or the genuine) prior to complicating it in relation to the false (or the inauthentic or artificial) as we intend to do here via the thought of Rene Magritte, Jean Baudrillard, Foucault and Deleuze. In the fundamental consideration of whether or not a cinematic text can be deemed 'realist,' for example, it is useful to begin opening up one particularly valuable perspective by acknowledging Magritte's historically influential assertion of what visual images actually are – representations as resemblances or similitudes rather than realities – as he suggests, notably, in his infamous statement below the image of a pipe from 1926, declaring beneath this image, and paradoxically, that: "Ceci n'est pas une pipe" (This is not a pipe.) This moment of apparent tautology or contradiction or paradox has led post-Surrealist writers such as Foucault specifically, but also more indirectly, Deleuze and Baudrillard, to consider and argue (and here we must, of course, greatly over-simplify) for a gradual transformation of the Western image from its uncomfortably mimetic origins in Plato and Aristotle - via moments of iconicity, similitude, verisimilitude, impression and affirmation - to expression itself, and thence to the realms and economies of pure simulacra, simulation, sensation and what Baudrillard notoriously termed hyperreality. The importance of Magritte's image for Foucault in particular is that it indicates the completion of a recent historical process marked previously by Paul Klee's explosion of the distinction between the previously divergent referential capacities and functions of words and images, and next by Wassily Kandinsky's move beyond the geometry of representation and resemblance to a geometry of form and expression (Foucault, 1982, 33-35).

In the case of Magritte's contradictory pipe, then, image and text are evidently distinct, and yet the text is part of the image as

the image is part of the text, gesturing towards the realm of simulacra to come. As Foucault puts it (although, as Martin Jay has noted in his seminal study of the denigration of vision in modernist continental thought, Magritte himself challenged this reading) (Jay, 1993, p. 400 n.):

Resemblance serves representation, which rules over it; similitude serves repetition, which ranges over it. Resemblance predicates itself upon a model it must return to and reveal; similitude circulates the simulacrum as an indefinite and reversible relation of the similar to the similar. (Foucault, 1982, 55)

For Baudrillard, (both building upon and exceeding Foucault), the agon here is less between resemblance and similitude than the play of seduction and pornography. As ever with Baudrillard, terms such as 'seduction' and 'pornography' have an extended set of connotations that take their everyday meaning into new zones of operation. Seduction here is in many ways a development and refinement of his earlier privileging of the symbolic over the semiotic in capitalist exchange systems; an emphasis on the play of appearances as this indicates a real to be taken seriously over the obsessive drive for the real represented by pornography, which in its zeal for the real as obscene becomes an excess of desire rather than a lack as in the psychoanalytic tradition, thereby configuring the hyperreal rather than the real itself. As he notes in *Seduction*, in a chapter titled 'Stereo-Porno':

The *trompe l'oeil* removes a dimension from real space, and this accounts for its seduction. Pornography by contrast adds a dimension to the space of sex, it makes the latter more real than the real – and this accounts for the absence of seduction... Pornographic voyeurism is not sexual voyeurism, but a voyeurism of representation and its perdition, a dizziness born of the loss of the scene and the irruption of the obscene. (Baudrillard 1990, 34-35)

Baudrillard's tactical and partial opposition here between simulation and seduction (the latter of which is also put in tension with the

simulacra and production) emphasises the ways in which the real has been overexposed in late modernity to the extent that it has in itself become the pornographic hyperreal. Seduction, on the other hand, is a play of appearances, of artifice, of the false, which through its hesitations and prevarications across boundaries – its transgressive vibrational patterns – gestures towards the real at the same time as it can never be or substitute for the real. Yet, it could be argued that in the post-transgressive cinema of sex, what was formerly pornographic has in some subtle way moved into the realm of what Baudrillard describes as seduction by virtue of its acceptance of the impossibility of the real as such and celebration of the false as at least a gesture towards the possibility of the real and the authentic. Thus, with the veritable proliferation of recent highly explicit cinema whether in film itself or through other screens, commodities that market themselves in line with various current aesthetic and popular philosophies of the real, it would appear that an *aporia* emerges; a blind-spot in which recent expressions of real-sex on screen are able to transgress hitherto pornographic classifications of porno pleasure and somehow embody real/genuine/ authentic intimacy in the mediated event that they present, but as a gesture towards the real rather than a representation of the real – whether this gesture is between people or between a subject and the camera itself. Such texts as, for example, *Romance* (Breillat, 1999), *Georges Bataille's Story of the Eye* (McElhinney, 2001) and *Shortbus* appear to transgress the supposedly 'realist' conventions of pornography in that they show the real of sex in order to articulate and point to an event in which genuine communication occurs between the 'actors' that has resonance beyond merely arousing an audience. Instead of being merely transgressive representations, then, such texts point to a post-transgressive and post-representational *expression* of the possibility of the real in relation to screening sex in which in meaning or significance is engendered by a pattern of more broadly cultural, historical, social and psychological elements connected and organised by notions of the authentic and the false, intimacy and expression. The two significant active elements here are *intimacy* and *expression*; intimacy being essential, for whether or not the intimate is co-determinate with the real, it undoubtedly has a parallel life to elements of the authentic. Expression, of course, has a complicated relation to the real, as it does to the concept of representation, especially in the

work of Deleuze as he draws upon Baruch Spinoza, but which lies beyond the scope of this article. It is thus to the intimate that we will look first, and its relation to the real and thence to the false and to the post-transgressive.

According to Theodore Zeldin in his *An Intimate History of Humanity*, within modernity there have been three overlapping forms and expressions of intimacy between men and women specifically. The first form of intimacy in early modernity was concerned with space and objects, with places to retreat, cherished objects and domesticity. Then the romantics demanded a second kind of intimacy in which lovers could, through sexual intercourse or exchange, find some kind of union of souls on an affective level. A third form of intimacy noted by Zeldin is about accompanying the purely amorous and passionate charge between lovers, which theoretically at least requires no other significant form of communication for bonding, with a third that does indeed demand communication intellectually as much as affectively. This is a form of intimacy between lovers who share tastes in art or film or music or literature or travel as much as they share and enjoy each other's bodies. This is the form of intimacy that demands attention and reciprocity and most specifically, partnership (Zeldin, 1998, pp 324-326). But it is the second form of intimacy which is simulated and then drained of affect in the conventional pornographic film. Sex in the second sense does, however, start to move from simulation to seduction in certain films in the 1970s, as we will see below, allowing for the emergence of new kind of intimacy of both hope and exhaustion, but most certainly a kind of sharing, even if it does it times stray into the contested zones of perversion or consensual cruelty as in BDSM. Here, and in spite of an apparent lack of affect, at least in terms of intimacy, in certain examples, what is often happening is that intimacy is shifting from what Baudrillard describes as pornography or simulation to seduction. Here, the performance of real sex is expressed as a significant form of communication and moreover, expressed in contradistinction to more traditional pornography, as recourse to go beyond the overt fakery of spectacular cum shots and screaming orgasms as a play of appearances gesturing towards the real – as seduction.

In terms of pornographic film, and as Baudrillard has suggested, this mode of seductive realism is undoubtedly significant – represented in the supposed arousal of the actors as well as the real arous-

al of spectators. Classically, close-up shots of penetration are mediated in order to testify to the reality of the intercourse taking place on screen. Simultaneously however, pornographic film tends to be stylistically uncomplicated with little or no focus on plot or character development but rather, has existed as a genre which utilises conventions of 'talking dirty,' 'raw animal desire,' exhibitionism' and 'cum shots' to authenticate and adhere to pre-existing porno conventions and audience expectations. Sex-on-screen then, or, more specifically, real-sex on-screen, has most dominantly been shown for physical rather than psychological titillation. Due to a lack of character depth in conventional porno, actors appear (consciously) one-dimensional - they are obviously dressed up and ready to fuck. While the penetration is real, authentic in the physical sense, the conventions associated with showing their pleasure to the spectator are often expressed via unoriginal moans and groans which become, over time, more audible so as to signify the forthcoming climax or to indicate a change of position, partner or scene.

New ways of re-presenting (as well as expressing) the real of sex are, of course, inevitably bound by and understood in the context of past theoretical, legal and aesthetic debates which have been utilised in order to segregate and situate major lines of demarcation between explicit materials that are intended to arouse and 'deprave' and those that present explicit content in a non-arousing way. The intention of sex on screen to arouse, or not, has long been linked to aesthetic and moral arguments concerning high and low culture since the inception of film. Certain screens however, have, as Linda Williams notes in 'Cinema and the Sex Act' been able, from the 1970s to partially transgress such a stringent distinction, examples including *Last Tango in Paris* (1972), *Story of O* (1975), *In the Realm of the Senses* (1976) and *A Clockwork Orange* (1971). Yet, despite these specific screens achieving a significant aesthetic and artistic acceptance for their ability to present sex which blurs the boundaries between mainstream and soft-core cinema, it is important to note that the hard-hitting elements in these films are achieved through an equal affiliation and direct reference to hard-core cultural theory and fantasy. What is distinct then between these works and present day real-sex film (besides, in cases, a hard-core appropriation of sex), is a contemporary attempt to convey aesthetic realism – a realism that is naturalistic. In distinction, *Story of O*, for example, locates itself from

the first line as fantasy: 'One day O's lover takes her to a place they've never gone before – Parc Monceau – Parc Montsouris, somewhere around there. They stroll along a luminous road surrounded by dark, dangerous forests. Twilight is approaching and autumn is in the air.' Alongside this narrative which deliberately taps into a schema of fairy story telling via the opening 'One day...' (an opening address echoed by Bunuel - 'Once upon a time' - in *Un Chien Andalou*) and the underspecified setting, the on-screen focus of a well-dressed couple, non-diegetic music and brilliant sunlight points to a lack of consensual reality. The scene is also shrouded in mist indicating a fantasy setting.

A distinction between these films and modern real-sex cinema can thus be drawn on two levels: firstly, the sex represented in these older films is not real. Secondly, the temporal distance between transgressive acts/scenes in the 1970s and present day eradicates some of the transgressive status of the films if they are considered out of context. Despite this, such films have been instrumental in the process of making anew real-sex films today – films in which desire signals excess. This excess however is not always spectacular. Indeed, excess here pertains not to a transgression but to a post-transgressive status. Actors in the real-sex films discussed in this article engage in real sex as recourse to go beyond transgression – to really engage in an event which signals the post-transgressive status a new type of sex on screen. As Linda Williams notes:

Acting implies artifice, being precisely what one is not, though drawing on what one has been in order to create an appearance that is credible. To 'act' in a scene in which the action is sex is, in these explicit moments, to really engage in sex. (Williams, 2001, p.22)

Williams observation raises once again the contemporary hesitation that exists in both the actor and the viewer where real sex on screen is concerned, and it is from the question of the flow of time *as* image and its relation to the production of the false and the authentic as well as to the flow of images in film, that this hesitation emerges. It is a hesitation signalled by Baudrillard but never properly developed, at least in part because he fails to deal in any significant way with the central image of time in the pornographically

hyperreal and the seductively false-real. One very useful way to illuminate this hesitation more fully is through Deleuze's notions of the powers of the false, the organic image and the crystalline image, as he derives these ideas from his reflections on cinema and his reading of the philosopher of duration, Henri Bergson, and it is to these ideas that we will now turn. Here, and centrally, Deleuze's provocative thesis has to do with the distinction he makes between what he calls the "movement image" and the "time-image," as these two concepts define and provide titles for the two cinema books themselves. In terms of the movement image, and in essence, Deleuze asserts that the cinema of the first fifty years, from 1895 to 1945, is dominated by the image embodied not *in* movement but *as* movement. In other words, whether one is looking at the films of Charlie Chaplin or Buster Keaton or directors like Carl Dreyer or Fritz Lang or even early Disney, or indeed early pornography, the focus on the movement image is on the intervals between actions and the ways in which these intervals and actions combine to connect the brain of the viewer with the moving image as a representation of the real. This is a connection between brain and screen that Deleuze calls the "sensory-motor-schema," which is, for him, the mechanism through which we as viewers relate to the external world as series of images organised into a fluxion unity: a unity which, in some way or another, acts to guarantee our sense of truth or reality, whether external or internal. The movement image provides us with this reassurance even when it deals with war, violence or atrocity, because there is an underlying sense of organic unity to its manipulation of space, time and movement. It is a unity that is also predominantly linear in form in that it tells a story, as well as being organic in that it binds together into a whole. It also, for Deleuze, reminds the viewer that whatever its problems, this reality suggested by the movement image is the reality of what he calls (following Gottfried Leibniz more than Voltaire) the best of all possible worlds: a reality conveyed by what he calls organic narration.

What happens as a result of the cataclysm of the Second World War and its seemingly cosmic atrocities, Auschwitz-Belsen and Hiroshima-Nagasaki, (and Deleuze's perspective is undoubtedly Eurocentric here, though that in no way invalidates its power) - is that this sense our world being "the best of all possible worlds" - even

potentially - collapses. The time image emerges accordingly and in response to this crisis from a relationship between the brain and the screen in which intervals and actions no longer rely on a linear sequence indicating the real; a relationship in which cinema is less concerned with the movement and its representation than with consciousness itself. With the time image, then, we also move from organic narration, to what he calls crystalline narration. There is a great deal that might be said about this transition, (and it is, of course, highly challengeable), but in essence it's about the difference between, say, the films of John Ford and the films of David Lynch, between *Stagecoach* and *Lost Highway*. Of course, linear narrative and organic narration and image still thrive in spite of the emergence of crystalline narratives – and sometimes in the same movie as crystalline narratives and images. Orson Welles' *Lady of Shanghai* is possibly a perfect example of that duality at a significant historical moment. Similarly, with Welles' *Citizen Kane* released in 1941, Deleuze notes that we are: "carried away by the undulations of a great wave, time gets out of joint, and we enter into temporality as a state of permanent crisis." (TI 186)

This idea of time being out of joint, that Deleuze (like Jacques Derrida in his *Spectres of Marx*, and for comparable though ontologically dissonant ends – see Blake's *Sonic Spectralities*, forthcoming) borrows from *Hamlet*, defines for him the transition between the movement and time image; a transition from "a unified diegetic world conveyed through spatio-temporal coherence and rational cause-effect editing" to the "jump cuts of Jean-Luc Godard" or the "elegant mismatches" of Alain Resnais (Stam, 2000, 260) But eroticism and pornography are unusual in this regard in that they are based on the temporal structure of fantasy rather than reality, and presumably this has been the case since the first pornographic reels, the first pornographic film images, as they coincided pretty much with the birth of cinema itself. The time of fantasy is often one of loops, recursions, repetitions, suspense, re-visitations of as certain locus or movement or sensation or image, and revisions to increase intensity or possibly to draw it out or re-dramatize it. Is sexual fantasy organic or crystalline in this sense? Or possibly both? And is the gender of fantasy – of the fantasists – of the scenario - of the depicted orgasm - of the pornographer let alone the porn star - significant here? Also, is it still accurate to make this distinction if we

examine the short reels of early cinema, of striptease in the silent movie, and the development of contemporary pornography on the internet? One thing they undoubtedly do have in common is the short clip which has increasingly replaced the full length movie, particularly on the web with the rise of you-porn and similar sites. So this does indeed raise questions about continuities and discontinuities between early and contemporary cinema, and in particular, questions about whether Deleuze's distinction really does what he claims it does?

Porn clips and movies have traditionally been understood as fantasies designed primarily for masturbation rather than for art or realism, (historically male masturbation via scopic passion, voyeuristic power and fetishism), rather, that is, than representations of the best of all possible worlds. But the rise of real sex in the cinema, on video and its equivalents, and increasingly on the web, as well as the normalisation of what would have been considered extreme, not to mention the evident rise of female directors and producers of porn, all raise a number of questions about authenticity, the power of the real and the power of the false, which connect with the nature of reality and fabrication in cinema more generally, and particularly the logic and temporality of fantasy as expressed through the recoding and dissemination of images of real sex in cinematic time. The crucial element here lies with what we have called the democratization of porn. By this, we mean the ways in which new technologies have allowed non-specialists to make their own porn movies, and in doing so, have - to a degree - undermined not only some of the arguments about exploitation in the porn industry, but also, about the necessary objectification of the body in porn.

For Deleuze, the movement image, we may recall, is concerned not with representing or re-presenting movement as such, but of effectively being movement. Images in this sense are part of the flow of life. With the time image, this flow is continued, but loses its linearity, its narrative context, its spatial-temporal position and linear causality. An essential distinction between the parallel notions of organic and crystalline descriptions or narrations is that the organic is concerned primarily with a play between the real and the imaginary, whereas the crystalline absorbs this polarity into a broader schema involving the virtual and the actual. We are not going to digress too much into the many debates about these contested and problematic

terms here, but on one level at least what it means is that crystalline narration has virtual access to all the images that could ever be imagined or un-imagined, including the image of thought itself, the image of the brain (for the brain is merely another image for Deleuze), the images associated with the concepts of philosophy as much as those of cinema or video. This is not to say that virtuality is like an infinite storeroom of potentialities, or potential images, but rather, it may be understood as the precondition for that storeroom's actualization as image. Deleuze writes as follows:

In an *organic* description, the real that is assumed is recognizable by its continuity – even if it is interrupted – by the continuity shots which establish it and by the laws which determine successions, simultaneities and permanences: it is a regime of localizable relations, actual linkages, legal, causal and logical connections....

and continues:

...It is clear that this system includes the unreal, the recollection, the dream and the imaginary, but as contrast.... A film may be entirely made up of dream- images; these will retain their capacity for perpetual disconnection and change which contrasts them with real images. (Deleuze, 1989, p. 126-127)

There are thus two modes of existence in the organic regime – the real and the imaginary. In the crystalline regime, on the other hand:

The two modes of existence are now combined in a circuit where the real and the imaginary, the actual and the virtual, chase after each other, exchange their roles and become indiscernible. (Deleuze, 1989, p.127)

Leading to what Deleuze refers to as the crystal image and the ascendancy of the powers of the false. In regard to the latter, and drawing on the literary and philosophical writings of Friedrich Nietzsche, Herman Melville and Jorge Luis Borges, Deleuze argues that crystalline regimes are fundamentally about appearances rather than

realities, about faking and forging. The time image, as he puts it, belongs to an order in which truth and the real have been converted into artifice by a focus on time extracted and abstracted from the flow of time itself. In other words, the time image de-chronologizes the image and the edit, and narrative itself, to emphasize instead the optical and sonic dimensions of film as its essence, rather than the representation of the real. There are however, potential conflicts in this vision of post-war cinema, and never more than when dealing with the rise of short clips on websites, or more aleatory web-cams, which attempt to provide, on some cases, a warts-and-all form of realism: 'This is me in my bedroom masturbating, fucking, whipping, going down on someone, etc... and me looking bored, putting on make-up, etc'. Specifically, the close ups associated with websites such as *Beautiful Agony* appear, at least initially, to belong more to the attempted realism of the movement image than the irrationalism and unreality of the time image. But is this the case?

For Deleuze, both alone and in his work with Felix Guattari, the issue could be argued to centre on faciality. In the first book of cinema, for example, Deleuze talks of the "Affection Image," (which he associates very strongly with the close up). In general, the face or faciality is what individuates and socializes us, and like the image of Big Brother in George Orwell's *1984*, the face is a form (or rather, constituent) of despotic power. The cinematic close up, however, abstracts the face from its conventional functions, which are, in brief:

- 1 To be individuating, it distinguishes and characterizes each person
- 2 To be socializing, it manifests a social role
- 3 To be relational or communicating, either between two or more people or within an individual (the harmony between one's character and the role one is playing, in Ronald Bogue's exegesis)

The close-up deterritorializes the face from these functions and frees it up from spatio-temporal coordinates, allowing it to express pure affect, pure power, pure feeling, abstracted momentarily from social roles and the structures and discourses of power that permeate these social roles. So in terms of pornographic and the eroticism of the image, the close-up is fundamentally different to other forms of sexual depiction or expression, emancipated from the more con-

ventional demands of sex in the moving image, and can arguably both depersonalize the body, the flesh on the screen, and real-ize the 'real' of the actor/consumer, the affective-flow of the actualized harmony between subjects. Thus faciality here, which can, for Deleuze and Guattari, on the one hand indicate the despotic regime of various organic and corporate micro-fascisms and their precursors as the gaze of power (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988 , 167-191), might also be able, through the close up, the porno-graphic and post-transgressive close up, to emancipate desire from these despotic constraints and align it instead with emergent temporalities, with molecular and immanent subjectivities, with the real as a perpetual and perpetually oscillating transgression between regimes in the crystal image.

We begin this project by asking the question "Does the Porn Star Blush?" In some ways this is a rhetorical question, as this article is far more about reality and fabrication than blushing or flushing per se, (interesting though the 'blush of the real' most certainly is). However, if we take on board that the real-imaginary dialectic is subsumed by the virtual in crystalline narration, and especially in the crystal image, then everything is fake anyway. Orgasms are just as fake in this sense as the minimal story line that might feasibly be attached to a porn clip, the clumsy acting, self-consciousness or hyperbolization of affect. On the other hand, what we have called the 'democratization of pornography' seems to work according to a notion of authenticity and reality to at least some degree, which attaches the powers of the false to a new kind of authenticity, authenticity as affect at the very least!. These are, after all, *real* people having *real* sex, however unreal the situations might be. One interesting example of this as mentioned above is the website *Beautiful Agony*. Interestingly, too, the full name of the site is *Beautiful Agony: Facettes de la Petite Mort*. This is a site dedicated to screening a collection of clips of 'real' people experiencing orgasm. *Beautiful Agony* advertises itself as a democratic, erotic and contemporary site

dedicated to the beauty of human orgasm. This may be the most erotic thing you have ever seen, yet the only nudity it contains is from the neck up. That's where people are truly naked.

Focusing on faciality, this site also explicitly demands that submitted clips must be filmed on a digital camcorder. Poignantly, the site also states that all footage submitted must be 'raw' and unedited. Further instructions for submission read as follows:

Frame the shot like you see on the site - full face, no nudity, preferably from a point of view above the nose. Make sure you have good light. Daylight from a nearby window is best. If you're using a lamp, it should be to one side, close to you but not too close to the camera, so the light is graded across your face. It will need to be a bright lamp and set the white balance manually to "indoor" (all camcorders have this control). Please don't have any music or the TV playing as it creates a copyright problem. Besides, Agony is an experience for the ears as well as the eyes, so try and keep the background noise down. Capture the warm up, and the cool down. Let us see all of your idiosyncrasies and rituals, but we're only interested in reality, not performances, impressions, or exaggerations. Let the tape run on at the end. You can talk to the camera before, during or after, if you like. Take as long as you need, we'll edit the tape. (<http://www.beautifulagony.com/public/main.php>)

While on the one hand this site holds a place of interest in that it appears dedicated to the democratization of sex and to 'reality' rather than performance, *Beautiful Agony* also insists that they, rather than those submitting, have full editorial control over footage. This certainly problematises the question of 'real control', power and democracy. A further issue can also be found in the site's insistence that all contributors submit 'two takes that are different'. This instruction again calls into question the mission statement of *Beautiful Agony*, specifically its self-proclaimed 'interest in reality, rather than performance'. While concentrating on the face rather than the genitals of the contributors, the 'two take' demand suggests that performance, and in particular, facial performances of extreme pleasure are part of the real. In addition, while the close up appears to signify the 'real,' it is also, through the edit, and specifically in the depiction of real sex, privileging the optical and the sonic over the haptic or verisi-

militude, and in that sense falling back into a logic of fantasy which acts as a force of continuity amidst the discontinuities of the technological and cultural developments in cinematic history and the evolution of the moving image from the short reel to the often equally brief digital clip. It is in this sense that the post-transgressive can be most clearly understood as an acceptance in Baudrillard's age of simulation by both actors and viewers – who are often now one and the same - of authenticity as an experience of the real subjectively expressed as an aspect of the power of the false in which truth and reality are forever subverted by time.

References

- Baudrillard, J. *Seduction*. Translated by Brian Singer. Montreal: New World Perspectives, 1990.
- Baudrillard, J. The Year 2000 Has Already Happened. Translated by Nai-fei Ding & Kuang-Hsing. Chen. *Body Invaders: Panic Sex in America*. Edited by Arthur & Marylouise Kroker. New York: New World Perspectives, 1987.
- Bogue, R. *Deleuze and Cinema*. London: Routledge, 2003.
- Colman, F. *Deleuze & Cinema: The Film Concepts*. Oxford: Berg, 2011.
- Deleuze, G. *Cinema Two: The Time Image*. Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Gelata. London: The Athlone Press, 1989.
- Deleuze, G. Postscript on Control Societies, in *Negotiations 1972-1990*. Translated by Martin Joughin. New York: Columbia UP, 1995.
- Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. *Capitalism & Schizophrenia. Vol. II: A Thousand Plateaus*. Translated by Brian Massumi. London: The Athlone Press, 1988.
- Derrida, J. *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, & the New International*. Translated by Peggy Kamuf. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Foucault, M. *This is not a Pipe*. Translated by James Harkness. Berkeley: U of California P, 1983.
- Grace, V. *Baudrillard's Challenge: A Feminist Reading*. London: Routledge, 2000.
- Jay, M. *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth Century French Thought*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1993.
- Krzywinska, T. *Sex and the Cinema*. New York: Columbia UP, 2006.

- Lacan, J. *Ecrits : The First Complete English Edition*. London: W.W. Norton & Co, 2007.
- Mellen, J. *Women and their Sexuality in the New Film* – New York – Horizon Press, 1974.
- Orwell, G. 1984. London: Penguin, 2011.
- Williams, L. *Hardcore: Power, Pleasure and the "Frenzy of the Visible"*. Los Angeles: U of California P, 1999.
- Williams, L. Cinema and the Sex Act in *Cineaste*, 27:1, (2001).
- Williams, L. *Screening Sex*. Durham: Duke UP, 2008.
- Stam, R. *Film Theory: An Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2000.
- Zeldin, T. *An Intimate History of Humanity*. London: Vintage, 1998.
- Žižek, S. *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology*. London: Verso, 1999.

Filmography

- A Clockwork Orange* (Stanley Kubrick, UK/US, 1971)
- Atomized* (Oskar Roehler, Germany, 2006)
- Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles, US, 1941)
- Georges Bataille's Story of the Eye* (Andrew R. McElhinney, US, 2003)
- In the Realm of the Senses* (Nagisa Ôshima, Japan/France, 1976)
- Lady of Shanghai* (Orson Welles, US, 1947)
- Last Tango In Paris* (Bernardo Bertolucci, Italy/France, 1972)
- Lost Highway* (David Lynch, France/US, 1997)
- Romance* (Catherine Breillat, France, 1999)
- Shortbus* (John Cameron Mitchell, US, 2006)
- Stagecoach* (John Ford, US, 1939)
- The Story of O* (Just Jaeckin, France/West Germany/Canada, 1975)
- Un chien andalou* (Luis Buñuel, France, 1929)