



THE PORN PROJECT AND 'I'

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Rachel Liebert is a PhD candidate and Adjunct Professor at the City University of New York (CUNY). She draws on critical race, feminist and security studies to examine practices and politics of arousal and surveillance, and to co-facilitate a number of creative, collaborative projects that protest the privatisation and policing of our bodies/sexualities/psyches. In NYC, these have included guerrilla theatre performances on female genital cosmetic surgery and on 'public' education, a grassroots exhibition on the vulva, participatory installations on genital diversity, a spoof training video on the 'cosmetogynecology' industry, an indie book on radical mental health for the (un)Occupy movement and an activist blog documenting racism in the criminal 'justice' system. Overall, through her scholarship and activism, she aims to create spaces of dissent, imagination and connection. Most recently she was involved in Auckland project 'Pornography in The Public Eye' as curator of The Porn Project - a fringe art campaign to generate a public dialogue around porn that celebrates diverse desires while refusing misogyny and racism.

I did The Porn Project not with a predefined passion/expertise/opinion for/about/on mainstream porn *per se*, but as someone who is into spaces of dissent & imagination & connection. Spaces that are increasingly needed & threatened as the neoliberal State of 'security' continues to creep & trample across the earth.

Nonetheless, it was hard for me to initially sit down and put energy into this present piece given all that is happening in the world. I've always defaulted to distrust around questions of subjectivity - their appeal & accessibility to ThePrivileged, and (therefore...) their liberal sway toward individualism and away from structures of domination.

Yet, thanks to people like Judith Butler and Gloria Anzaldúa, we know that 'I' can be a radical project. Interconnected with everyone & everything, our Selves are implicated in Othering - a process enacted with/in a sprightly array of social & political practices, from Syria bombings to mainstream porn.

It follows that Othering - and its friends misogyny, hetero/sexism and racism - cannot be exiled from questions of subjectivity. Even if making the benefactors of these relations bored, tired, uncomfortable.

In many ways The Porn Project was a project about our Selves; calling for the artistic, public scrutiny of a mechanism (mainstream porn) that serves the panoptical surveillance of our bodies, sexualities, relationships. Yet this somewhat passé Foucauldian reading warrants caution: whether settler-colonialism, the 'War on Terror' or (some) 'Western' feminisms, the construction of TheOppressed is fundamental to imperialism. The Porn Project was not a project to 'save' porn stars or porn consumers - whatever one's assumptions (fantasies) about who they (we) are. Instead, it was about witnessing the collective Effects of mainstream porn - its dumb shit *and* its delightful possibilities - in order to move toward a more radical porn culture.



**Peter Madden,
*Goddess of Want***

One that does not simply conserve our heteropatriarchal and white supremacist status quo, but that arouses diverse - more emancipated - desires.

The Porn Project, then, was an attempt to sit in that fertile and painful borderland between TheSelf and TheStructural; defying the historic, exhausting tendency to pour discussion on mainstream porn into *either* 'pro' or 'anti' positions, seeing the friction in-between these categories as revolutionary potential.

And so, as Andrea Smith says: It was "less of one based on self-improvement or even collective self-improvement, and more about the creation of new worlds and futurities for which we currently have no language." Thus not so much Endeavouring to *know more* - to capture the world in bleached think-nets - as committing to a collaborative process of reflexive, creative trial & error. A radical experimentation that beckons 'the beyond', *what we do not know*, to emerge.

And to try do this through the 'contradictory' cracks of discomfort & care, traction & ambivalence, seriousness & play, critique & imagination. As well as through Participation: accepting all submissions, supporting people's costs, surrendering ownership (but not accountability), keeping a squint-y eye on power. (In this case, liberal ideals of individual choice and the invisible workings of white privilege made things smell funny; seemingly easier for people to name & claim subversity than to damn & dismantle assemblages of misogyny, hetero/sexism and racism).

Difference collided & colluded in predictable & unexpected ways.

Politics were pushed (including my own).

A messy dialogue began to weave its Self.



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