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Abstract

The blurred boundaries between producers and consumers and the increased centrality of user-generated content have been seen as characteristic of Web 2.0 and contemporary media culture at large. In the context of online pornography, this has been manifested in the popularity of amateur pornography and alt porn sites that encourage user interaction. Netporn criticism has recently formed an arena for thinking through such transformations. Aiming to depart from the binary logic characterizing porn debates to date, netporn criticism nevertheless revokes a set of divisions marking the amateur apart from the professional, the alternative from the mainstream and the independent from the commercial. At the same time, such categories are very much in motion on Web 2.0 platforms. Addressing amateur pornography in terms of immaterial and affective labor, this article argues for the need to find less dualistic frameworks for conceptualizing pornography as an element of media culture.

Key words

alt porn, amateurism, immaterial labor, netporn, online pornography, Web 2.0

The recent rise of amateur pornographies and adjunct subgenres such as gonzo and reality porn has caused important transformations in the production and consumption of pornography. Most users access free content online – pay sites with premier content are used by far fewer people (Edelman, 2009) – and porn video publishing platforms modeled after YouTube have become popular (Van Doorn, forthcoming). Such transformations are connected to shifts in the technologies of producing, distributing and consuming pornography. All this calls for a rethinking of pornography as a popular media genre and the ways

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in which its boundaries have become stretched – and perhaps even redrawn – with the introduction of digital media tools.

Public debates on online pornography tend to follow what Jane Juffer (1998: 2) has identified as the tired binary characteristic of discussions on pornography in general. Following the sex wars of the 1980s, the lines of debate have been drawn as one of for or against – as anti-pornography and anti-censorship, respectively. Anti-pornography feminists have identified pornography as a form of exploitation and violence against women (Dworkin, 1989; MacKinnon, 1987), and moral conservatives have seen it as a form of filth and moral decay lacking in any social or cultural value. Anti-pornography camps have marked pornography apart from the more artful erotica, hence giving rise to specific cultural hierarchies. Those championing freedom of speech have been inclined to define pornography as a form of fantasy and exploration, and yet others have defended pornography as the site of new public sexual cultures (Califia, 1994; Rubin, 1995). While there exists a considerable body of research on the histories, genres and aesthetics of pornography (Gibson, 2004; Kendrick, 1987; Kipnis, 1996; Sigel, 2005; Waugh, 1996; Williams, 1989, 2004), such analytical work has not managed to divert the binary dynamics of the debate that have, particularly in North America, been enmeshed in moral panics (Kuipers, 2006). In spite of the high visibility of online pornography and the importance of so-called adult content for the development of web economies and technologies, pornography has remained one of the more under-studied areas of internet research (Paasonen, forthcoming).

Netporn criticism has been posed as one alternative point of entrance into analyses of pornography and digital culture. As sketched out in two netporn conferences organized in Amsterdam in 2005 and 2007, as well as the Netporn-l listserv and the *C'lick Me Netporn Reader* (Jacobs et al., 2007), the concept of netporn refers to pornographies specific to online platforms and networks.¹ Netporn entails the blurred boundaries of porn producers and consumers, the proliferation of independent and alternative pornographies, as well as the expansion of technological possibilities brought forth by digital tools, platforms and networked communications. Ultimately, what is at stake is no less than a redefinition of pornography as a cultural object in terms of aesthetics, politics, media economy, technology and desire. While netporn criticism has formed an arena for thinking about pornography beyond the binary logic structuring discussions on pornography to date, as a 'public display of porn affection' (http://listcultures.org/mailman/listinfo/netporn-l_listcultures.org), its aims are aligned with those of anti-censorship and pro-sex advocates.

Netporn has been defined in terms of grassroot activities, gift economies and performative exchanges, or, as the editors of the *C'lick Me Netporn Reader* put it, 'alternative body type tolerance and amorphous queer sexuality, interesting art works and the writerly blogosphere, visions of grotesque sex and warpunk activism' (Dery, 2007; Jacobs et al., 2007: 2; Messina, 2006; Shah, 2007). Popular netporn examples have included variations of alt porn, peer-to-peer porn and amateur porn, which have all been defined in comparison with the category of porn on the net. If netporn describes the ways in which online technologies restructure the pornographic, porn on the net refers to the recycling of the same old pornographic images and texts from print media, video and film on the internet (Shah, 2007).

The conceptual division of netporn and porn on the net, as evoked in these discussions, can be seen as simultaneously esthetic (in the sense that netporn is seen to challenge the norms and conventions of mainstream commercial porn catering primarily to male heterosexual audiences), political (netporn is seen as queer and non-normative in its displays of sexual acts and desires), ethical (netporn is seen as detached from the potentially oppressive practices of the porn industry), economic (netporn is seen as resisting the commodity forms of commercial pornography) and technological (netporn is seen as separate from offline media production and distribution). In other words, netporn criticism focuses on forms of pornography seen as characteristic, specific or native to the internet, and explores the esthetic, technological, expressive and interactive possibilities of the medium. Since pornography tends to be characteristically cross-platform and distributed through a range of media, the majority of online pornography (that is also circulated on other platforms) is framed out from the netporn agenda. The media-specific framing has also impeded the dialogue between netporn criticism and existing studies of pornography that address literary fictions, photography, film or video. As netporn is marked apart from such media landscapes, earlier studies risk being ignored.

This article investigates alt porn and amateur pornography, two subgenres seen as emblematic of netporn, in relation to the shifting roles of porn consumers and producers within the framework of Web 2.0 (used as an umbrella term for the increasing centrality of social media and user-generated content, such as blogs, wikis, online communities, social networking sites, podcasts and different publishing platforms in and for the internet economy). My interests lie in how the conceptual divisions drawn between amateurs and professionals, the non-commercial and the commercial, the alternative and the mainstream, are played out in relation to definitions of netporn, alt porn, amateur pornography, Web 2.0 platforms and their participatory cultures. I argue that the conceptual separation of amateur pornographies and alternative porn esthetics from porn on the net (i.e. mainstream commercial online pornography) makes it difficult to consider them as forms of content production and immaterial labor central to the digital economy (Arvidsson, 2007). Shifting the focus away from moral concerns and sexual politics related to pornography, the article addresses some of the transformations occurring in contemporary online pornography, as well as their connections to developments in the web as a medium.

The alternative and the mainstream

Alt porn (also referred to as alternative, indie and alt.porn) has been defined through its exhibition of non-standard subcultural styles, community features and interaction possibilities. Drawing on magazines such as the Goth-themed *Blue Blood* (est. 1992), alt porn went online in the late 1990s.² Sites like Suicide Girls (<http://suicidegirls.com>) and Burning Angel (<http://www.burningangel.com>) mesh the pornographic with the subcultural: their tattooed and pierced female models present their sexual appetites, lifestyles and music preferences in model biographies and blogs (Magnet, 2007; Mies, 2006). Alt porn sites are mostly softcore and 'known for countering the porn industry's images, ethics, and business practices' (Mies, 2006). Writing on alt porn, Feona Attwood (2007: 449–50) argues that these

new sex taste cultures attempt to define themselves through a variety of oppositions to mainstream culture – and especially mainstream porn – as creative, vibrant, classy, intelligent, glamorous, erotic, radical, varied, original, unique, exceptional and sincere compared to the unimaginative, dull, tasteless, stupid, sleazy, ugly, hackneyed, standardized, commonplace, trite, mediocre, superficial and artificial. In the process, a system of aesthetics is evoked as a form of ethics.

The commercial and the non-commercial, the mainstream and the alternative, continue to function as tools of categorization and evaluation in discussions on porn at the very moment when their boundaries are increasingly elastic (Attwood, 2007: 453). Mark Jancovich (2001) points out that much of the recent research on porn focuses on examples seen as transgressive, while simultaneously construing mainstream porn as that ‘where nothing interesting ever happens’. According to Jancovich, such distinctions come with classed underpinnings: ‘defined against an authentic folk culture on the one hand, and a radical avant-garde on the other’, the mainstream ultimately signifies the middlebrow and the petite bourgeoisie. This line of criticism draws on the tradition of mass culture critique originating in the 1950s. A similar dynamic is at play in the concept of netporn, which needs the category of the mainstream (as commercial, bulky and something already known) in order to define the means of challenging it in amateur porn (akin to authentic folk culture), alt porn, artful or queer pornographies (the radical avant-garde). Indeed, the principles of mass culture critique, while heavily debated for decades for their totalizing tendencies, seem to play an active role in investigations of media culture, its producers and its audiences.

In netporn criticism, porn on the net connotes the culture industry as addressed in mass culture criticism in the sense that its products are seen as standardized, mass-produced, passively consumed and representative of the logic of sameness (Adorno, 2001: 100–4, 163–4; Shah, 2007; Tola, 2005). In contrast, various gift economies and pleasure practices associated with netporn stand for the non-standard, the nonconformist and the handcrafted, while their users become active participants (in chats, webcam exchanges or by uploading their own content). To the degree that porn on the net stands for the standard and the predictable, it also becomes seen as less worthy of critical engagement (Cramer, 2006). Consequently, the massively popular and mundane forms of commercial heterosexual pornography are, once again, left with little analytical attention. Considered in a historical perspective, the notion of mainstream online porn is an unsteady one. The first web porn entrepreneurs were independent and semi-amateur, whereas companies already operating on video and in the print media only branched out to the internet after the mid-1990s (Perdue, 2002: 63). The mainstream becomes even more elastic a concept in the context of contemporary alt porn practices.

The Australian site Beautiful Agony (<http://www.beautifulagony.com>) has been heralded as an example of novel artistic erotica detaching itself from the codes and conventions of commercial pornography (Hardy, 2009: 15). On the site, people can send videos of themselves reaching orgasm, cropped from head to upper chest. The users see and hear the video and if the performer so desires, they can also access a separate confessional video disclosing his or her intimate thoughts and fantasies. The resulting videos are quite intense and difficult to fit into any existing categories of adult representation: no genitalia are seen but merely the facial expressions, sighs and grunts of the performers. Beautiful Agony is owned and operated by the Australian company gmbill, which runs

other similar sites (<http://nl.ifeelmyself.com/> and <http://ishotmyself.com/>), where amateur performers are rewarded for their efforts and users pay membership fees. The sites are commercial and while alternative esthetically, they are also highly formulaic in their own manner, citing artistic experimentations and subcultural pornographies (including Andy Warhol's 1964 film *Blow Job*: Gidal, 2008). According to Florian Cramer (2006: 134), here the 'milieus, roles and interests of art and commercial enterprise, of artists and sex workers, of sex industry and cultural criticism seem to blend into each other'. Such blending gives rise to new pornographic commodities.

Alt porn has carved out new markets of pornography (that are not merely niche) by profiling itself and addressing its potential audiences through subcultural codes. In practice, the generic (or mainstream) conventions of porn are not being simply negated or transcended but work to structure alternative practices in terms of esthetics or business models alike (Cramer, 2006: 136). Alternative pornographies (i.e. netporn) have, from kink sites to subcultural pornographies, fed back to the imageries of commercial pornography (porn on the net) that they apparently subvert. If independent pornographies appropriate poses and elements from the so-called mainstream while abandoning or disregarding others, this is also the case vice versa. Cramer and Stewart Home (2007: 165) may be exaggerating when they call indie porn 'the research and development arm of the porn industry,' yet it is evident that the porn industry has turned towards alt porn when seeking out new audiences and uses for their online platforms (Attwood, 2007: 452–3). As alt porn sites have been bought up and their styles appropriated, the category of the alternative has come to signify the esthetic rather than simply the economic or the ethical.

Writing on feminist, queer and independent online pornographers, Audacia Ray (2008) addresses the problems involved in considering some alt porn practices as better, that is, more alternative or somehow more radical than others. As she points out, free sites resisting capitalism and promoting open publishing (such as <http://www.sharingissexy.org>) do not automatically represent a higher form of porn than sites charging membership fees. The sites do, however, position their producers, performers and actors in different ways, since some work within the principles of the gift economy, and others for financial compensation that can be spent any way people choose. For Ray, identifying free sites as good and pay sites as less good pornography is problematic, since the open accessibility of content says little of their principles of operation. The denominator of commercial porn is, then, a contingent one, as exemplified by Beautiful Agony or Fuck for Forest (<http://www.fuckforforest.com>), a site using its revenues to fund environmental activism. Considering the gift economy itself 'an important force within the reproduction of the labor force in late capitalism as a whole' (Terranova, 2000: 36) further complicates the issue.

On alt porn sites, users generate content, share subcultural knowledge, and form affective ties with the sites and their performers. As Attwood (2007: 445) argues, both users and performers become members of 'a taste culture which functions to bind them together in relations of economic and cultural production and consumption which are also relations of community'. In other words, what is at stake is a form of affective engagement and immaterial labor. According to an Italian autonomist, Maurizio Lazzarato (1996), immaterial labor is that which produces 'the informational and cultural content of the commodity'. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2000: 293; 2004: 108) have

identified two forms of immaterial labor, the first producing 'ideas, symbols, codes, texts, linguistic figures, images and other such products', while the second, affective labor, produces or manipulates affects, social networks and forms of community. As an industry-driven term, Web 2.0 is descriptive of the increased importance of user participation in terms of site concept design and business models (O'Reilly, 2005), and social media is largely about affective investments, social networks and immaterial products. Tiziana Terranova (2000: 33) identifies such 'voluntarily given and unwaged, enjoyed and exploited' labor as characteristic of the web, digital economy and contemporary media culture at large. Activities like chatting or blogging are not necessarily recognized as labor as such, yet they involve the 'creation of monetary value out of knowledge/culture/affect' (Arvidsson, 2007: 71; Terranova, 2000: 38). The same can be said of both interaction on alt porn sites and the online distribution of amateur pornography.

Amateur pornography: for the love of it?

Some authors are prone to detach the concept of netporn from the commodity logic characterizing pornography as a genre. Nishant Shah (2007: 35) defines netporn as 'disembodied' pornography that is 'constituted within interactions' and 'located separately from the proliferation of pornographic material on the Internet'. In such reciprocal user interaction, 'the performers and the audience are the same people'. In Shah's discussion, netporn stands for performative online exchanges, in contrast to pornography as mass-produced and mass-marketed commodities. While not all define netporn in equally immaterial terms, the possibilities and forms of networking are seen to mark netporn apart from other pornographies. Peer-to-peer exchanges, personal uploads and various modifications connect users to one another, thus erasing the dualism of producers and consumers, performers and audience members, or senders and receivers, as applied in the context of broadcasting or print media (Attwood, 2002; Lillie, 2002; Reading, 2005; Tola, 2005).

Amateur porn, as distributed in self-organizing online networks, has been identified as a gift economy in which 'deviance is the norm' (Halavais, 2005: 21). A netporn scholar, Katrien Jacobs, associates amateur pornography with peer-to-peer practices based on the principles of pleasure (Jacobs, 2004a; Tola, 2005). In his investigations into amateur pornography distributed in Usenet alt.fetish newsgroups, Sergio Messina (2006), another active agent in the netporn community, has coined the neologism 'realcore' to describe the realness of the sexual acts and desires presented. Marking a departure from the familiar categories of hardcore and softcore, realcore has been quickly picked up as shorthand for self-made pornography that refuses to confine itself to the generic conventions of mainstream porn, its distribution or economy (Hardy, 2009: 12–14). To a degree, amateur productions have come to connote a better kind of porn that is ethical in its principles of production, but also somehow more real, raw and innovative than commercially produced (i.e. mainstream) pornography (Barcan, 2002; Van Doorn, forthcoming).

The division between amateurism and professionalism is a familiar one: whereas the professional is assumed to be technically skilled, the amateur supposedly operates simple versions of technical equipment, and even these with some degree of difficulty. As Patricia Zimmermann (1995: 1) points out in her history of amateur film, professionals are assumed to work for financial gain and amateurs for pleasure, for 'the sheer love of it, as

its Latin root – *amare* – denotes’. Furthermore, ‘while the professional conducts activities for work, an amateur labors away from work, in free time or leisure time’, recording his or her domestic life and private sphere (Zimmermann, 1995: 1). The categories of amateurism and professionalism are both social formations and ideologies that developed in tandem in the late 19th century with the invention of leisure, as well as attempts to differentiate the private sphere from the public and cater products to the emerging amateur markets (Slater, 1991; Zimmermann, 1995: 5). In the process, the amateur ‘shifted from the older, aristocratic notion of the *lover*, to the newer middle-class notion of the hobbyist’ (Armstrong 2000: 102).

Professionalism connotes skill and quality. While amateurism implies the opposite, it is also coded in terms of spontaneous, ‘more truthful, and less-manufactured representations’ (Citron, 1999: 17; Zimmermann, 1995: 144). An anthropologist, Richard Chalfen (2002), points out that the assumed naivety of such home media is quintessentially about conventions of interpretation. It is common knowledge that images are framed, staged and posed in, that some shots are selected for exhibition and others not, that generic conventions dictate the choices made, and that – especially with digital photography – images are manipulated, cropped and edited. However, there seems to be little desire to deny the evidentiary status of home media, or disagree with its truth claims (Slater, 1995: 145). Amateur photographs and videos function tenaciously as evidence of that which has taken place. Roland Barthes (1981: 77) saw this *ça-a-été* (‘that has been’) as the fundamental witnessing function, or indeed the essence, of photography as traces and records of things once placed in front of the camera’s shutter. While the technologies of imaging change, transformations from traditional (photochemical) photography to digital imaging have not necessarily altered ways of looking at domestic photography (Chalfen, 2002: 143, 148). Home media seem to involve modes of double-thinking: the images are selective and knowingly produced, yet function as evidence; technologies of imaging have been detached from photochemical photography, yet without eroding the faith in the iconic and indexical functions of photography.

In the case of pornography, views of amateur imaging as more authentic support the genre’s more general promise to record sexual acts in detail, to verify sexual arousal and climax (Barcan, 2002; Hardy, 2009; Van Doorn, forthcoming). Contrary to the glamour, glossiness and high production value of alt porn, realcore, as defined by Messina, stands for the low-fi (Attwood, 2007: 448) – and, indeed, for the real: ‘Realcore is all about the reality of what you see, the truth of these images. It’s about the desire to see someone doing something because they like to be seen. They’re filming it because you are part of the game as well. You’re the audience. They get horny because someone is getting horny over them’ (Messina in Dery, 2007: 24).

For Messina, the relationship between the producers, performers and audiences of amateur porn is dialogic and based on mutual pleasure. Positioning free will and pleasure as the quintessential motivators of realcore production, Messina bypasses questions concerning power within intimate relationships and family practices. However, amateur poses are not necessarily expressive of people’s desires or preferences, but always implicated by the social settings of their production (Citron, 1999: 13). The linking of sexual practices with desire and authenticity may derive from the positing of sexuality as the truth concerning the self, discussed by Michel Foucault (1990: 58–9) as in need of constant

discovery and revelation. Whatever the reason may be, there is a risk of approaching amateur pornography as expressions of desire or pleasure without accounting for how such moments of intimate production may be conditioned. Considering the practice of posting explicit photos and videos of ex-wives and girlfriends in online forums without their knowledge or permission (for which numerous sites are dedicated), consent may well be cast in an ambiguous light in acts of distribution.³

Amateurs, ProAms and labor

In terms of media history, amateur porn practices are subject to double effacement. Amateur practices are marginalized in overviews on media history that tend to focus on the industry, broadcasting and mass communications side of things. Investigations of amateur photography and film tend to pay little, if any, attention to pornography, leaving it a topic for separate overviews (O'Toole, 1998). In these, amateur practices do not necessarily figure, partly because they have been poorly documented to start with. Pornography has a persistent presence in media histories as footnotes and fleeting references but it is rarely included in general discussions on technological innovation or development. At the same time, the porn industry is known as an early adaptor of novel technologies, and the needs of the porn industry have greatly influenced the development of web technologies, advertisement models and hosting services (Lane, 2000; Perdue, 2002).

Messina (2006) defines the late 1990s as the turning point for novel, amateur online pornographies: with digital cameras and online networks, people could publish their own images and join groups of like-minded individuals. These self-made pornographies countered the esthetics of mainstream porn with their variety of tastes, styles and kinks, and provided aficionados with possibilities to interact and exchange material. Online platforms have undoubtedly rendered amateur pornographies more visible and popular than ever before. It is nevertheless important to note that amateur practices have flourished in a variety of media from film to photography and video – not to forget the traditions of erotica writing spanning from page to screen. More or less affordable tools for the making of amateur porn have been available since the marketing of cameras to private households: still cameras since the late 19th century, 16mm cameras in the 1920s, 8mm the following decade and Super 8 since the 1960s (Slater, 1991; Zimmermann, 1995). Since film requires developing, these media involved the possibility of unwanted exposure. Polaroid cameras and portable video cameras (Sony Portapak in 1967, affordable amateur models in the 1980s), digital still and video cameras, without this drawback, have been more flexible.

Kevin Esch and Vicki Mayer (2007: 101) situate the rise of amateur porn in the 'video revolution of the early 1980s, when millions of people bought their first home video camera and budding film-makers decided to make their own pornography'. Some of these products were distributed for others to watch (for example, through swap-and-buy services) and in the late 1980s the popularity of amateur porn even managed to damage the sales of commercial porn. As Laurence O'Toole (1998: 180) points out, the industry answered the trend by basically swallowing it up: "'Amateur" became a bunch of long-serving members of the industry cooking up a show "at home", yet marketing like it was part of the original pioneering amateur spirit.' Amateur porn was soon established as a

subgenre of commercial pornography, partly intermingling with other emerging categories such as gonzo (videos with little narrative using hand-held cameras and point-of-view shots, as introduced by Jamie Gillis, John Stagliano and Rocco Siffredi since the late 1980s).

While amateur porn was plentiful in the newsgroups of the 1980s, its distribution platforms have since undergone considerable transformation, as websites featuring amateur images and videos have burgeoned since the 2000s. These sites, easily accessible with search engines, frame and regulate amateur practices through their guidelines, norms and categorizations. To use one example, *Amateurs Gone Wild*, a site advertising 'Free Amateur Porn & HomeMade Porn Videos & Pictures Submitted By Visitors', insists that users post 'No single men or dicks on (sic) the pictures and the videos. Only women, pairs and groups' (<http://www.amateurs-gone-wild.com/submit.html>). The main page of the site confirms the emphasis on female bodies: women pose either alone or while engaged in sexual acts (usually with a single male partner). Unless the user knowingly migrates to sites or listings more unusual, similar iconography is repeated on one amateur site after another.

In his study on amateur videos distributed on YouPorn (<http://www.youporn.com>), Niels van Doorn (forthcoming) points out the centrality of a 'normative mainstream "pornoscript"', that is, generic conventions that 'highlight sexual difference as the primary source of heterosexual visual pleasure, which is predominantly experienced from a male subject position'. As van Doorn points out, amateur videos evoke a sense of authenticity through poor technical execution and the display of ordinary imperfect bodies while at the same time circulating and reiterating conventions familiar from commercially produced pornography. In a paradoxical dynamic, amateur porn approximates the generic conventions of porn (in terms of poses, gestures and acts) in order to be recognized as such while also differing from and providing alternatives to them (as something more authentic, raw and real). The most obvious difference in terms of site economy is that amateur photographers or performers are not necessarily compensated for their efforts. Hence the amateurism becomes a question of money: amateurs apparently do what they do for the love of it whereas professionals do it for the money (Jacobs, 2004b).

This division is rather tricky with pornography. People receiving compensation for the porn they make enter the realm of commercial sex and are possibly seen as sex workers, a label that comes with some social stigma. Sex work is generally excluded from the notion of good sex, that is, socially acceptable sexual practices that should take place in a relationship void of monetary exchange (Kulick, 2005; Warner, 2000: 26). While amateur porn manages to balance at least some of the criteria of good sex (despite breaking against the presumption of keeping such acts private), non-amateur pornographies seem to fall into the latter category by definition. As discussed above, the division between amateurs and professionals carries connotations of not only motivation (love versus money) but also of the realness of the acts and sensations recorded. For his part, Messina sees professional porn performers as actors who master sexual techniques, simulate pleasure and perform 'using all the props of professional productions: lights, backdrops, make up, editing, special effects, etc'. In contrast, digital amateur pornography involves 'pictures of real people with real desires, having real sex in real places' (Messina, 2006). This fantasy of realness, directness and authenticity, supported by low-fi esthetic and lay performers, lies at the heart of the popularity of amateur porn (Barcan, 2002).

The popularity of amateur porn and reality productions has given rise to neologisms such as ‘amateur professional’ and ‘professional amateur’, or ProAm, connoting people working in porn semi-professionally outside the large production companies (Esch and Mayer, 2007: 102). The denominator of ProAm has been coined in extra-pornographic contexts for addressing the blurred boundaries of professional and amateur: networked amateurs with professional skills participate in areas such as software development, design and knowledge production without identifying their activity as work, thereby challenging the traditional hierarchies and roles of experts and laymen (Bruns, 2008: 202, 234; Leadbeater and Miller, 2004). Describing the rise and significance of ProAms, Charles Leadbeater and Paul Miller (2004) see them as transforming the innovation, development and distribution of cultural artifacts. ProAms may match professionals in their skills but do their own thing on the side and mostly for free, be this activity writing, computer programming, sports, video editing or pornography. For Henry Jenkins (2006a; 2006b), this is exemplary of participatory culture, namely the ways in which users and consumers are increasingly central participants in the production of (popular media) culture.

Known for his work on fandom and audience creativity in the early 1990s, Jenkins (2006a: 12–13, 246) notes that this body of work has since been enthusiastically adopted in setting up new kinds of business models. The notion of media audiences as active participants (meaning-makers, discussants and lobbyists), rather than passive consumers, has become standard fare in the media industry as corporations tap into user activities by providing interaction platforms and specialized products. Audience participation has become a corporate strategy in a new affective economy where ‘the ideal consumer is active, emotionally engaged, and socially networked’ (Jenkins, 2006a: 20). While Jenkins (1992) once saw such practices as resistant poaching in the tradition of Michel de Certeau (the multiple tactics of users countering the strategies of corporations in acts of appropriation and subversion), his model of participatory culture aims to bridge such dualisms.

While user-generated content has been central to Web 1.0 since 1993 (e.g. personal home pages, discussion forums, online journals, pre-web bulletin boards or newsgroups), user-generated content has since become ever more integral to the mechanisms of online profit generation. For their part, Mark Coté and Jennifer Pybus (2007) argue that, with social media, we have witnessed a shift to ‘immaterial labor 2.0’, an intensified variant of the development discussed by Lazzarato, Hardt and Negri. For Coté and Pybus (2007: 90), social networking sites such as MySpace exemplify not merely forms of free labor but, importantly, ‘corporate mining and selling of user-generated content’, including ‘the tastes, preferences, and general cultural content constructed therein’. Such affective labor is personal, intertwined with questions of lifestyle, and voluntarily carried out by users attaching themselves to online platforms. Affect becomes ingrained in site concept design as platforms aim to optimize their ‘stickiness’, that is, to make users spend as much time on the site as possible, and to return regularly (Pybus, 2007).

In the context of pornography, this has meant the rise of sites combining community with commerce. On alt porn sites, users can interact with each other as well as the performers, while performers can make public their thoughts or lifestyle preferences (Attwood, 2007). On other sites, users simply upload the content themselves. Video publishing platforms such as RedTube (<http://www.redtube.com>), YouPorn or PornoTube (<http://www.pornotube.com>) are particularly noteworthy in this respect. The sites are structured as

community platforms offering both commercially produced and amateur pornography in multiple subcategories, while the users can download and upload videos, rate them and, on some of the sites, comment on them. On these sites supported by membership fees or advertisement income, amateur porn becomes one category out of many for users to choose from. As amateur and professional, independent and commercial are part of the same interface and site economy, it becomes quite impossible to make categorical distinctions between them. Sites featuring amateur content, much like the amateur videos of the 1980s, have attracted users with their fresh content, while this content has been very much appropriated by and incorporated into the repertoire of commercial pornography. The situation is different from that addressed by Messina. Usenet newsgroups are autonomously formed and based on personal interaction: in alt.fetish groups, for example, people create tribute images in response to those posted by others. While similar practice is common on YouTube as reaction videos, these are rarely seen on RedTube, YouPorn or PornoTube, where user interaction tends to be limited to rating and commenting on the videos.

The notion of pornographic gift economies, as presented by netporn authors like Messina and Jacobs, refers largely to amateur practices of the Web 1.0 kind. These practices are seen to originate from and to reflect the desires and pleasures of the people producing them while providing alternatives to the machinations of the mainstream commercial porn industry. Terranova (2000: 47) is, however, cautious of analyses of the pre-web internet as a utopian free medium and gift economy that has since been overtaken by commercial ends: 'Within the early virtual communities, we are told, labor was really free: the labor of building a community was not compensated by great financial rewards (it was therefore "free," unpaid), but it was also willingly conceded in exchange for pleasures of communication and exchange (it was therefore "free," pleasurable, not imposed)' (Terranova, 2000: 48).

For Terranova, the digital economy relies on free labor. Gift economies and the affective desire for creative production, as in the groups studied by Messina, have sustained the internet and facilitated the digital economy of today. If free, collective and affective labor has become effectively channeled into business practices, as Terranova (2000: 39, 49) states, then free amateur production has both fed and supported the mechanisms of the online porn enterprise. Terranova (2000: 51) is quick to point out that the fact that such labor is freely given (given voluntarily and for no financial compensation) does not render the development entirely unproblematic. Amateur porn may be understood as pleasure work but it nevertheless involves forms of labor. The question is not, then, only one concerning diversity (i.e. the degree to which novel platforms and the content uploaded on them diversify the genre understood as pornography) but also profit and labor. Amateurism may also signify a particular kind of gift economy in which users post their pictures and videos for fun and for free (perhaps paying for a membership fee themselves) while the hosting site profits from selling advertising space or access, and possibly holds the copyright to any further distribution. From the perspective of the hosting site, this equals free content. From the point of view of users, such participatory culture leaves them with preciously little control over that which they produce.

This is something that Lisbeth Klastrup (2007a, 2007b) has referred to as the social (after)life of texts: once distributed online, home media enter a web of exchange and circulation that is ultimately impossible for the producers to control, and texts are

gradually detached from their origins and narratives related to them. As Klastrup notes, available online platforms of distribution, storage and publication come with codes and terms of their own that shape and inspire amateur productions, as well as the ways of interpreting and interacting with them. As images and videos travel from one community, group or site to another, the agency of the performers and producers becomes dispersed and their products may no longer be theirs to control.

Conclusion: beyond netporn

Netporn criticism addressing independent and amateur productions has made it possible to step away from the by now familiar debates on regulation, sexism, abuse or the role of female porn performers, as waged since the sex wars. Rather than simulations of desire or repetition of old porn conventions, netporn is read as an expression of people's preferences and kinks: rather than exploitative consumers, users are seen to hook into this economy of desires as the audience desired by the performers and producers. Given that online pornography involves a broad range of public debates and moral panics, the focus on pornographies understood as more ethical or at least more diverse than the bulk deemed mainstream porn can be seen as a means of creating new ground for discussing porn, technology and desire (Chun, 2006; Jacobs, 2004a, 2004b: 69–72; Jacobs et al., 2007). In this sense, the notion of netporn comes with explicit intellectual and political investments. It also knowingly excludes many (mainstream) pornographic cultures from its agenda. Netporn criticism has provided important insights into independent, artistic and amateur productions. Nevertheless, as argued above, like most models based on oppositions and juxtapositions, the division between netporn and porn on the net comes with pitfalls. Trying to untangle pornography from dualistic modes of interpretation gives rise to new divisions and hierarchies. Within these, some pornographies (netporn) can be appraised by simultaneously marking them as exceptions to the rule and the standard (porn on the net). At the same time, it may be difficult to conceptualize the ways in which different forms of production are intimately intertwined on Web 2.0 platforms.

As user-generated content is increasingly recognized as both an asset and comprising consumables of a kind, it has become crucial to consider exactly what kinds of consumables these may be and what kind of social circulation they enter. Amateurs making their own porn are not merely expressing themselves, as a neoliberal discourse might have it, but commodifying themselves in relation to pornography as a genre and an industry. All in all, the meanings of amateurism – these labors of love – require rethinking as a form of free labor that complicates understandings of mainstream commercial porn. The mainstream is a heterogeneous category encompassing a range of practices that amateur pornographers by necessity engage with (e.g. by appropriating and approximating its conventions, or by knowingly countering them with different esthetic and thematic choices). Amateurism feeds the codes of realness central to porn while showcasing different types of bodies and sexual relations. As immaterial labor, amateur pornography gives rise to images, videos and texts that are commodities inasmuch as they are gifts.

I fully agree with netporn criticism on the need to find new kinds of public zones of consumption and debate concerning pornography and contemporary media culture. In the context of Web 2.0, the conceptual divisions invoked in netporn criticism are, however,

both limited and limiting. Rather than explaining or clarifying the operations of the contemporary media landscape, they create a false sense of clarity, for things are blurry indeed. I suggest that thinking about amateur and user production as forms of labor that feed the internet economy, online porn industry included, enables seeing different fields of activity as interconnected and interdependent. Ultimately, the category of pornography needs to be reconsidered in terms of esthetics, media economy and agency as a diverse field of practice involving affective investments, forms of labor and exchange. All this necessitates moving beyond dualistic conceptualizations such as the commercial and the noncommercial, the mainstream and the alternative, the professional and the amateur, the online and the offline, as frameworks for making sense of pornography, contemporary media culture and their fundamental entanglements.

Notes

- 1 In the mid-1990s, new media scholars, artists and activists debated the notion of net.art in forums such as Nettime listserv. The concept net.art was coined to describe art practices specific to the internet and its esthetic, technological, expressive and interactive possibilities. Net.art was juxtaposed with art on the net, namely artistic products created with other media (such as painting, drawing or graphics) and published online. As the web has grown increasingly multimedial in its interfaces and available forms of content, such takes on media specificity have become rarer. It is, however, echoed in the division of netporn and porn on the net as discussed in this article. Geert Lovink, the other founder of Nettime, helped to arrange the 2005 Art and Politics of netporn conference. The Institute of Network Cultures, which Lovink founded and where he serves as professor, published *C'lick Me Netporn Reader* (Jacobs et al., 2007).
- 2 Blue Blood went online (<http://www.blueblood.com>) and together with Forrest Black, its hostess, Amelia G, has launched other subcultural porn sites such as Gothic Sluts (<http://www.gothic sluts.com>) and Barely Evil (<http://www.barelyevil.com>).
- 3 For ex-wife and ex-girlfriend categories, see for example <http://www.exgfpics.com/blog/>, <http://www.postyourgirls.com/> or <http://www.amateurs-gone-wild.com/>.

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