

**Rethinking Gender and Agency in Pornography:
Producers, Consumers, Workers, and Contexts
(Second Part)**

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1. From porn for women to feminist porn: a brief history

The social perception of pornography, as we have pointed out, reflects highly gendered ideas about production and consumption, in which women are primarily viewed as performers rather than producers and consumers. While this is not the place for an exhaustive history, it is worth briefly discussing the emergence of porn for women and feminist porn.

The advent of home video recording technology had a profound impact on the pornography industry. In *Smutty Little Movies*, media historian Peter Alilunas argues that

the Vhs revolution was a game changer for the industry in more ways than one. Coming on the heels of the so-called Golden Age of porn (which refers indicatively to the period between the seventies and the eighties). In the 1970s and early 1980s, in which the industry was flourishing, home video «all but decimated the traditional adult theater circuit, permanently changed the industry, and altered the cultural landscape» (Alilunas 2016, 6). As home video became dominant, new opportunities for previously marginalized producers and audiences emerged, including for women, challenging the hegemony of heterosexual male pleasures. The combination of privacy, availability, and technology, according to Alilunas, «created the possibility to rethink the presentation of sexuality that, in some cases, embraced an unabashed celebration of women's pleasure» (*Ibidem*).

The early 1980s was a watershed moment for the emergence of porn for women. From Club 90 and Femme Productions to *On Our Backs* magazine and *Fatale Video* (see Comella in this issue), women began thinking anew about who pornography was for and what kinds of stories about gender, desire and pleasure it could tell. In 1983, a group of American porn actresses, including Candida Royalle, Veronica Hart, Veronica Vera, and Gloria Leonard, met at fellow performer Annie Sprinkle's Manhattan apartment for a baby shower to celebrate Hart's pregnancy. Following the event, the women began meeting regularly to discuss the challenges of being women in a male-dominated industry and how they might begin producing and distributing their own work. Named after Sprinkle's home address on Lexington Avenue, Club 90 became the first-ever porn star support group, using elements of feminist consciousness-raising, in which self-awareness becomes a starting point for shared understanding and political knowledge. As one writer put it: «[O]nce this trailblazing five-some joined forces, the sex industry would never be the same», (Wissot 2015).

As Annie Sprinkle recalled in an interview years later:

The basic common bond was that we had all made porn movies, and loved filmmaking. However, we also had a lot of creative juice and wanted to express ourselves in new ways — to explore our own desires and truths and go beyond performing other people's (men's) fantasies. We were curious to see what women's

fantasies might look like from a woman's perspective (Wissot 2015).

While all the members of Club 90 would leave their mark on the broader sexual culture, Candida Royalle's contributions to the history of feminist pornography were especially significant. Royalle was one of the first women to seize control of the reigns of production in an effort to make pornography from a woman's point of view. Porn was made on the backs of women's labor, but where, she wondered, were women's voices in shaping, defining, and redefining the genre. In 1984 Royalle, together with the photographer R. Lauren Niemi, created Femme Productions with the goal of expanding the market to a female audience through products created for and directed by women. In reality, though, the audience Royalle had in mind was primarily composed of heterosexual couples, a market segment that Alilunas notes was not completely unknown to the pornographic industry (Alilunas 2016). Royalle felt it was important for women to move behind the camera, for their perspectives on sexuality to find space in the industry, and for feminist ideas to be more fully integrated into both production practices and the narratives conveyed and not simply used as a marketing strategy (*Ibidem*).

The same year that Femme was founded, Nan Kinney and Deborah Sundahl founded Fatale Media in San Francisco with the goal of producing pornography by and for lesbians. Unlike Femme which, despite difficulties, had succeeded in entering the large U.S. adult distribution networks, Fatale had to independently manage the distribution of its products, relying on word of mouth and *On Our Backs* magazine for advertising (Juffer 1998). *On Our Backs*, with the tag line «Entertainment for the Adventurous Lesbian» was a pointed riff on the radical feminist newspaper *Off Our Backs*. The brainchild of Deborah Sundahl and her roommate Myrna Elana, the magazine's bold and unapologetic style of photography and sexual storytelling would come to define the magazine during an era when anti-pornography feminism dominated discussions about feminism and sex (see Comella in this issue) and few images of explicit lesbian sexuality were publicly circulating.

On Our Backs was groundbreaking. It featured sexually explicit pictorials and articles that explored topics on everything from sex work to sub-cultural currents within the lesbian movement, including San Francisco's leather and BdsM communities, as well

the issue of lesbians and HIV¹. Inside, advertisements featured products from San Francisco's legendary sex shop Good Vibrations, where the magazine's first editor, Susie Bright, worked. Focusing on the magazine for the distribution and advertising of its products, as well as inserting explicit references to Good Vibrations in its films, was not simply a move to market sexually related products that were often restricted from other advertising venues but it would confirm the connection between different actors in the creation of a female sexual culture (one that was not exclusively heterosexual and cisgender), and pornographic productions that addressed wider issues of «community, politics and markets» (Maina 2018; see also Comella 2013; 2017).

Fatale Media and Femme Productions, as well as production companies that followed in their footsteps, were responding to the lack of representation in mainstream hardcore heterosexual porn geared toward men.

Many of the elements that have characterized the style and contents of pornography productions for women and couples fall now under the label of feminist porn, an umbrella term that encompasses extremely diverse production styles and content and that present traceable elements in other productions that do not necessarily recognize themselves as feminist, including some “mainstream” productions, as well as queer porn. Comparing to porn for women, feminist porn has a political intent that is more explicit and openly declared.

These productions would try to deconstruct the representations of mainstream culture, in a generic sense, which show a masculinity that is always ready and infallible, not problematic, responsible for one's own sexual response and that of the partner (Bordo in Jackson and Scott 1996, 11) and, according to Reynaud (*Ibidem*), as a dominant genre, more committed to demonstrating power than pleasure. Feminist porn, on the other hand, would focus on pleasure and desires in their changing manifestations, aiming to modify and affect the heterosexist, racist, homotransphobic, enabler and ageist images present in the dominant representations, through careful ethical production and distribution processes (Taormino, Parrenas Shimizu, Penley and Miller-Young 2013). These elements also define the queer porn segment which, with respect to feminist porn,

¹ See Mondin 2017.

explicitly rejects by definition the binary division between genders, in favor of a fluidity that would represent an overcoming of the rigidities connected to sexual identities (a particularly well-known example is that of the productions of Pink & White Productions).

A central role in the visibility and distribution of these products, in the promotion of collaborations and the sense of belonging to a community, as well as in the definition of a fee for such productions, is that assumed by the pornography festivals. One of the most important was undoubtedly the Feminist Porn Award of Toronto, born in 2005 on the initiative of Good for Her, sexuality store and workshop center run by a group of feminists from Toronto, to respond to a strong dissatisfaction with of the most widespread pornographic materials and images. Over the years, the Festival, under the pressure and the incessant confrontation between the different currents of thought within the organization, has faced several changes and modified the participation criteria, up to its last edition, dated 2016 (from 2017 it is called Toronto International Porn Festival).

Compared to the first experiences of pornography for women, the galaxy of contemporary alternative pornography places itself in an extremely complex relationship with what we could define as mainstream: the permeability of the boundaries between commercial and non-commercial products, the multiplication of products and audiences, progress of rights and the irruption in the public scene of historically marginalized subjects, have meant that the tracks on which such productions proceed, assuming that those of the mainstream still exist, are not only parallel but present different points of overlap and intersection. To define their products would therefore no longer be a differentiation with respect to a clear and defined canon, attributable to a unitary industry that, in some way, marked its own borders and declared who was inside and who was not, as much as the will and the possibility of constructing one's own narratives and representations without the need for an opposite pole from which to differentiate itself.

2. Studying pornography: challenges and social dimensions

Academic interest in and research on sexuality continues to grow from year to year. And yet, despite the presence of an academic journal dedicated to porn studies («Porn

Studies»), and a spring school that dedicates an entire section to it (Gorizia Spring School host by University of Udine) there were challenges finding reviewers for this special issue, especially for the Italian written articles. In our opinion, this might have to do with the fact that, at least in the Italian context, the theme is still considered a niche or frivolous in the academic context is strongly influenced by complex dynamics. The dimension of “acceptability” of the research topic, would seem to be based, as well as on the fact that when «sex is named it implies so much else» (Rinaldi 2016, vii), and therefore of the subject itself, on at least two dimensions: the one of gender and that of the scholar's status in the academy. According to a scholar:

For a heterosexual male to study porn means to be stigmatized, to be perceived as a “wanker” [...] that's why when you organize something about porn, it's good that there is a woman in the organization. Porn is still considered a male genre, with a masturbatory purpose. If a woman is interested, she tends to interrupt this direct connection. And they don't even have a safety net [the men who study it], the peers take it for a ride. In the political sphere it is different. If I semantize it strongly, I legitimize it. The institutional legitimization is there but the one for which it is given scientific value and the legitimacy of its reference community to explicitly invest energies and resources on that object is lacking. This affects research lines and it happens because studies on porn have gone from American film studies to English cultural studies, which see in the products of popular culture an ability to develop counter-hegemonic values and meanings².

In D.'s words, therefore, the gender dimension, and the social expectations related to it, would affect the authorization by peers to study pornography. Individuals socially positioned as male, according to a more profound reading of the testimony, according to common sentiment, would have no interest whatsoever in approaching pornography, if not masturbation, a dimension that is widely criticized even from the sole point of view of the use that appears based on much more complex and variable motivations and purposes (see Stella 2017, and Scarcelli 2015). In this reading emerges the tendency to

² D., scholar, cisgender man, Italy; our translation.

consider pornography, as well as the group of men and that of women, as immutable, a-historical, out of social. Women who decide to study pornography, by the mere fact of being recognized as such, would invest the object of research with a “political”, superior, “identity” value. This step, as explained by D., would have effects on the development of research lines, defining who can study what. It would therefore not be a coincidence that most of the theoretical corpus on pornography does not concern the mainstream but the so called alternative pornographies, which tell in a more or less obvious way an intent to break with the *status quo*.

I., a pornography scholar, reporting her experience, would confirm this kind of trend:

[...] For example, for a single article, I found myself sewn with the label of an alternative porn scholar. But I just wanted to study porn, how one studies horror [...] a marginal stuff. My approach was therefore different. But the studies go in that direction and I had to follow it. But I didn't want to investigate certain things [...]³.

This sort of implicit “authorization” for women, however, reveals the fact that, just like for male subjects, there is a precise social expectation at work: women struggle to be recognized first of all as consumers of pornographic products and, as scholars, they can be interested only in the case of products of a certain type, which have, in the common perception, a certain social value.

The second dimension that would intervene would instead be that of one's level of progress in the academic career. To put it in the words of Attwood and Hunter «Don't do it without tenure» (Attwood and Hunter 2009, 547), to underline how studying pornography on the one hand can make the researcher, particularly vulnerable to external attacks (especially in the case of teaching on the subject), but also, on the other, in some way academically punishable, risking isolation or seeing the possibility of studying the same subject over time drastically reduced, just as the possibility of becoming recognizable as “expert *”. In this regard, Rinaldi (2016) speaks of «intellectual hostility [that ...] expresses itself with respect to the prestige and institutional recognition of objects of

³ I., scholar, cisgender woman, Italy; our translation.

study» (96). And yet, as noted by Plummer (2008), studies on sexuality, especially from the 2000s onwards, have increased significantly, both numerically and on the type of sexual worlds studied.

Following these reflections it seems emblematic that, of the six articles that make up the number, only two refer to the Italian context. A context that, as we will see in the following paragraph, would seem to be characterized by a marginal presence of “commercial” pornography, both in economic and productive terms, and in the interest aroused in the widespread perception, and therefore deserves room to try to underline its evolution over time.

3. The story untold: pornography in Italy

This is the first academic journal issue published in Italy dedicated to porn. In our opinion, the relative lack of academic interest in Italy with regard to pornography is the result of many factors. If, as we have already pointed out and we will not go into further, the subject is invested by a strong gender component also from the point of view of studying it, and by the more or less explicit sanctions for those who deal with it, a further cause could lie, so to speak, in its marginal presence in public discourse (to be understood as common perception, non-specialist discourses, media coverage), compared to other western contexts. Pornography is subject to waves of alarm due to the so-called pornification of society, or fears expressed by parents and educators about the consumption by adolescents and young people, but it would seem a topic little practiced by public opinion, perceived as uninvolved, of interest only to certain environments, not quite comparable to the popularity achieved in the eighties and nineties, where divas of the caliber of Cicciolina or Moana Pozzi were known far beyond the group of users of explicit materials. The reason for this lack of interest could derive from the fact that currently, in Italy, it is not possible to register the presence of a real recognized pornographic commercial industry, not even in agony or in a continuous phase of change as in the case of the United States, an element that would make it less pressing attention from both the general media and, in a certain sense, politics.

Drawing on the scarce existing literature, characterized almost exclusively by journalistic insights, it is possible to point out some aspects that can be used to reconstruct the relationship between pornography, until its decline, and Italian society in the hope of giving back some ideas that certainly deserve further reflection and insights.

Although we cannot speak of a phenomenon that is limited to a specific time frame, it is the interval between the 1950s and the mid-1970s (Grattarola and Napoli 2014; Maina and Zecca 2012; Ortoleva 2009) to define the progressive «pornographic turning point in the West» (Maina and Zecca, 2012, 59). In the Italian case, in order to better understand how explicit materials have freed themselves from being a shadow sector, it is necessary to detect the connection between films, magazines, red light rooms and TV. In other words, again, we want to emphasize the mutual influence and communication between products and contexts, between different production and fruition modes that are, in fact, linked by a red thread and which, in their relationship, they defined, and were in turn influenced by, the sexual-economic frame of the time.

3.1. From clandestinity to the red light cinemas

Until 1979, the year conventionally referred to as the moment of transition from eroticism to pornography (Grattarola and Napoli 2014) in Italy, the explicit cinematographic representation of real sexual interactions was relegated to hiding. Extremely widespread, since the 1940s, was the practice of the so called “French version”, which included turning (mostly by the hands of assistants and not directors) nude scenes, or with stand-ins or with the same protagonists, to be inserted after the censorship was checked and to be used only for foreign market (*Ibidem*). In the 1960s, the practice of a sort of “cinematographic” tourism spread, bringing numerous Italians and, if in pairs, even women, to reach France and Switzerland in order to witness projections with more stringent content. The phenomenon reached such large dimensions that it was defined by the press as «the most recent tourist resource of the Confederation» (Ivi, 13). The same authors report some statements by a member of the censorship commission of the Canton Ticino that lists, among the various censorship criteria, «the naked men in front» (*Ibidem*). This element appears particularly interesting for two reasons: the first lies in the centrality which the male organ will later assume as the discursive figure of porn

and the second in the different treatment given to female genitals, considered instead scrutinable (although the close-up zoom were forbidden) and displayable. This double register could derive from the fact that still, to be shown, were simulations of sexual acts, a characteristic that would have been denied by the presence, for example, of the male genital organ in erection, ultimate proof that what was being witnessed was instead real. However, it cannot be ruled out that the greater permissiveness on female nudes placed the feet also on a well-known social perception of the female body as “available” and of the sexuality of women as “passive” and “receiving”, therefore less immediately recordable with the look.

These were years in which in Italy there was a tension between two opposite impulses: a more traditional and conservative one and one that looks at modernity, at least from the point of view of changing morals, marking the first fractures with respect to previous generations and preparing the ground for the “revolutionary” wave that, starting in 1968, will cross (also) the country. In 1962, this tension crosses, not so much the drawing up, as the application of the 21.04.62 Law n. 161 «Revisione dei film e dei lavori teatrali»⁴, better known as the censorship law. In the reconstruction of Liliosa Azara (2018) in *I sensi e il pudore: l'Italia e la rivoluzione dei costumi: (1958-1968)*⁵ «are reported some interesting episodes that highlight those that the author calls mutations and persistences» (Ivi, 191). In 1965, the Christian Democrat deputy Agostino Greggi, considered the standard-bearer of morality, declared all his concern about the compositions of the censorship committees and kiosks:

The film is an evocative fact that imposes responsibilities [...] Adultery, the obsessive search for women, peeking through the bather's hole in the cabin, represent the most negative sides in contemporary cinematography. Morality is not just a sexual fact. Modern cinema is crumbling society⁶.

⁴ *Review of films and theatre works.*

⁵ *The senses and the modesty. Italy and the revolution of customs (1958-68).*

⁶ Azara 2018; our translation.

The concern was far from the criticism that part of feminism will reserve for pornography or for the exposure of female bodies in the media; in fact at play was not the possibility or otherwise of self-representation and deciding on one's own sexuality on the part of women. The game was played around the definition of the public and private spheres, the preservation of traditional roles (the woman as a pure being and the hearth angel) and the main social institutions and Catholic values, such as marriage (and its indissolubility) or female virginity. Continuing to draw on the precious work of Azara, a story is recalled that tells the social context of the years in question: that of the school magazine «la Zanzara». In March 1966 the boys and girls of the Liceo Parini in Milan published an inquiry in which, according to female students of different ages, the desire to talk and discuss issues such as sex education, religion and its interference in the sexual sphere, premarital sex, contraceptives; in other words the need to live one's sexuality with more freedom and awareness. After the publication of the issue, the protests of Catholic students followed, as well as the denunciation by a Catholic association, and countless other subjects, resulting in a judicial case, carefully amplified by the press, that will last until July of the same year and who will see on the table of the defendants, when juridical when popular, the school principal, the editors (two of whom will even be subjected to a medical assessment to ascertain the possible presence of venereal diseases), the owner of the typography who had printed it and even professors and parents who had shown solidarity with the young editors. More than the judicial case, which ended with the acquittal of the defendants, it is however interesting that the news has become the occasion for commentators, experts, politicians, intellectuals, men and women of faith, for a fierce confrontation that returned a country split in half between a faction «[...] old [...] swollen with taboos [...] and a new one, fresh ...»⁷ as pronounced during his harangue by one of the defense lawyers (Ivi, 214). The same Claudia Beltrami Ceppi, author of the investigation, will reveal forty years later, in an interview that appeared in «La Repubblica», that it was not so much the fact that she had given the girls the opportunity to express opinions on certain “forbidden” issues, as was the tenor of the responses that told of “enlightened” girls: «The central theme was not really the

⁷ Our translation.

sex but the role of the woman towards her husband, the education of children. And the thought of those girls was so different from the mentality of that time»⁸. The family, which had already undergone an evolution during the economic boom, moving from a productive microstructure to a consumer unit (Chianese 1980), in the words of the girls interviewed, thus became the field chosen for numerous battles that would have marked, in effect, the history of the country, and of the women's movement, in the years to come.

In the following year, 1967, the ministerial censorship authorized the first scene of integral nude of a white woman (*The pawnbroker*, of Sidney Lumet) leaving to glimpse the possibility of a greater margin of maneuver, at least for the «auteur cinema» (Grattarola and Napoli 2014, 13). This does not necessarily mean that porn movies were not filmed in Italy but that they did not find space in the official channels. Slowly, but inexorably, porn began to force the limits imposed by censorship.

Between 1973 and 1977, in fact, the insertions in the double versions, often turned from scratch, would no longer have been simply “erotic” or itchy but more hard-core, going to outline the contours of a phase that Maina and Zecca (2012) define as para-pornographic.

In 1977 the Majestic opens in Milan, the first red-light hall of the peninsula, in 1979 was the time of the Roxy, the only case of a red light room run by a woman, while Rome will have to wait until 1978, with the inauguration of the “Ambassadors”. Compared to the big US cities, in the Italian case, the proliferation of these rooms will not concern specific or ad hoc areas of the city but will extend from the center to the suburbs. It would not be until 1978 that viewers would see a blow-job with the movie *Rosa Bon Bon, flower of sex*⁹ of Hedman, projected for the first time on the Majestic's big screen. (Grattarola and Napoli 2003).

If the turning point of the red light halls marks a particularly significant moment in the race for the spread of pornography in Italy, it would be short-sighted to ignore a sector that, even before the cinema, had forced the boundaries of acceptability and repre-

⁸ Our translation.

⁹ Our translation.

sentability of explicit sex: the editorial one. In 1966-1967, as Maina writes in *Corpi che si sfogliano*:

The sexy magazines [...] with the first releases of the founders “Men” and “Playmen”, both created by the “lady of the porn-soft” Adelina Tattilo-based their editorial identity on a mixture of (claims to) journalistic information and / or cultural dissemination and an iconographic outfit marked by the increasingly unscrupulous nude¹⁰.

Magazines such as Cinesex and Cinestop confirm the existence of more powerful versions of films produced by Italy for abroad market, since in their pages they housed scenes or frames that were absent from the versions of films circulating in the country (Grattarola and Napoli 2014). The presence of more eloquent images on printed paper that on the screens will not only concern the frames or the “cut” scenes to get the visa from the censorship but real inserts extraneous to the film itself, extrapolated from other contexts and, not infrequently, recycled and reassembled for the occasion. The publishing sector linked to eroticism and pornography then will have a role in the sexual imagery, above all in men, at least until the 1980s (Cantatore in Luongo and Serughetti 2017).

The practice of the inserts, in its numerous variants, so common in the aforementioned magazines, will be revealed in 1978-1979, as one of the main strategies of circumvention of censorship by the film industry of the hard, allowing the products to obtain the censorship visa to then be hardened, or reintegrated in the case of scenes specially cut to pass the check, later (Grattarola and Napoli 2014). Another strategy, although adopted almost exclusively in the Milan area, saw the operators of red-light cinemas project films completely devoid of ministerial authorization. The answer of the law does not delay however to arrive and, above all in the person of the judge Nicola Cerrato, a real counteroffensive both on the legal and administrative plan, with the revocation of the licenses to the managers, started (*Ibidem*). In any case, Italian pornographic production does not stop, at least until about 1982. According to the meticulous

¹⁰ Maina 2018, 10; our translation.

reconstruction of Grattarola and Napoli, the one from 1979 to 1982 represents the golden age of Italian porn, in which the increase in demand and supply (and the inversely proportional relationship between costs and profits) have led to such an expansion of the sector to make it the lifeline for Italian genre cinema, which was in a crisis as profound as it was inconvertible (Ivi, 4).

The diffusion of hardcore into Italian cinema has not, of course, been disputed. In addition to the foreseeable attacks by movements, groups and Catholic associations and those close to the Vatican, we can find among the “enemies” of pornography the extra-parliamentary extreme left (Autonomous Collectives, Lotta Continua, Avanguardia Operaia) who insert the red-light halls in the context of proletarian self-reductions strikes, some feminist groups (*Companions organized for feminist counter-power*) that will come to claim incendiary attacks in some red-light halls of the capital, and the neo-Nazi group Ludwig, author of an attack on a red-light cinema in Milan that will cause the death of six patrons (*Ibidem*).

Despite the vehemence of the attack by the aforementioned feminist group, the topic of pornography has played an extremely marginal role in the Italian feminist debate compared to what happened with the sex wars in the United States. The years we are focusing on have in fact seen the movement, far from being unitary, engage on different issues, also obtaining different results of historical significance: it is the 1970 L. 898 which governed the dissolution of marriages and in 1974 the abrogative referendum which confirmed the law in force. 1975 is instead the year of L. 151, which reformed family law, introducing various innovations. To name a few: the transition from father authority to parental authority, equality between spouses, the possibility of choosing the patrimonial regime of the nucleus between separate or in communion, and revision of the rules on personal separation of spouses. In 1978, L.194 was promulgated, which decriminalized and regulated access to voluntary pregnancy interruptions. Years, therefore, of profound changes and in which the role historically occupied in the society by women and men, emerged radically modified.

This does not mean that women were not interested in pornography; however, rather than talking about actresses, performers or audiences, it seems interesting to point out that in 1981, before the experience of the Club 90 and the creation of Femme Produc-

tions in the United States, the first Italian porn film directed by a woman was shot: director's name was Giuliana Gamba. A graduate of the University of Florence, she worked first as an assistant and as a secretary of edition; she then meets Aristide Mas-saccesi (known as Joe D'Amato), director of what is considered the first real Italian porn movie (*sex black*, 1978), which will offer her to shoot hard movies. In 1981, under the pseudonym of Therese Dunn, she shot *Pornovideo* and, in the same year, *Claude and Corinne a particular restaurant*¹¹. After a first phase, she will move on to erotic cinema, while trying to keep her style. In her own words:

[...] being a woman and not having a “professional” approach, I based everything on creativity, both in stories and in scenes. Even in the first soft porn film I made, *Profumo*, I had the same transversal approach. One thing that was not usual even in erotic cinema that came out in normal cinemas: I created a story in which a woman came to disguise the lover as a woman to confuse and attract her husband ... there was a scene of penetration with a pink brush [...] they were all very ironic [...] At the time, as a woman, I wondered what I wanted to see. I tried to make the act of desire more realistic: while the man saw it more carnal, I saw it erotic. I tried to evoke desire with details, I focused on things like tearing away the actresses panties. These small “inventions” at the time were considered to be ideas alternative to brutal penetration. The female figures, then, were always active and central as regards desire [...] there was a desire to experiment. For example, I remember that I had this idea: let a woman go with a trans woman. It was something that had never been seen before, but in the end both the actress and this young trans woman told me that they had been pleasantly surprised by the experience. [...] In my films I have often tried to dare scenes that had never been seen before, but with the utmost naturalness: I shot one of the first pissing scenes in Italy, for example. I tried to bring the sex of real life to the screen, but also that of ideas. In those years there was a lot of talk about the right to female orgasm, and I made sure that my actresses had real orgasms on the set. Not theoretical orgasms.

¹¹ Our translation.

In short, I tried to make the camera felt as little as possible¹².

The reader will not miss different analogies with respect to what was said about the Candida Royale project: innovative elements, even more if they are conceived in a context like the Italian one as it has been described up to now. Compared to the Club 90 and Femme Productions, however, there is a different degree of “feminist political awareness” we could say. Giuliana Gamba, for example, seems to have acted with less conscience with respect to the reading that she gave ex-post of her experience with porn, while acknowledging to share with the feminist militants the will of «Go against the rules».

3.2. Decline and Changes

Following the work of Grattarola and Napoli (2014) it seems that 1984 marks the end of the golden age of Italian porn. Continuous attacks by the judiciary, and market saturation would be among the causes that would have contributed to the end of the era in question. Contributed but not exhausted the reason for its decline; to give the final blow to the aforementioned phase there would in fact have been two innovations that we can link to the technological sphere: private television and the VCR (*Ibidem*). In 1976 the Constitutional Court with the sentence n.202, the authors explain, authorizes the existence of local television stations, delivering a heavy blow to the Rai (State Television) monopoly. These broadcasters will insert in the program schedules, first erotic films forbidden to minors and, later, real hard-core products (*Ibidem*, 56). The Milane Telereporter, repeating a broadcast of TeleTorino International, broadcast nightly stripteases that reached an audience of 200,000 spectators. In 1977 Rai will host a character in its broadcasts who will then enter the country's collective imagination as the first real porn star: Ilona Staller, also known as Cicciolina. Two years later, the explicitly hard films will occupy the schedule of TeleMilano International (*Ibidem*, 59), challenging the ministerial censorship. Interesting, in the reconstruction operated by the authors, the presence of the statement of a programmer of the issuer who, in 1979, told not without sur-

¹² Carradori 2016, viewable at the link <https://www.vice.com/it/article/av5b9b/intervista-giuliana-gamba-porno-femminismo-445>); our translation.

prise to have discovered, through the phone calls she received every evening, a strong presence of women, in pairs and not very young, who enjoyed the films they aired. The presence of erotic and porn movies, even beyond the local television stations, especially after the entry in the market of Silvio Berlusconi, will proceed until the promulgation of Law 223 of 1990 (so called Mammì Law) which will unequivocally prohibit the broadcasting of films prohibited to minor of 18 years (*Ibidem*, 60).

The second element to dictate the end of the hard core era in movie theaters was the spread of the Vcr. Some industry entrepreneurs decided to beat both roads, spreading the film in the two different media but others, like Riccardo Schicchi, decided instead to concentrate creative and economic efforts towards the home video market (in the case of Schicchi also towards live entertainment venues), leading some performers, including Cicciolina herself, as well as the equally well-known Moana Pozzi, in a phase more linked to “stardom”. This is not the place to offer an overview of the period, however it is important to emphasize that the popularity achieved by these figures has been so extensive as to make them a custom phenomenon that has gone beyond the boundaries of the environment in which they were created. The two stars have collected television appearances, occupying the seats of the largest and most popular talk shows (think, for example, of the Maurizio Costanzo Show). Especially in the case of Moana Pozzi, it was a question of women who were quite distant, by cultural level and social capital, from the widespread social perception towards the women that work in the sex industry. Not only that, they both started a political career: Ilona Staller was elected as a deputy in 1987 in the ranks of the Radical Party and then, five years later, together with Pozzi herself, they become candidate with the Party of Love, founded by Riccardo Schicchi and Mauro Biuzzi: the topics on which their political activity was based included the fight against censorship, information campaigns on the spread of Hiv, and sex education.

The figure of the two porn stars is so deeply rooted in the Italian collective imagination that, 22 years after the premature death of Pozzi in 1994, Walt Disney has decided to rename the Italian version of the film *Moana* with *Oceania* (and its protagonist, who gave her name to the film, became Vaiana). Although no official statements have been released on the matter, even the foreign press has interpreted the choice as, on the one hand, a distancing try from a figure that is ill-suited to be placed side by side with the

Disney product and, on the other, as an attempt to obviate a problem as technical as it may be expensive to solve: indexing the results in the main search engines that, when typing the word Moana in the Italian context (see [https://movieplayer.it/news/oceania-e-moana-le-reazioni-the-press-foreign-to-change-the-title-f_46833 /](https://movieplayer.it/news/oceania-e-moana-le-reazioni-the-press-foreign-to-change-the-title-f_46833/)), would have returned only porn movies as first links.

Due to technological innovations, the web, and the success of amateur porn, it is not possible to talk about a porn industry in the Italian context; however, it is worth noting that Italy hosts three different festivals dedicated to pornography: the Fish & Chips of Turin, the Hacker Porn Film Festival in Rome and the most recent Vieni? of Catania. Three festivals in which to circulate would be mainly products, often non-commercial, ascribable to queer, and feminist porn and to post-porn and in any case meeting the characteristics of *sur-porno*, as defined by Biasin, Maina and Zecca (2014) that is:

A porn that would be ashamed of being nothing but itself and that is trying to justify its existence with an additional interest: of an aesthetic, sociological, moral, psychological, political, kind, [...] in short, with some kind of extrinsic value that is supposed to enrich it¹³.

4. Some conclusive thoughts

With these premises, we are particularly satisfied in offering the reader a number that, in our opinion, succeeds in illuminating some fundamental questions for us by answering basic questions such as the following: What space for the unexpected and the unforeseen in a social context in which sexuality continues to be strongly codified? What margin of movement in a capitalist context that defines the spaces for maneuver? What other visions with respect to dominant narratives can emerge when the gaze and the approach try to deconstruct rigid and, in our opinion, often short-sighted theoretical premises? What happens when, at the center of the discussion, the word of the historically margin-

¹³ Biasin, Maina and Zecca 2014, in Maina, G. (2018), “From the Scene, for the Scene! Sexual Styles and Identity Narratives in Alternative Porn”, in Attwood, F. and Smith, C. (eds.), *Routledge Companion to Media, Sex and Sexuality*, London, Routledge (our translation).

alized subjects like women, trans people, performers, is given, just to mention some example, when, to quote Spivak (1988), «the subaltern speak?»

The contributions that make up the number revolve around fundamental concepts both for existing literature and because they have become, in some way, slogans in political and militants discourses around pornography: authenticity, intimacy, pleasure, empowerment, objectification but also stigma, to give some examples. The research methodologies range from ethnography, auto ethnography, text analysis, to the use of quantitative techniques, and reflect different disciplinary positions: media studies, visual and performing arts, sociology, gender studies.

The contributions dwell and trace a tension between global thrusts and local profiles, emphasizing changes and specificities linked to different historical periods, but also the influence that technological innovations and a capitalist system exert on pornography, both from the point of view of the imaginary and of working practices.

The articles presented here move mainly on two axes: one more linked to the dimension of the imaginaries and of the fruition of pornography, and the other that questions pornography as a field of labor. Two dimensions strongly debated in public discourse and in the widespread social perception that, here, are dealt with lucidly and without a priori dichotomous positions, trying to overcome the rigid typical alignments of sexwars and responding adequately to the objectives and contents of our call for articles.

Lebedíková's contribution, guided by the perspective of sexual scripts (Simon and Gagnon 2003; 1987; 1973), revolves around the qualitative analysis of the content of the 5 most viewed videos on Pornhub in the Czech Republic; the author explores the most unexpected component of the scripts and underlines how sexual objectification and sexual agency, although considered conceptually opposite and respectively exclusive, can coexist and intertwine. The essay by Dalila Missero, through the study of the impact of Italian soft-core pornography magazines for men and women of the early 1970s, focuses on the negotiation between the Anglo-American popular culture and the Italian one, and on the peculiar developments of the Italian feminist movement compared to the American and French one. The Italian context is also the protagonist of the article by Ferrerero Camoletto-Todesco, which represents a particularly original contribution for various reasons. Most of the so-called effects studies have focused on the

consumption of pornography by men, ignoring women as a category of users, emphasizing potential negative effects, and relying on relatively small samples. The present contribution, on the contrary, tried to investigate whether, and to what extent, the consumption of pornography by Italian women was linked to two indicators of sexual empowerment: masturbation released from guilt, and the idea of sexuality as a way to express oneself freely and in an authentic way. The concept of authenticity is explored and challenged in Stardust's contribution which, through self-ethnographic work and 35 qualitative interviews administered to Australian porn stakeholders, questions the effects of such discursive mobilization, typical of so-called alternative pornographies, on the working practices of performers in a context of gig economy, which would stand out as one of the new forms of affective, emotional or relational labor. Laurin's contribution also places the performer's work within the framework of emotional labor, in this case with explicit reference to gay porn, even in amateur productions. The performers would move in a subtle balance that sees the performance and private dimension being integrated into the eyes of an audience that would require a deep level of engagement mediated by technology. The relationship between technologies and work practices emerges in Pezzuto's work too, which presents the results of an ethnographic research carried out in the Las Vegas context, and focuses on trans performers and on the complex relationship between work and online use / presence, with the emergence of a singular profile, that of pornpreneur, for which social media represent on one hand a tool but, on the other, a place where trans performers experience a sense of self-commodification, competition and even bullying.

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