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Digital Spaces, Material Traces : Investigating the Performance of Gender, Sexuality, and Embodiment on Internet Platforms that feature User-Generated Content

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Chapter Six

Keeping It Real: User-Generated Pornography, Gender Reification, and Visual Pleasure

6.1 — Introduction

The past few years have witnessed the proliferation of three separate yet interrelated phenomena in the Western media and the societies in which they are embedded. First, many authors have argued that we are experiencing a ‘sexualization’ or ‘pornification’ of media and society (McNair, 1996, 2002; Levy, 2005; Attwood, 2006; Poynor, 2006; Paasonen et al., 2007). Sex is increasingly the topic of public discussion and scrutiny in different media, popular culture is flirting with the stylistic conventions of pornographic representation, and porn stars like Jenna Jameson are treated as pop icons. One could therefore argue that pornography has been involved in a ‘mainstreaming’ process over the past decade and that, simultaneously, the public discourse on sex and sexuality has grown exponentially.

Second, since the 90s the media have shown an increased preoccupation with the mundane, everyday lives of ‘ordinary’ people. This trend is mainly symbolized in the rise of Reality TV as the prevailing television genre, which has spawned many successful programs such as *Big Brother*, *Temptation Island*, *The Real World*, and *The Osbournes*. (Andrejevic, 2004; Hill, 2005). These productions thrive as much on the fetishization of the ‘real’ and ‘authentic’ experiences of regular people, as on their willingness to divulge private and ‘truthful’ information in front of a camera. In this sense, the Reality genre owes its wide public appeal to its entrenchment within a broader ‘confessional’ culture, which it concurrently perpetuates.

Third, the development of new media technologies has brought with it the promise to reinvigorate participatory communities and transfer communicative power from multinational media conglomerates to ‘the people’. This promise is best captured in the ‘birth’ of Web 2.0 and its commercial reappropriation of user-generated content on the internet (‘Author’, 2008). As illustrated by the YouTube slogan ‘Broadcast Yourself!’, media consumers are encouraged to become producers and participate in the collective presentation of self, while interacting with others in their various social networks.

I argue that these three developments, only briefly introduced here, converge in the figure of YouPorn: a website featuring user-generated pornographic video material. More specifically, the so-called ‘amateur’ videos found on YouPorn offer an interesting site for the investigation of the interconnections between pornography, the representation of ‘authentic’ experience, and participatory online culture. While pornography has traditionally had an antithetical relationship with feminism, which condemned pornographic production for its heterosexism and glorification of male dominance (e.a. Dworkin, 1981), more recently feminist scholars have suggested that new media technologies are opening up spaces for the sexual emancipation of previously marginalized groups (Attwood, 2007; Jacobs, 2004; Albury, 2003). These ‘Do It Yourself’ web cultures would allow for different, more authentic, representations of gender and sexuality than is conventionally available in mainstream pornography. In response to these suggestions, this study examines the ‘amateur’ videos on YouPorn from a gender perspective, asking the following questions:

- 1 – *How do the ‘amateur’ videos on YouPorn make aesthetic or narrative claims to an authentic ‘reality’?*
- 2 – *How are gender and sexuality represented in these videos?*

I start by further discussing the connections between pornography, participatory media technologies, gender, and the representation of ‘reality’. This is followed by an introduction to YouPorn and an explanation of the methodological approach, after which the outcomes of the analysis are considered. With this study, I aim to contribute to current scholarly debates about the opportunities and pitfalls of internet pornography, addressing the issue with an empirical research agenda (McCreadie Lillie, 2004).

6.2 — From the obscene to the on/scene

I adopt the conceptual distinction between on/ and obscenity from Linda Williams, who, in the introduction to her edited volume *Porn Studies* (2004), uses the terms to describe the ‘gesture by which a culture brings on to its public arena the very organs, acts, bodies, and pleasures that have heretofore been designated ob/scene and kept literally off-scene’ (3). As such, on/scenity marks both the controversy surrounding the increasing proliferation of sexual representations in the public sphere, and the fact that these have become increasingly available to the general public (Williams, 2004). The recognition of this tension between the ‘speakable’ and the ‘unspeakable’ has led to new scholarly and popular interest in pornography’s changing position within a

society that becomes ever more savvy when it comes to the representation of sex and sexuality (for a discussion, see Paasonen et al., 2007).

Brian McNair (1996; 2002) has identified this increased proliferation of sexual representations as part of a process he terms the 'pornographication' of mainstream culture in our late/postmodern capitalist society. He sees this pervasive fascination with sex and sexuality as bringing about a transgression of traditional boundaries between public and private spaces, which can be more broadly witnessed in recent media trends that focus on 'reality' programming, interactive audience participation and various confessional formats. The ongoing commodification of sex and the emphasis on sexual consumerism are both aspects of a so-called 'striptease culture': the privatization of the public sphere through the expansion of popular participation in sexual discourse, often located in commercial media environments (McNair, 2002). He understands this expansion, facilitated by the introduction of new communication technologies (from print to the internet), as promoting a 'democratization of desire', which couples an extended access to the means of sexual expression with the emergence of a more pluralistic sexual culture.

Fiona Attwood (2002; 2006; 2007) concurs with McNair that the contemporary emphasis on the relation between sexuality and consumer culture has made sexually explicit material more available to audiences who were previously excluded from its consumption. As sexuality has become an issue of aesthetics, rather than ethics or morality, women have increasingly been addressed as consumers of 'tasteful' versions of pornography that allude to a sense of sophistication and liberation from traditional sexual mores in middle/upper class culture (Attwood, 2006). By linking sex to matters of health, pleasure, and self-fulfillment, porn is making new claims to aesthetic value and sells itself as a part of women's 'progressive' sexual politics (Juffer, 1998, Attwood, 2006). Although this 'domestication' of pornography does help to create new genres that are agreeable to women and establishes new connections between sex and everyday life, Attwood argues that the proliferation of such commercial initiatives does not necessarily guarantee the democratization of sexual desire as envisaged by McNair. As she writes:

It may be true that our sexual repertoires are broadening, that sexual discourse is increasingly accessible to all, and that 'sex' now functions as a privileged site through which the ordinary, the personal, and the individual are embodied in the public sphere, but a simple celebration of these developments ignores the ways in which they also make our sexual practices and identities more available for regulation. This approach also oversimplifies the ways in which developments in sexual taste, representation and practice may be related to positions of power, particularly in terms of class and gender relations. (Attwood, 2006: 82-83)

Attwood, along with a number of other scholars (Whelehan, 2000; Williamson, 2003; Gill, 2003), warns that contemporary postfeminist visual culture might invite an uncritical reception of glossy sexual representations that disguise sexism as 'porno chic'. Gill most vehemently argues that the mechanisms that work to objectify women are now being reassembled to create an ironic, 'knowing' version that involves the 'sexual subjectification' of women who are finding themselves under a constant self-scrutinizing gaze (Gill, 2003).

The often difficult issues surrounding sexuality and sexual representation in today's late/postmodern society, then, force us to consider a new ethics of sex (Attwood, 2006). Two authors who have been instrumental in articulating such a new framework are Ken Plummer and Jeffrey Weeks. Plummer (1995; 2003) observes a democratic potential in the emergence of what he calls 'intimate citizenship'. He uses this concept to invoke the major changes that have taken place in the spaces and discourses surrounding intimate subjects. Areas that were previously considered taboo (obscene) or solely debated by experts are now increasingly accessible to ordinary citizens who are able to challenge authoritative discourses with heterogeneous 'participant stories' about a large variety of topics dealing with bodies and sexuality. This corresponds to what Jeffrey Weeks has called the 'sexual citizen', who 'makes a claim to transcend the limits of the personal sphere by going public' (Weeks, 1998: 37). However, he adds that the going public is a necessary yet paradoxical move in order to protect the possibilities of private life and choice in a more inclusive society. He follows Plummer in the claim that sexual/intimate citizenship is eventually about the control over one's body, access to representations and spaces, and choices about identities and experiences (Weeks, 1998; Plummer, 1995).

6.3 — Pornography, participatory culture and the internet

McNair, Attwood, and Plummer all seem to agree on the democratic potential of the internet. While the internet has, since its inception, been an important catalyst for the proliferation of mainstream pornographic representations and the exponential growth of the porn industry¹, these authors argue that it also provides access to exactly those alternative spaces that allow individuals control over their own stories and representations. Attwood (2007) mentions how new web technologies have given rise to various participatory networks, some of which have emerged as 'new sex cultures' where "savvy media practitioners' are producing and distributing alternative porn in online arenas for peer-to-peer sharing, sex activist and art networks' (442). It is in these arenas that alternative bodies, desires, and sexual practices can become visible, which is instrumental in the sexual emancipation of groups who have been previously marginalized

and/or oppressed (Attwood, 2007; Jacobs, 2007; Lehman, 2007; Albury, 2003). The proliferation of queer, fat, hairy, or old bodies online makes the relationship between aesthetics and ethics explicit: it challenges the boundaries of what can be counted as 'real' sex/bodies/pleasures and expands the representational space to include non-normative practices.

Katrien Jacobs (2007) has emphasized that, next to the aesthetic dimension of so-called 'indieporn' or 'altporn' sites², another important ethical aspect of these new online sex cultures is their community-centered, participatory agenda. Many of these websites, such as *Suicidegirls* or *NoFauxxx*³, facilitate interaction between the 'models' and the spectators, and often encourage visitors to become part of the production processes as well. This focus on communication and participation generates possibilities for identification and intimacy that extend beyond the realm of 'carnal lust' (Arvidsson, 2007). In this way, then, these sites create an aura of authenticity that transforms the pornographic spectacle into 'real' sex, as experienced by everyday people with whom one can identify and interact, but who have previously lacked the means of sexual representation that reach outside their direct intimate circle. This drive for authenticity is particularly pronounced in the 'amateur' or 'reality' porn phenomenon, which has become increasingly ubiquitous in the realm of internet pornography.

Amateur porn and the claim to the 'real'

In part, the desire for 'real', authentic sexual practices formed a reaction to the increasingly spectacular, silicon-enhanced artificiality of mainstream pornography (Russo, 2007; Patterson, 2004). In opposition to the supposed 'fakeness' of mainstream productions, amateur porn posits the 'real' bodies and pleasures of people who could be your neighbor (Russo, 2007; Attwood, 2007; Patterson, 2004; Hillyer, 2004; Albury, 2003; Barcan, 2002). In fact, they might indeed *be* your neighbor, as amateur pornography has traditionally relied on homemade footage. In the early stages of the amateur phenomenon during the mid-80s, this footage mainly consisted of photographs and low-grade Super-8 videos, which were traded and sold among a small network of aficionados (O'Toole, 1999). However, the advent of the internet and other digital technologies has expanded these amateur practices in both their scale and heterogeneity, and catapulted the private sexual practices of ordinary people into the (semi-)public realm of the internet (Barcan, 2002).

Julie Levin Russo (2007) has argued that the central claim to 'realness' is not only present on 'amateur' and 'altporn' sites, but constitutes a more general conception of pornography as having a privileged relationship to the real. More specifically, this conception holds that porn 'records an unsimulated, authentic

sexual act (realness of production)' and 'its images appear real due to their character and conventions (realness of representation)' (239). Amateur porn sites place a particular emphasis upon the realness of production and representation, in order to produce images that exude a sense of 'liveness' and intimacy (Hillyer, 2004). Over the past several years, this phenomenon has grown into a subgenre with its own aesthetic codes that have been widely adopted in mainstream productions (Esch and Mayer, 2007; Jacobs, 2007; Penley, 2004). As Barcan notes:

[T]he stylistic "naturalness" of the home-made sex video has become an aesthetic unto itself. Its technical features (e.g. graininess, blurriness, and poor lighting) would often be considered flaws in public genres, but in private they function as values themselves, signs of indexicality and authenticity. It should be no surprise that authenticity itself should have become an erotic stimulant. (Barcan, 2002)

As amateur porn (whether featuring 'real' amateurs or not⁴) made its way onto the internet, its homemade production process was supplemented by web-based technologies, which augmented its 'raw' amateur aesthetic by adding the low-resolution quality of streaming video and webcam images. Next to the experience of online interactivity, these grainy images provide an added feeling of authenticity (and thus of erotic pleasure) by intensifying porn's already 'privileged relationship to the real'. According to Patterson, this relationship between grainy web cam images and the 'real' is 'enhanced by their similarity to the image sequences obtained from video surveillance cameras, which have a similar claim to liveness' (Patterson, 2004: 113). This suggestion leads us to consider the intersections of amateur/reality porn on the web and the broader field of media modalities that seek to discover and represent 'the real' through mechanisms of confession and surveillance.

'Reality', confession, and the 'truth' of sex

Several authors have placed amateur/reality porn on the internet within the larger context of the rise of reality TV and contemporary (media) culture's fascination with confessional genres, characterized by a desire for authenticity, participation, and the revelation of 'truth' (Attwood, 2007; Patterson, 2004; Barcan, 2002; McNair, 2002). As discussed above, McNair's notion of the privatization of the public sphere through the on/scenity of sexual discourses within popular media illustrates the shifting boundaries of the public and the private in late modern western culture. These boundaries are being renegotiated in media formats that privilege lifestyle, 'human interest', interactivity, and 'reality'. For McNair, this commodification of the intimate provides common

people with a platform for self-expression and participation in sexual discourses, albeit under the banner of sexual consumerism (2002). Other scholars, however, have been less enthusiastic about this commercial ‘incitement to discourse’ through various confessional formats.

In his critical book *Reality TV: The Work of Being Watched*, Mark Andrejevic (2004) carefully analyzes the way in which reality TV poses an injunction to participate in various forms of surveillance under the guise of ‘self expression’ and access to ‘reality’, while in effect placing people in a constantly scrutinized position that generates market value through ‘the work of being watched’. He relates reality TV’s promise of experiencing the ‘real’ through extensive monitoring to the way in which audiences are encouraged to participate online, which ‘functions as an incentive to enter the digital enclosure – and to, in turn, offer oneself up as an element of that reality, as a *participant* in it’ (Andrejevic, 2004: 123, italics in original). According to Andrejevic, this invitation to participate plays into people’s desire for the resuscitation of democracy and community, while in fact setting them up for a voluntary submission into a corporate ‘participatory panopticon’ (Whitaker, 1999, in Andrejevic, 2004: 113). In this way, the search for authenticity through self-disclosure and interactivity is commodified through comprehensive online systems of disciplinary (self-) surveillance that turn these activities into marketable information.

In Andrejevic’s analysis, the mechanisms of participation, confession and surveillance are not only mutually related, but simultaneously tied up with the promise of ‘reality’, which serves as an overarching catalyst. His Foucaultian perspective on how the ‘real’ functions as an ideological tool for the incitement to divulge information resembles Williams’ discussion of pornography as a particular form of confessional technology (William, 1989). In her classic study of hardcore heterosexual pornography, Williams traces the origins of pornographic representation in film and sees in these technologies ‘an impetus toward the confession of previously invisible “truths” of bodies and pleasures in an unprecedented “frenzy of the visible”’ (Williams, 1989: 7). Andrejevic himself already addresses the connection between pornography and ‘the real’, in a passage that resonates with the assertions made earlier by Russo and Barcan:

The relation between reality TV and pornography is (...) not an incidental one. Voyeurism is an undeniable aspect of the appeal of reality TV and lends this appeal a distinct erotic charge. (...) At the same time, pornography carries with it the promise of the real: that the act of copulation is neither imitated, as in fictional movies, nor stylized, as in erotica, but presented in all its raw, mundane, reality. (Andrejevic, 2004: 87)

In Williams's discussion, pornography's claim to reveal the previously undiscovered 'truths' of gendered (predominantly female) bodies is equally inscribed by the desire to know the 'reality' of sex. Following the ideas developed by Foucault in volume one of his *History of Sexuality* (1978), she relates his notion of modern society's compulsion to speak incessantly about sex to hardcore pornography and the visual pleasure of seeing sex itself 'speak' (Williams, 1989). For Williams, this pleasure is inextricably linked to knowledge: the knowledge of pleasure and the pleasure of knowing pleasure. This knowledge/pleasure constellation, which lies at the heart of pornography, instigates the construction of discourses on sex, gender, and sexuality, augmenting existing discourses that have been institutionalized by medicine, psychiatry, and law (idem).

Similarly, Hansen, Needham, and Nichols (1991) see pornography as part of a larger discourse of sexuality and the 'organization of pleasure'. They draw comparisons between the aesthetic and discursive aspects of pornography and ethnography, arguing that pornography's careful visual analysis of bodies and pleasures relies on a 'documentary impulse' shared by the ethnographic film's 'will to knowledge' about the reality of human relations. In this sense, pornography can be understood as another form of visual inquiry, deploying a 'scientia sexualis'⁵ in order to 'understand, label, codify, and cure sexuality' (Hansen et al, 1991: 210). Thus, the proliferation of sexual bodies and desires (both off- and online) should not necessarily be taken as a liberatory process that escapes the power structures of a hegemonic moral authority, but may rather be understood to function as an extension of its disciplinary power (McCreadie Lillie, 2004; Foucault, 1977; 1978).

6.4 — User-generated pornography: discipline or emancipation?

How does this dystopic view of participatory pornography relate to the more utopic position expressed by Jacobs, Attwood, and Plummer? As discussed above, these scholars are equally concerned with online porn's relation to interaction, 'reality', and 'truth', but argue that the internet allows participatory communities to represent different versions of 'reality' and contest the hegemonic 'truths' of sexuality. Thus, instead of foregrounding the disciplinary qualities of these spaces, they invoke their emancipatory potential to actualize sexual citizenship online.

Two empirical studies that emphasize the subversive potential of websites that facilitate the participatory, or user-generated, production of porn have focused on the way that gendered bodies are represented in these spaces. In their investigation of 'interactive sex entertainment' on CU-SeeMe video conferencing

sites, Kibby and Costello (2001) argue that through the breakdown of the distinction between producer and consumer these sites enable individuals to express their own sexual identities, which can encompass diverse desires and cultural meanings. Furthermore, they show how these interactions bridge 'the gap between the image and the act' by providing a space where the positions of spectator/spectacle and active/passive are fluid (367). According to Kibby and Costello, this allows for the subversion of traditional gender relations in pornography and the possibility for the rewriting of gendered codes of sexuality (idem).

In his essay on the representation of the penis in user-generated pornographic images, Lehman (2007) is clear about what he sees as the revolutionary potential of websites that allow users to participate in the production and distribution of sexual content, in this case Voyeurweb:

Voyeurweb has shifted the balance to the amateurs and away from the professionals and opened the sexual representation of the male and female body to a much wider variety of age, race, body type, and range of features with regard to cultural norms of beauty than previous forms of porn, sexual representation, or even the artistic representation of the body. Instead of just feeling a sense of frustration or exclusion or even perhaps deploring what we are seeing when we look through magazines, watch porn films, or walk through art museums, for the first time in history we are able to enter directly into the process of affecting and changing such representation, and for the whole world to see (Lehman, 2007: 110)

Like Attwood and Plummer, Lehman stresses the link between sexual ethics and the importance of alternative aesthetic production in participatory media. He relates the political importance of these user-generated porn websites to that of Youtube, which has widely been heralded (most prominently by *Time* magazine) as a harbinger of democratic media production that challenges traditional hierarchies in the culture industry and opens up space to alternative voices (Lehman, 2007). Lehman bases these assertions on his research about the ways that the penis is represented on Voyeurweb. His survey suggests that the images on Voyeurweb show a much larger variety of representations than is permitted in either porn or art, especially when it comes to the size and shape of the (often flaccid) penis. These images thus allow for the representation of male bodies that have previously been excluded from visual culture, challenging hegemonic ideologies of what maleness and masculinity may look like.

But what about other contemporary websites that have adopted the YouTube model of facilitating the distribution of user-generated content and applied it to pornographic material? What representations of gender and sexuality can be found in the 'amateur' videos that are uploaded each day by these participatory

communities of porn enthusiasts? As Paasonen, Nikunen, and Saarenmaa (2007) point out, 'porn is a question of genre and embodied practice, not simply sex or sexual expression' (13) and its stylistic conventions can be both reiterated and subverted by people engaged in the grassroots production of pornographic images. I want to investigate these images and the embodied practices that they contain through an analysis of the user-generated videos distributed on YouPorn, which currently features as the most popular 'adult' website on the internet.

6.5 — Method

You Porn: An introduction

In November 2008, Voyeurweb ranked 919th on Alexa's list of most trafficked websites worldwide, whereas YouPorn had a worldwide ranking of 51, making it one of the most popular websites on the internet (ranking above CNN.com and Livejournal)⁶. Most of its visitors reside in the United States (22.2%), followed by Germany (13.9%) and Italy (13.1%). Additionally, the national traffic rankings show that the site is even more popular in Greece (14), Italy (15), Switzerland (17), and the Philippines (17). These modest statistics suggest that YouPorn is an international phenomenon, although its popularity seems to be concentrated in the United States and Europe.

Like YouTube, YouPorn functions as an online depository that allows users to upload and distribute millions of videos, but where the former does not accept any sexually explicit material, the latter focuses exclusively on such content.⁷ In addition, compared to the way that videos are organized on YouTube's main page, the YouPorn interface shows less editorial effort concerning the presentation of its videos. YouTube arranges its videos in three different ways ('Videos being watched now', 'Special attention', and 'Recommended videos'), while the videos that are uploaded on YouPorn are all displayed under the rubric 'New Videos', with the most recent clip posted at the top of the main page. As such, the clips initially appear to be largely unorganized, in the sense that they are not divided into any predefined categories.

However, analogous to YouTube, clips can be further organized by the user, which is facilitated in two different ways. First, the material can be filtered by length of video, highest rated video, most viewed video, date of upload, title of video, and type of content ('Straight', 'Gay', and 'Cocks'). Second, users can employ a 'search' tool in order to seek specific types of content by entering keywords, which correspond to 'tags' that are attached to the uploaded videos. Like YouTube, YouPorn offers its users the opportunity to 'tag' their uploaded videos so they can be retrieved by other users when searching for specific

contents. These tags are usually keyword descriptions of the content, such as information about the people depicted in the video, the type of sexual conduct, the place of conduct, and the body parts that are emphasized in the particular clip.

Next to the video-sharing section of the YouPorn website, there are a variety of other facilities hosted on related pages that can be accessed by clicking on the links on top of the main page. Most of these facilities provide the user with different ways to 'get involved', thereby actively promoting a sense of interactivity and community, while also building strategic business alliances with other companies in the adult industry:

- **YouPorn Dating** (provided by AdultFriendFinder⁸): requires registration (no fee), after which the user can look for sex partners in their region by browsing the profiles in the social network.
- **YouPornMate**: 'The hottest live cam community', where users can browse for 'amateurs' who perform interactive webcam shows 'from their own homes'. This feature also requires registration without a fee.
- **YP Chat**: this affiliate program, licensed by YouPorn, allows users (after registration without a fee) to chat to other registered members in one of the many chat rooms.
- **YP Sexblogs**: a page featuring hundreds of links to 'adult' weblogs.
- **YouPorn Premium**: a service which allows the user to download and watch licensed porn DVD's in high quality. This requires both registration and a fee.
- **Web TV**: an external link which leads the user to BluVu.tv; a 24-hour online broadband television site with 'over 18 channels of hardcore content', which requires registration and a fee.

In contrast to these extra facilities, the video-sharing part of YouPorn does not require registration and is thus freely available to anyone. In this section, the ideas of community and interactivity are encouraged by allowing users to rate videos (on a scale of one to five stars). Furthermore, users are able to add videos to their 'Favorites', in order to create a personal collection of preferred videos. Leaving comments, which is a very popular feature on YouTube, is not possible.

Data selection

This study focuses on 'amateur' videos that were uploaded on the video-sharing section of YouPorn. On November 13, 2008, a search for the term 'amateur' resulted in 656 videos that were tagged with this particular keyword.

Subsequently, every 6th clip appearing on the 'search results' pages was selected and downloaded in order to create a sample of 100 'amateur' videos. It should be noted that, *by default*, the search results consisted exclusively of clips featuring heterosexual content. To access non-heterosexual material, the user has to filter the results by choosing the 'Gay' option in a drop-down menu (which provides the options 'Straight', 'Gay', and 'Cocks'). A subsequent search for 'amateur' clips within the 'Gay' content area resulted in just five videos, which were located on a separate domain: YouPornGay.com. Because of this location on an ancillary website (similar to YouPorn's Dating and Cam sites) and the fact that a discussion of gay pornography requires a different theoretical framework than is currently employed, it was decided not to include these five clips. The empirical focus is thus solely on the sample of 100 'straight amateur' videos.

Mode of analysis

The 'amateur' videos on YouPorn can be approached from two different conceptual and methodological angles. On the one hand, they can be viewed as manufactured images similar to other forms of cinematic representation. This perspective, rooted in the film studies tradition, emphasizes the artificial nature of the production and aims to investigate the aesthetic and narrative construction of meaning through and within the visual frame. This has been the predominant analytical approach to pornographic representation. On the other hand, these videos can be conceived as 'homemade' recordings of regular people (amateurs) engaged in sexual practices. This perspective, rooted in the performance studies tradition, examines the way that meaning is created through everyday social (and thus also sexual) performances, documented on digital video.

As Van Leeuwen and Jewitt (2001) rightfully point out, '(t)he issue of 'record' versus 'construct' exists because many images have an element of both and so require a mode of analysis which is sensitive to both' (5). This study thus adopts a combination of these two approaches and their respective methodologies, by recognizing the strengths and weaknesses of both modes of analysis in the context of addressing the 'amateur' videos on YouPorn. Whereas the performance studies approach treats the camera as a 'neutral' device for recording social performances, which constitute its primary object of analysis, a film studies perspective acknowledges the role of the camera as an active agent in the production of meaning. Conversely, while a film studies approach allows for the investigation of how the camera frame enables certain identifications and arranges a particular 'gaze' on the side of the spectator, it tends to neglect the notions of interaction and performance as important mechanisms in the social

construction of meaning in everyday life. As such, this study employs an interpretative framework that accounts for the performances *on* as well as *of* the screen.

6.6 — Results: Amateurism and the aesthetics of ‘the real’

As noted above, the low production values of ‘homemade’ amateur porn have become an aesthetic unto itself. Whether due to practical necessity or formal considerations, a large majority of the videos included in the sample indeed contain aesthetic qualities that set them apart from mainstream productions and could thereby be categorized as ‘amateur’ porn. Similar to previous observations by scholars such as Barcan (2002) and Hillyer (2004), the analysis of the YouPorn sample indicated that most of the videos consist of rather blurry, grainy and often underexposed footage. In addition, when the camera is not placed in a stationary position the camerawork is frequently shaky, including recurring attempts to zoom in and out in order to focus on a particular shot. Perhaps one of the most instructive examples of this ‘homemade’ aesthetic is a video called ‘Amateur sex with the ex’. The camera is operated by a man, who lies on his back while filming a young woman as she sits on top of him and slides his penis inside her. During the whole video the spectator is positioned to assume the man’s point of view as he tries to produce close up shots of her vagina, stomach and breasts. His attempts only partially succeed however, due to the dim lighting and unstable camerawork, which repeatedly obscure the indexicality of the images.

Although a large number of videos are shot manually (nearly always by men) there are also numerous occasions when the camera is stationed somewhere in the room. Yet this rarely means that it simply assumes a position as passive onlooker, as many clips show a frequent interaction between the ‘performers’ and the camera/screen. For instance, the video ‘Amateur couple X4’ features grainy footage of a couple having sex on a bed while the camera shifts angles and zooms in/out. Only after a wide shot of the couple, the viewer notices how the man (lying on his back) is consistently engaged in adjusting the camera with two remote controls, in an attempt to achieve the right perspective. He seems rather distracted from the actual sex and more focused on catching a good shot of the penetration.

Some videos feature webcam images of performers (usually women) who interact with the computer screen and repeatedly adjust their webcam, while others display ‘scenes’ in which the performers use the extended digital screen of their camera to watch themselves having sex. In these videos, the performers are simultaneously the exhibitionist/object and voyeur/subject, scrutinizing their

own performance which is mediated through the (computer) screen. On many occasions, the male performer eventually picks up the stationary camera and continues filming the 'action' from his point of view. These particular videos closely resemble the 'gonzo' aesthetic: a pornographic subgenre in which the cameraman/director records himself having sex with many different 'amateur' women. The 'gonzo' genre, in turn, originated as a low-budget alternative to feature-length pornography, adopting its production values from amateur porn. Another aesthetic element that many of the sample videos share with 'gonzo' porn is their lack of narrative structure. With the exception of a few clips that did feature some kind of contextual narrative (usually in the form of a short interview with the female 'performer'), the sample consisted of short, fragmented clips depicting sex and masturbation devoid of any narrative framework. This YouTube-style assemblage of scattershot sexual imagery starkly contrasts the average mainstream porn movie, which usually employs some kind of storyline to accompany the 'sexual numbers' (Williams, 1989). In this sense, the performances on the YouPorn screen are *mimetic* rather than *diegetic*: they (claim to) directly represent sexual interactions rather than recounting these interactions within a unified narrative framework.

But even though the majority of the sample videos appear to be relatively straightforward representations of regular people engaged in sexual practices, the spectator rarely gets to see 'uncut' footage. Only videos that last less than two or three minutes occasionally provide an unedited account of sexual (inter)action. Still, the crudely edited scenes of most videos attest to their 'amateur' status by distinguishing themselves from the smooth continuity of professionally edited porn movies. For example, the video 'Amateur tattoo couple fucking hard on sofa' features a woman who briefly shows her breasts while smiling at the camera and (presumably) watching herself on a screen next to the lens. The scene abruptly ends and is followed by a shot from the same angle, yet suddenly a naked man sits on a sofa behind her. The woman proceeds to fellate him while he stoically stares into the camera and attempts to stimulate her manually. Then there's another cut to a scene that depicts the couple having sex on the sofa, until the woman apparently strains herself and climbs off the man after expressing her pain. After another cut the woman has climbed back on the man, but this time she has her back towards him, facing the camera. This shot lasts about a minute until the phone rings and they again stop having sex. Following yet another disjunctive cut the man picks up the camera and records himself penetrating the woman from behind until he pulls out and ejaculates on her back. Although the video is 15 minutes long, it is thus comprised of five

discontinuous scenes that primarily serve to emphasize the different sexual 'numbers' that have been performed.

As the above example also illustrates, a number of videos contain unexpected, disruptive elements. Sometimes the sexual (inter)action is interrupted because of a coughing fit ('Amateur fuck and facial'), a ringing telephone (see above), a barking dog ('Amateur dildo action, part 1'), or an adjustment of the camera ('Amateur'). At other times the 'performance' is accompanied by distracting sounds and noises, such as slamming doors ('Amateur couple does the old in and out'), radio/TV commentary ('Amateur'), or a strange mechanic hum ('Hungary Amateur'). Occasionally, the sound is suddenly lost or there is no sound at all ('Amateur couple having sex'), while one video ('Amateur') contains interludes of static and blue screen, suggesting that this clip has been converted from analogue camcorder footage to a digital format. Despite, or perhaps rather *because of* the often rough editing that precedes the online distribution of these clips, these disruptions remain visible and audible aspects of the eventual video. In this way, they give the spectator a sense that what is being watched is improvised, unstaged and thus 'real'.

The presence of the medium

The examples discussed above suggest that these amateur videos' proximity to the 'real' is established *not* by minimizing or annihilating the presence of the medium, but instead by emphasizing this presence. This shows the artifice of the 'real', which in effect shows the reality of artifice; of the labor that *really* produced such authentic images (Andrejevic, 2004; Latour and Weibel, 2002).⁹ This sharply contrasts the efforts to erase the presence of the medium in the majority of mainstream feature-length porn, through increasingly sophisticated technologies that render images fully transparent and leave no trace of their production. As a result, the mainstream porn movie constitutes a fetish object that has assumed a life of its own. It offers a hyperbolic spectacle of blonde babes with tiny waists and big shiny breasts, always ready to be 'taken' by muscular men with spectacular penis sizes, enacting an athletic sexual choreography embedded in an often flimsy plot. It forms a 'fake' fantasy space, separated from one's 'real' everyday life. Conversely, the majority of the amateur videos on YouPorn transplant the object of fetishism onto the various mundane aspects of its production process, by which the video acquires its 'aura' of authenticity. In this way, everyday 'reality' is transported onto the screen as a new kind of spectacle: the 'inverted spectacle' of the sexual self. The screen is no longer separated from the spectator, as two detached realms, but becomes a genuine *medium* that connects both spaces in their mutual desire for the 'real'.

However, by foregrounding the presence of the medium and underscoring the ‘reality’ of the circumstances in which the images on the screen were produced, these amateur videos effectively deny their phantasmatic dimension, instead claiming a direct proximity to the real life bodies within the visual frame. In other words, the emphasis on the *construction* of ‘reality’ paradoxically works to *disavow* its imaginary component. As I argue below, this contributes to the reification of a politically conservative gender ideology in the name of representing ‘authentic’ sexual pleasures. First, however, I want to discuss how representations of gendered bodies are organized around a particularly masculine version of visual pleasure.

6.7 — Results part two: the construction of visual pleasure

This analysis confirms the claims of scholars like Jacobs (2007) and Attwood (2007) that the rise of online participatory sex cultures allows for the representation of body types that have previously been marginalized in the mainstream porn industry. Indeed, many of the sample videos feature hairy, chubby, pale, or aging bodies of both the male and female gender. However, while this constitutes a transgression on the level of bodily representation, it quickly became apparent that it does not necessarily result in alternative or subversive sexual performances. In contrast, the videos suggest that both the sexual practices and the way they are visually displayed on screen are structured by a normative mainstream ‘pornoscript’. Therefore, the analytical focus should not be on bodies in themselves, but on the way that these bodies are engaged in gendered sexual interactions and the techniques that are employed to visualize them.

Fragmentation

The predominant way in which this mainstream ‘pornoscript’ permeates the YouPorn videos, is through the operation of the camera. In many of the clips, the lens of the camera (nearly always operated by a man) probes the female body in a decidedly atomistic way. Her vagina, breasts, buttocks, anus, and (to a lesser extent) face are often framed in isolated shots, as if they were separated from the body to which they are attached. In these shots, every body part seems to evoke its own specific visual pleasure that can only be experienced through close scrutiny, subsequently stimulating other pleasures. For example, at the start of ‘Not bad for an amateur’, a young woman is interviewed by a man operating the camera. He gives her compliments and asks her to show parts of her body, to which she complies. As she pulls up her skirt the camera zooms in on her vagina, but then quickly moves upwards for a close up of her breasts. The man’s face

briefly enters the screen when he reaches forward to lick them, after which he continues to give her both compliments and requests. She is then asked to look into the lens and after a brief close up of her face the camera moves down again for a shot of her buttocks, which she is requested to spread open so he/the camera can have a good look at her anus and vagina. Following this visual 'mapping' of the woman's erogenous zones the man puts down the camera and proceeds to have sex with her.

The male body is visualized in an equally fragmented way, although it only enters the frame in association with the female body, mostly during fellatio or penetration shots. In these shots the visual focus is on the penis, testicles, and pelvic area, with the penis as centerpiece. Since the male 'performer' often doubles as cameraman, his face is usually absent from the spectator's view (with the above example as one of the few exceptions). Yet even in videos that feature a third person operating the camera, the man's face remains mostly obscured in order not to compromise the 'faceless' anonymity of his primary function: to induce sexual pleasure in a woman, which can then be 'caught on tape'. This fragmentary way of framing male and female bodies closely resembles the visual conventions found in contemporary commercial porn, such as the popular 'gonzo' genre.

From female to male pleasure

In order to capture this 'confession' of female sexual pleasure, to borrow Linda Williams's terminology, it has to be organized around the visualization of the 'truth' of sexual difference as the source of this pleasure. A broad trend among the sample videos is to expose this embodied 'truth' by having the camera repeatedly zoom in to capture the vagina in the most intimate way possible. In many instances, the lens gets so close to the spread open labia that the spectator almost feels able to enter her. It is as if a woman's sexual pleasure can be comprehended through the visual penetration of the organ that presumably constitutes its source, in search of the essence of femininity which lies hidden somewhere deep inside this otherwise unknowable body (Williams, 1989). The most excessive example of this 'will to knowledge' is the clip 'Feuchte amateur muschi', which features a minute-long studious close up shot of a spread open vagina, but numerous other videos follow a similar motif. Several clips show masturbating women who grant the spectator a look at their open vagina ('Extreme Horny Amateur Girl is Masturbating'), while other videos feature women exposing their 'rear entry' as another fetishized orifice that might convey an alternative route to the 'truth' of female sexual pleasure ('Check this Amateur Hottie').

In some clips the attempt to visually penetrate the woman's body either precedes or follows the 'actual' penetration. Williams (1989) has argued that this attests to the inherent failure in any attempt to properly visualize penetrative sex as the ultimate consummation of heterosexual desire, which means that the 'proof' of complementary sexual difference necessarily remains out of reach in any form of pornographic representation. However, the sample videos indicate that this does not detract from the visual pleasure of trying, as the majority of clips features a variety of so-called 'meat shots' that provide a close up view of the penetration of either a woman's vagina or anus. These are predominantly shot from the man's point to view, allowing the spectator to vicariously experience the 'action' from his perspective. Both these 'meat shots' and the way they are positioned in a masculine visual framework are staples of mainstream pornographic representation.

In addition, many clips suggest that this incapacity to completely visualize penetration, and by proxy sexual difference, is regularly compensated by the mobilization of two other representational conventions in contemporary pornography: the 'cream pie' and the 'cum shot'. In 'Amateur wife properly inseminated', two men and a woman are involved in a threesome. While one man lies on his back, the woman fellates him while simultaneously being penetrated from behind by the other man. The camera, operated by a fourth person, focuses on the woman in the middle and largely excludes the men from the frame. During the following minutes, the camera attempts to get a good shot of the penetration from different angles, including a position between the man's legs which results in a view of his testicles that partly obscure the favored shot. Eventually the man ejaculates, which is discernable from the sperm that runs down from his testicles and the woman's vagina. Yet this image is apparently not satisfactory, as the two men proceed to jointly spread her buttocks and labia so that the camera is able to closely scrutinize the sperm that has been 'inseminated' into her vagina. This shot, which is referred to as a 'cream pie' in porn vernacular, figures as the 'post hoc' visual evidence of the penetrative act. This compensatory move addresses the spectator as a witness to the material trace of the man's virility and thereby paradoxically shifts the focus from female to male pleasure. While the close up shots of opened vaginas and various 'meat shots' already suggested a male voyeuristic pleasure in excavating the 'truth' of sexual difference and female bodily exaltation, the 'cream pie' shots explicitly transfer male pleasure to the centre of the frame.

Analogous to the cream pie, the 'cum shot' also projects the 'essence' of male sexual pleasure onto the screen, in the form of the ejaculating penis. Here, the visualization of (hetero)sexual difference is entirely dominated by the male

genitals, relegating female pleasure to the supplementary task of watching the penis as it ejaculates on her chest, face, or mouth. Also wryly coined 'facial', it quite literally compels the woman to 'face the fact' that his pleasure can not coincide with hers, at least not when expressed in a visually satisfying manner. Meanwhile, her gaze seems to be a partial source of his pleasure. Yet instead of a controlling gaze it rather denotes a subordinate one, as signified by her bodily position which is nearly always below his, kneeling or otherwise. In this position, she again serves as a reservoir for the trace of his sexual pleasure, which usually heralds the end of the clip: when the man finishes so does the video. This dialectical relationship is most vividly enacted in 'Real German amateur facial (Deutsch)', which begins with a woman looking directly in the camera and telling the cameraman (in German) to 'come on her face'. In a subsequent shot she is lying on the bathroom floor while the cameraman stands above her and masturbates. Although she mentions that she wants him to come, she looks quite uncomfortable and closes her eyes. Even after the man asks her to open them again she keeps her eyes closed until he ejaculates on her face and the video ends.

6.8 — Conclusion: Gender ideology and its 'scopic regime'

As discussed above, the adoption of a normative 'pornoscript' structures the possible ways in which sexual pleasure is visualized in the 'amateur' videos on YouPorn. As a result, many of these clips negotiate the (impossible) challenge of fully representing female sexual difference and pleasure by either positioning women as objects of intense visual scrutiny, or shifting their focus to the much more photogenic 'evidence' of male pleasure. Both strategies thereby effectively highlight sexual difference as the primary source of heterosexual visual pleasure, which is predominantly experienced from a male subject position. Through this adherence to a male-centered, conventional 'porno norm', these videos perpetuate an essentialist (and sometimes sexist) gender ideology that ties gender to the male and female anatomy and the heterosexual pleasures derived therefrom. The way that ideology operates in these 'amateur' videos is perhaps more pernicious than the ideological work contained in conventional pornography. In contrast to the latter's feature-length 'spectacle', these compressed clips disavow their imaginary dimension and claim to provide brief, (f)actual representations of 'real' bodies and 'authentic' sexual experiences. In this way, the YouPorn videos more precisely embody the 'documentary impulse' of pornography, as theorized by Hansen, Needham, and Nichols (1991), translated into a fragmented YouTube format. Their presumed proximity to 'real life' works to ground these images, which enables the reification of their gender ideology through a denial of the phantasmatic support (in the form of the

‘pornoscript’) that organizes the sexual performances and their visualization on the YouPorn screen.

When invoking the concept of ‘ideology’ here, I am not referring to its transcendental manifestation, in which a moral authority installs its prohibitions (in the form of laws and regulations) in order to enforce a universal conception of proper sexual conduct from the top down. Instead, I believe one can witness an *immanent* embodied ideology at work on YouPorn. Its participants are facilitated to explore their sexuality and exhibit every visible fraction of it, in the pursuit of a hedonistic, narcissistic individuality and pleasure. The ‘sexual self’ is realized by making it available for continuous surveillance, in search of the visual ‘truth’ of sexual bodies and their pleasures. This generates a scopic regime in which the explicit injunction to ‘Enjoy!’ is embedded in the implicit ideological imperative to produce knowledge about sex and sexual difference, extending the ‘scientia sexualis’ to Web 2.0. It is within this framework that YouPorn can be understood as a user-generated confessional technology, soliciting its participants for ever increasing amounts of visual disclosure. Additionally, this is also the point where YouPorn manifests itself as a site where (amateur) pornography, participatory online culture, and the representation/fetishation of ‘reality’ converge to maintain a politically conservative gender ideology.

While I principally agree with authors like Jacobs, Attwood and Lehman, who assert that the internet can provide representational space for sexual cultures and individuals whom have previously been marginalized by mainstream cultural production, I would warn against an overly optimistic appreciation of the contemporary internet landscape and its opportunities. With an ever-increasing amount of web space acquired by multinational media conglomerates, Web 2.0 has witnessed a return to user participation under corporate control and it is not likely that marginal sexual practices will be able to thrive in these spaces. Although YouPorn has not (yet) been purchased by one of the porn industry moguls, its enormous popularity suggests that this might change in the near future. Currently, the site reflects mainstream pornography’s enduring popular appeal, with little evidence to sustain the hope for a proliferation of alternative sexual representations. Individuals with a proclivity for the ‘abject’ thus see themselves retreating to the peripheral cultural spaces on the Web, from where they form heteronormativity’s ‘constitutive outside’ (Butler, 1993). It is from this position that the relations between representation, emancipation, and sexual citizenship will continue to be negotiated in an effort to challenge the dominant scopic regimes and their hegemonic gender ideology. Additionally, I propose a healthy dose of skepticism towards any form of cultural production that claims a privileged relationship to ‘reality’. While I concur with

Lehman (2007) that there is a critical ethico-political significance in the representational struggle to define what can count as 'real' and 'authentic' sexual experience, this study has argued that a claim to the 'real' can equally serve to reify a gender ideology that is in fact counter-progressive.

Postscript: the pornoscopic sublime

In order not to write off YouPorn as a monolithic bastion of heterosexist, male-dominated representation, I want to conclude by stressing that some videos do contain images that deviate from the normative repertoire. These instances usually involve a camera that is stationary for the whole duration of the clip, so that there are no close up 'meat' or 'cum' shots, and a woman that is noticeably in control of the interactions. The men in these videos can be seen elaborately performing cunnilingus ('Full length amateur porn - 41 min'), or exhibiting pleasure through facial expressions ('Amateur couple having sex'). Nevertheless, I would like to argue that the most subversive moments arise when bodies are *not* represented, or rather, become unrepresentable. This phenomenon, which embodies a ' pornoscopic sublime', repeatedly transpires when the camera gets too close to its object-body in a failed attempt to visually capture it. This failure results in a temporary distortion of the screen, obscuring the indexicality of the bodies within the frame. I have already pointed to such an incident in the first video discussed above, but its most expressive incarnation can be found in the clip 'Amateur wife deepthroat her husbands cock'. Here, the once discernable bodies emulsify into what can best be described as an abstract landscape of flesh tones.

In these instances, the scrutinized body is able to resist representation and escapes its entanglement in the scopic regime. Instead of an indexical *representation* of gendered bodies, the spectator is confronted with an amorphous *presentation*, a grotesque formless object on the screen (reminiscent of the Kantian 'Unform'). These moments of digital sublimity interrupt the 'frenzy of the visible' through a rupture of the screen and substitute the spectator's visual pleasure for what Lacan has termed 'jouissance': an uneasy amalgamation of pleasure and pain, grounded in the fascinated inability to apprehend what is before him/her and what will come next. It is during these moments of ambiguity that the unskilled amateurism of many YouPorn videos might prove to be a productive force in the destabilization of dominant modes of visuality and the social control they assert.

Notes

¹ It is outside the scope of this article to discuss at length the role of the internet in the development of the sex industry, and vice versa. For an overview, see Fredrick Lane's *Obscene Profits: The Entrepreneurs of Pornography in the Cyber Age* (2001). For now, it is important to note that the sex industry has been instrumental in the development of new internet technologies, most notably the advancement of streaming video applications.

² These terms denote the 'independent', or 'alternative', pornographic/erotic websites that operate below the radar of the mainstream porn industry and often develop in explicit opposition to its aesthetic and economic norms. However, as I discuss later, the industry has since co-opted these alternative aesthetic values so that a distinction between the two is often a difficult exercise.

³ See www.suicidegirls.com and www.nofauxxx.com.

⁴ I argue that attempts to determine whether these representations feature actual amateurs are not only infeasible but also largely irrelevant. They are infeasible because of the highly problematic nature of the relation between 'amateur' and 'professional' in the context of pornography (when does the amateur become professional and how can one tell by viewing?). They are also irrelevant because the crucial issue concerning 'amateur' porn in this particular study is the aesthetic claim to authenticity and the presumed proximity to the 'real', rather than the 'behind the scenes' ontological status of the participants involved.

⁵ 'Scientia sexualis' is a term used by Foucault (1978) to describe the scientific organization of sexual practices, predominantly in the fields of medicine and psychiatry, which commenced in the 19th century.

⁶ For a detailed ranking and traffic overview, see http://www.alexa.com/data/details/traffic_details/youporn.com (consulted: November, 2008).

⁷ In relation to this content, it is important to note another similarity between YouTube and YouPorn: while both websites feature user-generated content, this material can effectively be divided into user-created content and user-distributed content. The difference is that while users on both websites are enabled to upload and distribute videos, the contents of these videos are not necessarily created by the users themselves, but are instead 'remediated' (Bolter and Grusin, 1999). In the context of YouTube, many users distribute content created by others (either professional media productions or amateur footage), which is then sometimes 'remixed' or 'mashed-up' with other materials. Although these sorts of creative practices do not seem to occur on YouPorn, many of the uploaded videos on the website feature recycled clips from (copyrighted) professional releases, varying from high-end productions to cheap 'amateur' footage. As stated before, this makes a clear distinction between 'genuine' amateur and 'professional' amateur clips unattainable (Esch & Mayer, 2008).

⁸ AdultFriendFinder is the world's largest adult social network and a place where people looking for sexual adventures can post contact ads on their profiles.

⁹ For instance, think of the surveillance cameras that were often visible during episodes of the now famous 'reality' TV show Big Brother.

Postscript to chapter six: assessing the YouPorn study

If there is one area where gender, sexuality, embodiment and new media technology converge, it is the vast topography of internet pornography. Next to the nearly infinite number of professional websites, the distribution of internet pornography has always depended on 'do-it-yourself' networks of users engaged in sharing and uploading their materials (see chapter six). For these reasons, it was clear that my project should include a case study of user-generated pornography to follow up on the MySpace study. I started my investigation of YouPorn in May 2008 and by the end of January 2009 I submitted the final manuscript to *Convergence*, an international journal focusing on new media technologies and their relationship to culture and society. At the beginning of July 2009 I received a 'revise and resubmit' assessment, which has increased the likelihood of a future publication (especially given the fact that the suggested revisions require no profound changes to the manuscript's argumentation). In this postscript, I would like to devote some attention to the study's position in relation to the other case studies assembled in this dissertation, especially pertaining to their respective objects of analysis.

While the YouPorn study focuses on the dissertation's central themes of gender, sexuality and embodiment, and examines the ways that these are visually performed in user-generated video clips on YouPorn, there are two aspects in which the study deviates from the preceding three case studies. First, whereas those three studies deal with users' individual and collective performances that are enacted through the various forms of digital content they generate on the respective platforms, this study analyzes the performances that take place in the uploaded video material. Thus, instead of focusing on the *online performance* of gender, sexuality and embodiment, the YouPorn study looks at the online representation of *physical performances* of gender, sexuality and embodiment. Second, while the 'performers' in these videos may use YouPorn to distribute their own productions (as amateur pornographers), the videos are also often uploaded by third parties. This entails a provisional distinction between the *user of YouPorn* and the *'performer' in the YouPorn videos*. I already addressed this issue in a note (#7) at the end of the article, in which I discuss how user-generated content can be divided into 'user-created content' and 'user-distributed content'. Because of the prevalence of 'remediation' (Bolter and Grusin, 1999), or the 'recycling' of existing content on YouPorn, any attempt to discriminate between videos that contain 'actual' user-created amateur porn and those that are remediated (professional) productions is bound to result in speculation at best. Yet as I argue in another note (#4), the purpose of this study has never been to

interrogate the 'real' status of the participants in these 'amateur' videos, but instead to examine how this 'reality' is visually/aesthetically performed and to relate these practices to the embodied performances of gender and sexuality on the digital screen. Even though the recordings of these performances might not have been *created* by the users of YouPorn, they are still the ones who *distribute* the videos through its digital database, thus qualifying them as 'user-generated content'.

Additionally, and in conjunction with my reflections on the previous case studies, I want to emphasize the role of new (and old) media technologies in the process of producing these 'representations'. While the material dimension of the uploaded video clips is a recurring theme in the study, it is never fully explicated or worked out in detail. Nevertheless, the analysis has pointed to the numerous ways in which media technologies are employed to construct a certain visual framework that delineates the 'amateur porn' genre. Instead of hiding the materiality of the medium, it is exhibited through various forms of 'performer-camera interaction' (on-screen) and crude editing practices (off-screen – see chapter six). Add to this the material infrastructure of the YouPorn interface, which facilitates users to upload, annotate and access the videos in a particular way, and it becomes clear that these videos are more than mere 'representations' of sexual performances. Rather, they are highly specific sociotechnical and aesthetic objects attuned to producing a certain sense of amateurism and 'real sex', while remaining tightly structured around a regulative visual 'pornoscript'. It is this focus on the performative engagement of gendered 'representational' practices and new media technologies that ties this case study to the others in this dissertation. Chapter seven will further discuss the practical and theoretical consequences of this engagement, by comparatively assessing the outcomes from all four case studies.