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Monstrous Resonances: Affect and Animated Pornography

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Abstract

As a media genre, pornography aims to move the bodies of those watching, reading, and listening through depictions of bodies moving. Such motion, or animation of bodies, can be conceptualized through the concept of resonance as a dynamic sensory relation of varying intensity, rhythm, and speed where the affective and the emotional cohere and which becomes registered in bodies as they move from one state to another. This chapter argues for the productivity of the concept of resonance over that of identification in studies of pornography through an exploration of animated pornography. In their depictions of monstrous, impossible bodies, hyperbolic scenes of domination and submission, Japanese hentai and 3D monster porn both follow the representational conventions and push them on overdrive. The stiffness of character's motions and gestures, combined with their affectless facial expressions and regularly fantastic embodiments leave little for viewers to literally identify with. Since that which people enjoy in pornography may be disconnected from their sexual preferences, as practiced with other people, the notion of resonance opens up avenues for addressing gaps and frictions emerging between pornographic preferences and sexual identities. In doing so, resonance helps in conceptualizing the appeal of pornography beyond the notion of identification.

Pornography depicts bodies moving with the aim of moving the bodies of those watching, listening, or reading from one state to another—to turn them on. The carnal, often visceral aesthetic of pornography zooms in on human bodies, their parts, orifices, and excretions, as well as on their interconnections driven by the quest for physical pleasure. Encounters with pornography involve instances of sensory proximity where one becomes moved by images, and conscious of the power that they hold. These intimacies may be desirable, surprising, unwanted, or disturbing, and the sense of them being “dangerously effective at moving us” (Attwood 1) challenges modes of academic analysis premised on more distanced observation. Annette Kuhn notes how “the capacity of pornography to provide gut reactions [...] makes it peculiarly difficult to deal with analytically” (21). Rephrasing the question, gut reactions evoked by pornography require analytical approaches that do not assume the mastery of the viewer over the image, the reader over the text, or the user over the medium, but rather account for the carnal resonances that emerge in such encounters.

According to thesaurus definitions, resonance refers to “the quality in a sound of being deep, full and reverberating,” to “the ability to evoke or suggest images, memories, and emotions,” and to “oscillation induced in a physical system when it is affected by another

system that is itself oscillating at the right frequency.”¹ In academic conference discourse, resonance refers to arguments and points that relate to, or somehow echo those made by others—possibly in ways difficult to precisely pin down. In new materialist theory, the resonance has been used for discussing affective, precognitive intensity separate from emotions as “intensity owned and recognized” (Massumi 25-30; Shouse 2005). Sara Ahmed (2010: 32) argues for the factual inseparability of the two: rather than being “after-thoughts” to the affective, emotions “shape how bodies are moved by the worlds they inhabit.” Connected to personal memories and social norms alike, emotions orient encounters with different objects, tinting them in particular hues, affecting and attuning their intensities. This is evident in how the murky tapestry of sexual shame drawing from Judeo-Christian legacy, gendered relations of power, histories of racist depiction, notions of obscenity, and the lingering shadows of bodily disgust may all interlace with sexual interest, excitement, and arousal in encounters with pornography, either curbing or amplifying their intensities.

In encounters with porn, affective intensities may grab one’s attention, resonate, and create novel connections to before one is aware of any of this. Resonance, as deployed here, implies connectivity and contact between objects, ideas, and people as they affect one another: it is a dynamic sensory relation of varying intensity, rhythm and speed, where the affective and the emotional stick and cohere, and that becomes registered in bodies as they move from one state to another (see Paasonen 2011; 2013). Some pornography has strong resonance, some weaker, and most of it likely fails to resonate at all. Some images hold a viewer in their grab whereas others merely slide by. Meanwhile, all resonance alters in form and intensity over time, as well as depending on who one is encountering the images, how, where, and when.

The appeal of pornography is largely connected to its visceral and excessive modality, that which can be defined as the “physical residue in the image that resists absorption into symbol, narrative, or expository discourse” (MacDougall 18). As a body genre (Williams 1991) “rooted in bodily effect” (Dyer 27), it is simultaneously literal and hyperbolic in its carnal displays. In porn, different bodies are juxtaposed with one another as lavishly as possible according to their gender, size, color, and age; identity categories are routinely exaggerated and performed on overdrive. The displays of desire, lust, and sexual satiation are no more subtle. Such hyperbole is perhaps nowhere more present than in animated pornography where, unbound by physics or biology, enormous bodies penetrate tiny ones and human-like bodies sprout novel sexual organs. The popularity of Japanese hentai—pornographic anime—and the more recent emergence of 3D monster cartoon porn catering to Western audiences, challenge assumptions of porn preferences as being causally tied to, or indicative of sexual preferences, likes, or identities.

As I argue below, animated porn equally disturbs conceptualizations of viewing pleasure as premised on identification with characters according to axes of similarity or psychological depth. The characters in question are, after all, cartoons, and as such flat rather than round: exaggerated, stylized, and not necessarily human in their physique. Animated porn is not tied to documentary realism of the kind that has been identified as central to the genre’s appeal in making visible motions and sensations that otherwise remain hidden (Williams 1989), even if it occasionally aims to approximate the aesthetics of photorealism.

¹ See http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/american_english/resonance; <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/resonance>.

All this makes hentai and 3D monster porn productive tools for thinking through the appeal of pornography and its affective transmission. Starting with a brief contextualization of hentai and monster pornography, this chapter moves to discussing the assumed interconnections of sexual identities and pornographic preferences, as well as the centrality of identification in and for academic accounts of pornographic, all the while building an argument for the productivity of the notion of affective resonance in explaining the force and fascination of pornography.

Affective and Affectless

Hentai was considered too exotic and extreme for North American DVD distribution in the 1990s (Dahlqvist and Vigilant 2004), yet it found its way to the palette of online porn during the following decade. Google searches for both hentai and 3D monster porn peaked in 2012 and by 2017 hentai was the second most searched term on the leading porn video aggregator site, Pornhub, “cartoon” holding the 12th place (Pornhub 2018). Hentai and hentai-influenced animated porn have, in sum, grown mainstream. Drawing from hentai, the much less extensive traditions of Western cartoon porn, and machinima (3D videos generated in real time with game engines and additional software), monster toon porn originates from the efforts of amateur fans, studios, and crowd-funded enterprises alike, hence balancing the user-generated with the commercially produced. As is the case with hentai, its imageries are characteristically fantastic and excessive in their displays of sexual encounters of the impossible and improbable kind: in penetrative sex between miniature elves and colossal demons, tiny teenagers and hulky zombies, in their scenarios of control and submission, and in their ample displays of lust and disgust.

The bodies of animated porn are immaterial as fictitious, digital renderings that become perceptible as pixels on a screen bearing no indexical relation to physical bodies existing in specific time and place. The technical quality of these images ranges from the compressed to high definition: some bodies are somewhat sketchily drawn while others have been modeled with 3D photorealistic care rendering the pores, luminosity, and stickiness of their skin readily visible. Some bodily motions are jerky and mechanical, while others are almost graceful, their physical properties ranging from the markedly cartoonish, stylized, and exaggerated to the glossy and the streamlined displayed in high definition. In their different materializations, these imageries build on the visual conventions of hentai, “dwelling on unconventional erotic practices” and regularly featuring “rape and nonconsensual sexual violence, and often preposterous scenarios” (Ortega-Bena 20; fig. 1).

[Insert Figure 1]

Figure 1 Space scene, uploaded as “3D 3way and some hard Monster fucking” on <https://xhamster.com/>. Screenshot by author.

These dynamics are encapsulated in scenes of tentacle rape, itself a trope with a rich history in Japanese visual culture (see Screech 2009; Buckland 2010; Kazutaka 2013; Napier 2005: 21). Hentai is rife with “demonic phallus incarnate”: demonic characters that are “preternaturally huge, covered with rippling muscles, and inevitably equipped with an enormous penis (and often with phallic tentacles as well)” (Napier 65, 79). In 3D monster porn, these dynamics are often combined with female video game characters—as is the products of Studio F.O.W.

known for their high-end, crowd-funded machinima porn (see Hernandez 2015; Paasonen 2018; fig. 2). These videos extend the game world into the realm of pornographic excess, reimagine it, and add a further layer to experiences accumulated through game-play. Here, resonance emerges between human bodies, animated characters, video game consoles, and the screens of personal devices, facilitated by network connectivity and myriad networks of media production and distribution.

[Insert Figure 2]

Figure 2 *Kunoichi 2: Fall of the Shrinemaiden* by Studio F.O.W. Screenshot by author.

Occupied by giant worm-like creatures, demons, centaurs, elves, ogres, dragons, zombies, spiders, insects, slugs, extraterrestrial creatures, and amalgamations of humans and bugs, hentai and 3D monster porn are posthuman in a range of ways: in their hybrid protagonists that often metamorphose from one shape to another, in their computer-generated origins, as well as in their mechanical displays of sexual acts. The bodies of user-generated monster toon porn in particular often move back and forth in their penetrative acts with notably little variation in gesture or motion. The videos repeat the same identical motions, expressions and sound effects over and over again, to an effect that can be numbing inasmuch as it may be hypnotic or arousing. Despite the unlimited possibilities that computer animation affords in imagining characters engaging in acts impossible for actual human bodies to accomplish, or even to survive, clips also remain tied up in rather predictable ways of imagining sexual scenarios and gendered power dynamics. Independent of the specific bodies or species involved, narrative action focuses firmly on vaginal, oral and anal penetrative sex climaxing in money shots. All kinds of creatures sport anthropomorphic penises, and semen flows freely.

In both hentai and 3D monster porn, sexual scenarios are overwhelmingly ones of domination and submission, often of the non-consensual sort. With the exception of *futanari*, inter-gender pornography where primary sexual characteristics are played with, it is generally the female bodies—young, fit, beautiful and human-like as they tend to be—that are pushed to their boundaries of physical endurance by the sheer size of the penises, tentacles, or objects inserted in their cavities, yet manage to bend, flex and accommodate (fig. 3-4). Writing on animated pornography, José B. Capino notes how it allows for constant metamorphoses of “unreal, imaginary, fabricated, virtual” bodies unburdened by gravity, causality, or the limits of what physical human bodies can do, or be (53-54).

[Insert Figures 3-4]

Figure 3 Fantastic embodiments in “3D Futanari Collection 3” on <https://xhamster.com/>. Screenshot by author.

Figure 4 Monstrous encounter framed as female sexual fantasy, uploaded as “3D Animation triple feature Hardcore 3D Porn” on <https://xhamster.com/>. Screenshot by author.

On the one hand, these scenarios are markedly affective in their visceral attention to (more or less fantastic) bodily detail and in the dynamics of disgust, amusement, pain, pleasure, and

lust. On the other hand, the monsters and their more or less human partners are markedly void of affect in their facial expressions and predictable bodily movements. Independent of differences in technical execution and image resolution, the animated characters' facial expressions tend to be vacuous: when audible, their verbal output is limited to the repetitive loops of grunts, sighs, squeals, and whimpers largely detached from the motion of bodies, mouths, and faces. Like elsewhere in animated pornographic film, human voice is both an extension and displacement of the animated body (Capino 64) that creates as much distance as it yields grains of proximity. Mariana Ortega-Brena points out that hentai builds on the more general trend of emotional inexpression, or visual blankness, in Japanese art and film. There is little explicit or outward expression of emotion and animated bodies tend to be equally impassive. All this results in layers of spectacle and excess, blankness and inexpression deployed in conveying the markedly fantastic and out-of-the-ordinary (Ortega-Brena 20-21). Ambivalent expressive blankness accompanies markedly visceral displays of bodies stretched and mauled in scenes simultaneously rife with affect and void of it.

Curious Attractions

In a 2017 survey conducted by the Finnish National Broadcasting Company as background information for the lifestyle TV program, *Jenny+*, which I have recently had access to, circa 2,500 women outlined their porn preferences and dislikes. Although the specifics connected to the survey methodology and the range of responses received are impossible to unpack in the confines of this essay, I would like to raise some points from the material in order to address the appeal of both animated pornography and scenarios of submission and control among female consumers as a means of paving way to a discussion on identification, and the problems that I see it entailing in accounts of pornographic preference. It may seem obvious to connect the popularity of hentai to *otaku* masculinity (see Galbraith 2014) and that of 3D monster porn to the toxicity and misogyny of game cultures (Consalvo 2012; Chess 2015), namely to identify its consumers as markedly male and homosocial. The popularity of both animated pornography and hardcore scenarios of submission, domination, and non-consent among female consumers nevertheless points to the necessity of expanding analysis towards the complexity, as well as occasional ambivalence, of pornographic resonance.

In the open-ended survey question inquiring after porn preferences that the respondents themselves considered odd or weird inasmuch as hot, many referred to hentai as allowing for pleasure in scenes of submission and humiliation without the ethical baggage connected to porn labor: "In cartoons, one is not so tied up with the performers' physique and limits of nature, and for example stuffing too large things into too small places doesn't cause the reaction of 'ouch, that must hurt'"; "It's easier for me to watch anime porn as it's pure drawn fantasy and no one is really being hurt or humiliated and, yes, I watch tentacle porn. Metaphorical details give room for creating one's own fantasies and unusually large breasts or penis do not matter"; "In the world of hentai, all kinds of sex and fantasies are clearly fantasies—in acted porn being forced into sex, for example, is not arousing but distressing"; "I find hentai porn weird to say the least but I like watching it since I don't have to wonder if the people are on drugs, drunk, coerced, or all of the above."

In these responses, hentai—as well as cartoon porn more generally—allowed for fantasy and pleasures taken in hyperbolic bodies and power play. In hentai-infused monster cartoon porn, demons and zombies function as proxies to human bodies while effectively shifting the action into the fantasy realms of dungeons, castles and forests. Pleasures taken in

such scenes challenge assumptions of pornographic preferences as bound to specific sexual orientations and categories of identity, given that these can scarcely be decoded from the figures on screen. Notably many survey respondents wrote of enjoying hardcore scenarios of domination, submission, and even rape both within and beyond animated content, all the while emphasizing that, if experienced in real life, these would be among the worst things imaginable, and in no way desirable or acceptable. In many instances, enjoyment taken in such fantasies was in direct conflict with one's sense of self in terms of gender politics and sexual preferences alike, in ways that created a sense of ambivalence felt towards the grab of resonant media images as sources of sexual excitement.

According to a routine line of thinking, watching a porn video is indicative of that video somehow communicating to, or speaking of, that person's sexual preference, bent, and identity: watching gay porn, for example, would not precisely make one gay, yet might speak of inner gayness manifesting itself. A preference for any other porn category, let alone a distinct niche, would, according to this logic, similarly communicate issues concerning sexual identity that, following Michel Foucault's analysis of modern perception of sexuality (1990), entails a more profound truth concerning one's inner self, or being. It was possibly due to this assumption that the survey respondents articulated pornographic likes deviating from their sexual preferences as weird or even shameful. In a recurrent pattern, scenes of the kind that one would not want to participate in oneself—ranging from tentacle-rape to extreme humiliation, BDSM, urination, anal, lesbian, straight, and gay male sex—stood out as puzzling.

It is however not uncommon for what people like doing in their sexual lives to differ from that which they enjoy watching for the purpose of sexual arousal, even if this goes against the assumption that the two are continuous, or at least contiguous. According to available empirical studies, women identifying as straight and queer alike broadly consume gay porn, as do men self-identifying as "totally straight" (Neville 2015; Robards 2018). Consumers of different ages report watching pornography out of interest, sexual arousal, curiosity, and fun. People describe watching things they like or would want to do, those that they do not want or cannot do, as well as coming across things without much planning or premeditation involved, possibly in search of serendipitous thrills (e.g., McKee et al. 2008; Smith et al. 2015; Paasonen et al.) All this means that sexual selves are multi-faceted and possibly contradictory in their fantasies, actions, preferences, and interests, as well as in the ways that these are distributed in encounters occurring in the flesh, through screens, and in combinations thereof.

The gaps between pornographic preferences and the kinds of sexual encounters one finds pleasurable makes evident the need to seek out other conceptualizations for the pleasures taken in porn than those based on the continuity of sexual desires, orientations, and fantasies. I suggest that the notion of resonance opens up avenues for addressing the potential gaps and conflicts emerging between that which people enjoy doing in their sexual engagements with others and the imageries that they consume for the pursuit of sexual arousal on a more solitary basis.

Identification and Resonance

As both precognitive and cognitive motion, resonance evokes a different mode of thinking about engagement with screen-based media than those opened up through the notion of identification. Broadly deployed in studies of literary fiction, film, and media, identification

has become “a kind of commonsense term” (Stacey 130), particularly in approaches building on psychoanalytical theory. Martin Barker further points out that the notion of identification has been deployed, in different variations, since the mid-twentieth century in communication research, with the assumption that if “audiences ‘identify’ with particular media characters, they may come to ‘take part’ in the story to a depth where they become open to its ‘values’, or ‘messages’” (354). In this framework, identification describes the impact, or effect, of media representations on their viewers, no matter whether the approach is subtle or bound to models of media effects.

The effects of pornography on the people consuming it are seldom seen as positive, and more likely as corrosive. Anti-pornography rhetoric has, for a number of decades, drawn firmly on the model of media effects to unpack the damage and harm that pornography does on levels both individual and social. In journalistic, scholarly, and activist accounts, both young men and women are recurrently seen as vulnerable to the biased imageries and roles of pornography that are seen to carry over to their sexual expectations and fantasies. In this line of thinking, people learn to want and prefer certain sexual acts and scenarios by consuming them on the screen and then emulate them in their fantasies and physical encounters. This assumes continuity between pornographic scenarios, sexual fantasies, interests, orientations, practices, and identities—even if the issue may be equally one of disconnections and discontinuities. Such continuity assumes proximity between things seen, heard, preferred, and enacted within the logic of identification. In studies of porn, viewers have been assumed to have “a necessary close identification” with the bodies on the screen (Martin 194) while encounters with all kinds of pornography have been discussed through the notion of identification (e.g., Williams 1989; Patterson 2004; Moore and Weissbein 2010). At the same time, there is not necessarily much to identify with in the characters and narratives on offer, only considering the hyperbolic, posthuman scenarios of hentai.

Despite its seemingly ubiquitous uses in cinema, media, and communication studies, the notion of identification is primarily theoretical and operates as a premise of sorts without being grounded in, or articulated through empirical inquiry. Critiquing the concept through the findings of a massive reception study, Barker argues for distinguishing between identification, absorption, and recognition—as in instances of relating characters on the screen to people other than oneself (355-356). According to Barker, enjoyment taken in a scene or a specific character, for example, should not be hastily conflated with a process of identification, not least given that the term itself has, in its broad range of uses, become slippery, elusive, and therefore ultimately obscure. Reframing identification as fascination, Jackie Stacey suggests that, rather than being somehow automatic process or requiring similarity between the self and the characters depicted, it may equally concern more elusive moments, motions, clothes, settings, props, movements, or dialog (25).

The concept of resonance opens up ways of addressing the corporeal, sensory appeal of media images, and hence the pleasures that emerge from them. In order to resonate with one another, objects or actors need not be human, or in any way similar. They merely need to relate and connect. This relating can involve fascination, absorption, or recognition, or it may be registered as more ephemeral pull or interest. While resonance involves affective intensity preceding cognitive processing, it is equally descriptive of relations between people and things that build and transform over time and where the affective, the sensory, and the cognitive intermesh. The visceral immediacy of affect cannot be necessarily easily drawn apart from more self-conscious ways of relating to things seen and heard. Similarly pointing

out the intermeshing of the reflective and the unreflective in film viewing, Barker argues that self-awareness is not necessarily lost in moments of absorption that “are simultaneously moments of reflection, and also moments of preparation, recollection-in-advance, account-building, and role-management” (357). Resonant instances can, in other words, be complex in their nuances and orientations: while these encounters involve gut reactions rife with affect, this is not all they entail.

Ambivalent Affect

As a frame for conceptualizing encounters between people and media images, resonance further points to the material factors of media technologies, to the fleshy substance of the human body, as well as to the texture and grain of images and sounds. It is descriptive of the interactive nature of such attachments, as well as of the power of sounds and images to touch and move us, to arouse our senses, memories, feelings, and interest alike. Resonance is not synonymous with identification, nor is it an issue of projection. Resonant frequencies are sought when choosing a Netflix show, picking a film to see in a cinema, visiting an art exhibition or a theatre show, browsing Twitter, or searching for monster cartoon pornography on a video aggregator site. Resonances are equally discovered by accident as particular images and sounds grab one’s attention and somehow stick. Rather than mere “good vibrations,” resonances can be experienced as disturbing kinds of dissonances, as sharp, revolting shocks, or as waves of amusement and lingering curiosity. They may entail heterogeneous and ambivalent affective responses, as in disgust feeding interest, or in shame amplifying sexual titillation.

The resonant and the dissonant may well be difficult to tell apart while the interplay between different qualities and intensities of experience can be central to the dynamics and motivations of engaging with media content to start with. When it “works,” horror startles and even terrifies while lifestyle and makeover television aim to evoke a range of sensations from curiosity to shame, interest, amusement, embarrassment, and disgust (e.g., Williams 1991; Skeggs and Wood 2012; Coleman 2012). Porn may sexually arouse, astonish, amuse, or disgust in ambivalent affective registers. All this involves both human and nonhuman agency, connections and attachments between people, ideas, images, technologies, and physical spaces. Encountering the tentacle monsters of hentai on the screen of a conference lecture hall as part of an academic talk frames and attunes the experience in different ways than browsing for the same content with one’s personal device for the purposes of sexual arousal, or being shown the same images by a friend with the intent of shared amusement and astonishment. While all such encounters may resonate, this does not mean that their qualities of experience are similar. The issue is not of transmission in the sense of pornographic images impacting viewers but one of animation, of bodies moving from one state to another, occurring in specific time and place. Context, in sum, matters.

Pornography is a particularly evocative object for thinking about the resonances of media culture, given that the genre—in its myriad contemporary shapes and forms—basically aims to bodily move and touch those engaging with it in markedly fleshy ways. Video porn tries to convey how sexual acts feel by translating the sensory to the visual and the auditory. Since the taste, smell, and feel of sex escape mediation through audiovisual means, inter-sensory translation is unlikely to completely work in mediating a range of intensity and motion experienced during sex. Consequently, some images and sounds stick whereas others slide by with little viscosity, independent of whether the bodies moving on the screen are

those of human actors, digitally rendered 3D, photorealistic characters, or boldly cartoonish creatures. Recognition of bodies and acts occupying the screen, or even fascination felt towards them, does not imply affective intensity.

Human bodies are shaped by historically layered skills, experiences, and sensations that bring forth particular ways of relating to other bodies and resonating with them (Kozel 24-26). As people experience and experiment with their bodies, the bodies of others, and bodies of representation, memories and sensory imprints accumulate into somatic archives—embodied imprints and sensory memory traces—on which we draw upon, in ways both voluntary and involuntary, when encountering images, sounds, objects, or people. Associated with the particularities of places, people, and moments, somatic archives accumulate over time. They may resonate pleasantly as the stuff of fantasy, or evoke sharp dissonance that, despite its unpleasantness, refuses to keep at bay (see Paasonen 2011, 202-204). These archives carry traces of the past, both opening up and closing down future connections with the world by attuning the body's affective capacities. In the context of pornography, embodied memory traces orient relations to the images of bodies moving and being moved: instances of resonance make it possible to physically register some of their intensity.

The resonances of pornography may please, displease, perplex, surprise, or elude specific definition. Viewers can imagine how things might feel or matter on the basis of their somatic memories of touch, texture, heat, taste, friction, and motion. Following film scholar Vivian Sobchack (2004), this could be considered carnal identification, yet attachment of this kind can be contingent and fleeting, moving between detachment and resonance, proximity and distance, similarity and difference. It is not necessary for the viewer to identify with any particular character on the screen, or to sense a physical similarity between one's own body and those put on display. A monster porn clip featuring a towering, winged demon or a giant slug, may resonate in the sense of moving the viewing body from one state to another (fig. 5). Such attachments can be volatile in the connections and disconnections they afford, and they come imprinted and underpinned by technologies of production, distribution, and consumption, as well as the specific style, texture, and grain of the images and sounds consumed.

[Insert Figure 5]

Figure 5 *Porn of the Rings 3D* with Sméagol on <https://xhamster.com/>. Screenshot by author.

The imageries of hentai and monster toons compete in the attention economy of online pornography by catering impossible, endlessly pliable, mechanical, and metamorphosing bodies in exaggerated displays of (nonhuman) gender differences, relations of control and submission. These visceral, fantastic imageries are as if designed to grab user attention through resonance and patterns of dissonance alike, even if there is no guarantee of such connections emerging. The bodies imagined are more or less human-like in their genital markers, and hence not impossible to relate to on the basis of somatic imprints. At the same time, their motions move pornographic scenes of non-consent and domination to their extremes, and well beyond that which actual human bodies can act out, without physical trauma and harm, allowing for freedom of fantasy.

Resonance works in and through somatic archives that remain open towards surprise,

transformation, and novelty. All this involves affection, “that part or aspect of the inside of our body which we mix with the image of external bodies” (Bergson 60). For Henri Bergson, perception and sensation are inseparable while the virtual actions of bodies are “impregnated” by actual ones:

I see plainly how external images influence the image that I call my body: they transmit movement into it. And I also see how this body influences external images: it gives back movement to them. My body is, then, in the aggregate of the material world, an image which acts like other images, receiving and giving back movement, with, perhaps, this difference only, that my body appears to choose, within certain limits, the manner in which it shall restore what it receives. (4-5)

In this line of thinking, drawing from Spinoza to Bergson, Gilles Deleuze and beyond, bodies are defined through their capacity to affect and to be affected: bodies, like things, become through and in their affective relations to the world (Massumi xvi). As Rebecca Coleman argues, “*it is the relations of affect that produce a body’s capacities*” (2009: 43; emphasis in the original). Pornographic images animate the bodies of those watching while these bodies animate the images they encounter in return, making them stand out from the mass and bulk of available content and possibly inviting further engagement. This movement happens through and as resonance that is sometimes undetectably faint, sometimes seemingly overwhelming, and sometimes paradoxical.

Qualities of Encounter

Pornography operates in the oscillating registers of documentary realism, predictability, and hyperbolic excess. This involves complex commute between gut reactions and distanced observation, curious glancing and incredulous blinking, insistent grabbing, and haphazard glimpsing. Generic, theatrical, and spectacular depictions of bodily orifices, liquids and acts in extreme close-up may draw a viewer closer while repetitive, exaggerated, and distanced conventions work to push her away again (or vice versa). Proximity surfaces, or fails to surface, in encounters with images and sounds, modulated by the media technologies used in their production, distribution, and consumption. Ways of experiencing pornography move between different visual registers and modes of looking as attention shifts from close-up details of bodies, to whole body or long-shots, surprising juxtapositions and ruptures—this is equally the case with hentai as it is with film pornography.

Resonance, as examined in this chapter, entails dynamic relations between objects (their specific properties and affordances) and the particularity of the viewing bodies that shift and move from one encounter to another. These accumulate and layer as somatic archives that affect our ways of orienting in the world. This conceptualization differs from definitions of affect as separate from phenomenological, personal and social affectations (e.g., Massumi 2002; Shouse 2005). For new materialist scholars, phenomenological accounts of affect fail to address the level of force and sensation. When writing on images, analytical attention nevertheless regularly congeals on instances of resonance that these scholars in question have come to register (Shaviro 2010; Deleuze 2003; see also Brinkema 2014). Herein lies a methodological problem, for if such accounts are conceptualized and generalized as indicative of non-subjective intensity or potentiality, there is a risk of losing sight of the specificity of viewing bodies and context of encounter (Kyrölä 2014; Coleman 2009). Focusing on the

intensities and potentialities captured in processes of artistic creation, Deleuze sees resonance as confrontation and struggle between different sensations or elements: a coming together of sensations with different levels or zones that confront, as well as communicate with, one other (46, 67-69).

Similarly discussing art as producing and generating intensity and sensation, Elizabeth Grosz separates art from material production that gives rise to “pre-experienced sensations, sensations known in advance, guaranteed to affect in particular sad or joyful ways” (4). According to this argument, popular culture is unable to vibrate and therefore merits no interest in theorizations of affective intensities. Given that pornography is a genre conventionally defined through its perceived lack of any social, cultural or artistic value, and that it regularly flaunts its own lowly status in the hierarchies of culture, it would then seem to lack in any vibrations whatsoever. Resonance is an issue of properties and affordances: the different encounters that objects invite and the modes of analytical engagement that they afford or facilitate (the question being, what resonates with what). It is nevertheless a different thing to see potentialities as residing in specific images or media products as result of processes of artistic creation, due to the objects’ formal and aesthetic properties, or in accordance with their overall position within the cultural hierarchies of relevance and value. This means shifting attention away from encounters and relations between people, images, and media technologies to the level of form in ways that can say little of how such objects resonate and become sensed.

Following Spinoza, different people “can be affected in different ways by one and the same object, and one and the same man can be affected by one and the same object in different ways in different times” (133). In other words, there is little guarantee that others will be moved by the same images, scenes, and moments by which we find ourselves ever so impressed, that they will recognize the resonances we try to describe, or that the same image will affect us twice in quite the same way. For Silvan Tomkins, “There is literally no kind of object which has not historically been linked to one or another of the affects” (54). Consequently, any object may be attached to any affect, and vice versa (55). An image that grabs me is likely to leave another viewer cold, just as, on re-reading, a book I used to enjoy a decade ago now only evokes bored dismay. Intensities and qualities of resonance differ from one act of viewing to another. Such motion cannot be fixed by, or confined in, analysis based on formal properties alone. In other words, analysis focusing exclusively on pictorial, material, or representational aspects will fail to account for the quality of encounters with pornography. As affective intensity, resonance necessitates oscillation at the right frequency between entities that are appropriately tuned. These frequencies and qualities of encounter are in constant motion and hence involve an element of unpredictability and surprise.

It remains important to analyze and map the formal properties of images: how they are put together, how they work and circulate, as well as what elements they draw from. In the context of 3D monster cartoon porn, this means examining the histories and codes of hentai, the gendered dynamics of game cultures, the traditions of animated pornography, the platforms through which the video clips circulate, as well as the particular aesthetics, textures, and representational content of the clips themselves. Analysis of such affordances need not, however, lead to generalizations concerning either their effect on the viewing bodies or the affective intensities that animate encounters with them: one need not assume that *this* very image is to evoke *this* particular affect. Animated pornography, for example, may astonish and sexually arouse, disgust and amuse, bewilder and anger. Resonances are bound to be

different among fans who financially support Studio F.O.W.'s production efforts than among those coming across these videos with little preparation when exploring the selections of video aggregator sites. All kinds of pornography operate within the modes of excess, hyperbole, realness, repetition, and viscerality, yet, following Tomkins, these characteristics cannot be assumed to evoke any specific affect. Assuming something like this would risk a particular kind of formalism where affective potentiality is deciphered by analyzing an object, its properties and aesthetics without accounting for what it resonates with—who encounters it, how and where.

The notion of somatic archives—similarly to that of body image (e.g., Coleman 2009; Kyrölä 2014)—help to account for how affective resonances are marked and oriented by personal histories, experiences, traumas, tastes, and fantasies, ethical concerns and political investments, as well as how these resonances shape and orient ways of being in the world and relating to other bodies within it. While resonance is precognitive in the sense of preceding conscious processing (albeit intimately tied to it), the bodies resonating are historically specific and attuned in particular ways (Ahmed 2004; Coleman 2009: 1-2; Coleman 2012).

Rather than exploring affect as an impersonal force, I am interested in resonance as a connection through which bodies—human and nonhuman alike—move together, shape and affect one another. When resonating with one another, the representational and material properties of an image meet the layered, personal and corporeal histories of the viewing subject. Bearing in mind Spinoza's and Tomkins' points on the fluctuation and dynamic nature of affect, no two affective encounters with an image are ever identical for two different people anymore than they are for the same person encountering an image for the second, third, or fourth time.

When watching porn, the affective intensities of looking can be tangy or undetectably lame. Some images, films, and texts glide by, some remain inaccessible or uninteresting, while yet others involve visceral grab and grow magnetic through affective intensity. When working on pornography, such intensities shape acts of interpretation, pulling the viewer closer or pushing her further away again. Affective dynamics give rise to analytical affordance, potential means of engaging with and making sense of images through proximities and distances alike. Affective intensities open up analytical vistas while narrowing or even closing down others without such motion necessarily being consciously noticed. Such “discomforting commute” (Pearce 23) can feed a range of methodological approaches from the very closest of close analysis to distanced content description. When explored conceptually, it makes it possible to explore the affective dynamics between the viewer, the images and the technological networks that these are embedded in, and to grasp some of the force and appeal of pornography—both animated and not—as a media genre.

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