Going to Bed with a Camera:
On the Visualization of Sexuality and the Production of Knowledge

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Abstract
Many sexual encounters are nowadays photographed by the participants. The paper examines the photographed sex in the historical contexts of the visualization of sexuality, pleasure and desire; and the new norms of photographed self-documentation. Based on research conducted in Israel, I show that photographed sex produces new sorts of not only pleasure, but knowledge: about one's self, partner, sexuality and relationship. This “objective”, visual knowledge is often privileged over subjective, haptic knowledge. Photography also introduces new peformativities, encourage borrowing from media-representations of sex and rational self-improvement.

Key words
Knowledge, Photography, Pleasure, Porn, Reflexivity, Sexuality, Video, Visual Culture, Visualization

Sex has always been a site for production of pleasure and knowledge, yet the kinds of pleasure and knowledge produced are historically contingent. For example, as Foucault demonstrated, the quest to extract hidden truths concerning one's core of subjectivity from one's sexuality and establish subjectivity as sexuality's effect is emphatically modern. This article surveys contemporary practices of non-commercial sex photography in Israel. Video- and still-photography of sexual encounters has gradually become a mainstream practice. This paper explores how it turns sexuality into a production site of visual (and in some senses objective) knowledge produced by prosthetic vision-aids, transcending the subjective-somatic knowledge traditionally associated with carnal knowledge.

The study relies on online self-completed questionnaires. Respondents were recruited by messages left in Israeli sexuality-oriented web-forums, and by e-mail (in a snowball method, asking people to forward the request). This method was aimed at obtaining a large and heterogeneous group of respondents despite the topic's sensitivity. 60 respondents who were engaged in photographed sex filled the questionnaire (31 females, 29 males). They were asked detailed open questions concerning practices of sex-life documentation, archiving, sharing and viewing/watching the materials, and the subjective/emotional aspects of these practices. The data refers almost exclusively to mundane “home mode” photographed-sex (for partners' and self-consumption), which appears as much more common than “home porn” par excellence, aimed at wide audiences (mentioned only by one male respondent). The respondents' ages ranged from 18-50, ca three-fourths heterosexuals (others declared themselves as 'mostly-straight', 'bisexual', 'queer', etc.). Although representing various classes and occupations, the middle classes (hi-tech, academic, artistic, and managerial occupations) are over-represented. The survey data was supplemented by excerpts from in-depth interviews and other surveys conducted for a wider project on the sociology of photography, not focused on sexuality.

On the theoretical level, I wish to analyze practices of photographed sex in terms of their 'relation to the formation of a sensorium' (Hirshchkind, 2001) and production of knowledge. While practice theory made great progress in jettisoning culture-as-text models and intentionalist theories-of-action, it must now be honed to include cognition, perception, emotion and desire as integral dimensions of many socially- and historically-specific practices. My account of photographed sex problematizes knowledge and pleasures as contingent upon culturally-specific techniques, in a post-Foucauldian manner.
Pleasure and the Eye: a Brief History

In the 20th century, western sexuality turned visual. From encounters in the dark in which participants couldn’t see either their own bodies or their partners’, western sex turned into a visual spectacle, where visuality is no less important than tactility. In 18th-century erotica, sex usually took place in the dark or shadows, being 'less a visual and more a multi-sensuous encounter', in which men 'did not employ a mapping, unveiling, controlling, phallocentric gaze' (Harvey, 2001). In 19th-century bedrooms, 'the naked body was not regarded as a thing of beauty and joy, sex should take place in the dark', hence even the "gay" "naughty" 1890s sexual manuals cautioned that partners should never undress in front of each other' (Featherstone, 1991). The Kinsey reports reflect a transitory stage: In his survey, the preference for sex in the light was much less common than today. His data demonstrates that in the fifties, the visualization of desire and arousal was still typical of educated males (who more often consumed pornography), whereas the working classes still made love in the dark, or even without getting fully undressed (Kinsey, 1953a, 1953b). Nowadays, the shift has been completed: Sex in the light and pornography aren’t exclusively upper-middle-class, and the adjective ‘sexy’ has become standard for visually-exciting objects.

This change in interpersonal sexual practices didn't take place in a void. It was effected by wider cultural dynamics in psychology, media technologies, and the market-economy (e.g. advertising). Modern sexuality is not a product of confession alone (Foucault, 1978), but also of imagery. Psychology since Freud has utilized the rhetoric of Enlightenment, condemning the sins of sexual shame and guilt as unnatural feelings, dangerous to sexual and mental health. This rhetoric is echoed by contemporary psychologists and sexologists, who identify lovemaking in the dark as a symptom of shame and guilt (e.g. Tiefer, 2004:70-71; Hopson, 1995:156-158). For Freud, sexual visual pleasure is natural: people are equipped with a ‘scopophilic instinct’, just as they have erotogenic zones, and ‘visual impressions remain the most frequent pathway along which libidinal excitation is aroused’ (Freud, 1905).

Furthermore, interpersonal sexual praxis has been affected by the formation of a visual language for representing desire. This has happened since the identification of desire in general and sexual desire in particular with the visual was recognized as a potential economic engine by different industries: the film industry, the sex industry (from peep-shows to porn), and advertising (which throughout the 20th-century moved on a path of escalating eroticism, recommended by psychologists, thus increasing the cultural importance of the 'look': Featherstone, 1991; Sivulka, 2003). This argument concerning the visualization of sexuality may easily fit into wider macro-narratives on spectacularization of society and the reign of the image (as suggested by Gui Debor, Jean Baudrillard, and more recently in Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998: 77-98). Yet, the historical case for visualization of sexuality is stronger, and can be defended independently of these macro-narratives.

The contemporary usages of cameras in sexual encounters discussed below could only take place once desire was visualized, yet these usages in turn led the visuality of sexuality to new frontiers. But before delving into them, I offer a short discussion of pornography, both since practices of sex-photography are highly influenced by porn and since porn was used as a reference point by the respondents themselves in giving sense to their own actions.

The very foundation of the porn industry is the power of images to produce pleasure. Yet, arousal is not an effect of the image itself: explicit images in scientific or high-art context are less likely to produce arousal and/or sexual activity, while acts that may arouse when seen on film may evoke different reactions in real life (Kimmel, 2005). The difference between porn and high-art lies in 'how the image is seen, who has access to it and how they behave or respond in its presence' (Nead, 1992:86). Porn is thus not a category of products, but rather a technology of arousal, a device needed for some sexual scripts (usually a masturbatory aid or an introduction for partner-sex), which are learned behaviours, part of a wider erotic habitus.

Whereas 'lewd' illustrated literature existed since the 16th century (Samuel Pepys even used it once for masturbation), pornography as a common sexual technique is a modern phenomenon (Slade, 2001; Kendrick, 1996; Toulalan, 2007). Only in the last two centuries has mass-distributed porn become a masturbatory-aid for wide audiences. The first to adopt it were male educated elites: according to Kinsey, half a century ago lower-class men considered porn both immoral and not-arousing: they 'may look on such a thing as the use of pictures or literature to augment masturbatory fantasies as the strangest sort of perversion', being unable to be aroused by media or even by imagination. Women too were indifferent to sexual imagery (Kinsey, 1953a, 1953b).

Nowadays, porn plays a major role in the education of desire of most male adolescents, defining
normative masculinity and teaching normative male sexual scripts (Kimmel, 2005; Attwood, 2005). For girls, this somatic pedagogical process often doesn't take place: female adolescents in Israel and abroad are increasingly exposed to porn, yet their rates of solitary consumption (often accompanied by masturbation) and regular/intensive consumption are much lower than boys; girls report being aroused by porn less often than boys, and more often report feeling disgusted (Shtarkshall et al. 2008, Shaw, 1999; Johansson & Hammarén, 2007). The capacity and tendency to use images for arousal (which is not unrelated to stressing the visibility of partner-sex) is thus unevenly distributed.

Why did porn appear on the stage of history? Kendrick cites both social/structural explanations (cheaper printing methods, rising literacy rates, dissolving social arrangements, urbanization) and discursive ones (institutional incitement to speak about sex). Others cite technological changes, reducing new pleasures into deterministic ‘effects’ of the ‘realism’ of photography and cinema. For Williams (1989), porn cinema didn’t answer any pre-existing need: The mechanical eye produced desire by intensifying the visible, showing what could not be seen before. Cinema taught men to take pleasure in viewing the female body through the eye of the camera, implanted voyeuristic perversions and normalized them. Later, following Crary, she gave-up technological determinism, and stressed the development of a new, embodied model of vision with ‘carnal density’: porn, just like modern high art, is about seducing and exciting the body (Williams, 1995). Visual arousal entails a new societal organization of perception (Koch, 1989). Yet, what's at stake is more than a change in technology or the theory of perception.

Introducing technologies of the image into sexual praxis, acting on bodies through images (in video-cybersex; non-commercial photographed sex; or porn consumption), entails not only new behavioural scripts, but also the development of perceptual capacities, embodied sensitivities, desires, and modes of appraisal. If perception is active (as suggested by Robin Collingwood, Maurice Merlau-Ponty and other thinkers), then analysis of cultural products is inadequate, and the focus must shift to their embodied consumption patterns, and the attentiveness towards them.

This attitude puts sex-photography in a much broader context: the rise of porn: the unprecedentedly intensive usage of media within new technologies-of-self (including emotional management). Gitlin (2003) and Stearns (1994) described the media-produced bracketed emotions and excitements as substitutes for ‘real’ emotions, which our emotional stringent late-modern culture delegitimizes. Others took a more positive stance: Tia Denora (2000) demonstrated how people consciously use music to change moods and bodily tempos in the emotional/somatic design of events like aerobic, lovemaking, work, or house-parties.

However, the contemporary trend of increased recordability of the mundane and photographic self-documentation led to the emergence of technologies-of-self based on consumption of self-produced media to manipulate religious and nostalgic emotions (Schwarz, 2009, in preparation). Private sex-documentation does the same: exploiting life-experience by turning it into a product that elicits emotional/bodily reactions at will, similarly to mass-media products.

The emergence of private sex-photography is thus inextricable from the growing usage of media in late-modern emotionology at large, changes in photographic practices, the visualization of sexual desires, and the 'pornification' of mainstream culture (McNair, 2002). It relies on these new desires and attentiveness, new conventions of representation, and new modes of working on the self.

### A Typology of Photographed Sex

By ‘photographed sex’ I refer to various practices of sexual usage of different sorts of cameras in different modes of attention (nostalgic, pornographic), resulting in a wide variety of sexual and emotional effects. For Abercrumbie and Longhurst (1998), modern people developed a new sensitivity to the visual, as in turning places into 'landscapes' for visual consumption. While this isn't necessarily correct elsewhere, sexuality has undoubtedly been visualized. The camera both answers desires formerly produced by this increased visual sensitivity, and encourages further development of these sensitivities in new directions, re-moulding sexual scripts and kinds of sexual knowledge. Photographed sex is still very much a space of experimentation: unlike pornography consumption (which influenced it vehemently), it's not yet organized by collective patterns, not yet homogenized by mass-media representation or public discourse (at least not in Israel). This relative silence encourages heterogeneity, indeed present among my respondents.

It is also important to notice that both porn and photographed sex don't only visualize lovemaking – they also show it from various points of view (POVs). ‘Vision is an act that occurs from somewhere in
particular' (Sobchack, 1995:54). Films are not only viewed objects but also viewing subjects: having a vision, they aren't only representations but also presentations of a ‘perceptual and expressive existence as the film’ (Sobchack, 1995:41). Often, photographed sex is shown from POVs that would be impossible if not for the camera. Usually the POV is exterior (not belonging to any participant), either an objective and objectifying gaze (when the camera stands on a nightstand) or an omnipresent, all-seeing god’s (while held in a participant’s hand). Different POVs represent different sorts of knowledge produced by filming, in both porn and private photographed sex, a fact often ignored since, following Mulvey (1985) and Williams (1989), we assume the viewer’s identification with the male-protagonist.

People integrate cameras in their sex life in various ways, including:

1. **Being Watched.** Photography turns events into a collective *mis-en-scene* directed towards its end-products. The camera represents a potential viewer (be it a generalized viewer or a concrete one, usually the ego and/or the partner. Some even explicitly and jokingly talk to the imagined audience). It provides participants with increased awareness of how things are seen objectively. Yet, photography doesn’t invent it *ex nihilo*: more than 20 respondents reported having thought during sexual encounters about how it looks from the outside, even before first experiencing photographed sex. The exposure to mass-media visual representations of sex already introduced spectacle-like performativity, which the presence of the actual camera (and the self-monitoring of sex, often by watching the screen during the act) increases even further. Being watched also introduces playfulness, and playing with scripts borrowed from pornography. This widening of sexual scripts is sometimes experienced as freedom, an expression of inner truths now extracted by the exposure to light (i.e., to the camera’s gaze). Visuality in this sense reshapes sexual practices: Since documented sex is experienced and assessed in retrospect only through the visible, documentation often puts some of the limitations of cinematic representation on real-life interactions, enhancing the colonization of daily life with cinematic (esp. pornographic) repertoires. Respondents ‘*Put more effort on "how it looks"*, try ‘*to be more aesthetic, more sensual*, pay attention to positions, pose for the camera, and make louder voices than usual (externalising pleasure to render its representation possible). The sexual performance is no longer directed at a one-person audience on a single occasion, thus performativity increases and people try to ‘improve’ their performances following the relevant cultural standards. Participants often structure photographed sex (both their own choreography and the camera’s view) after porn, even if they may be uncomfortable with the similarities in retrospect. For Koch, amateur-porn doesn’t document sexual practices, but rather reproduces pornographic fantasy/representation: ‘*Pornographic movies beget pornographic movies*’ (1989:17). A good example is offered by one respondent, describing watching porn and photographing sex with his future bride in a single event, during a romantic vacation.a Yet, Koch’s phrase is only a part of the truth. Indeed, sometimes documentation-materials are consumed pornographically, and in many other cases, watching is about finding the similarities and differences between commercial and home productions, autobiographic experiences and cinematic conventions of representation. Yet, porn is definitely *not* the only perspective through which products are assessed and consumed.

2. **Watching for Pleasure.** The camera functions as an instrument of pleasure during intercourse and afterwards. Participants watch themselves on the camera/screen during or immediately following lovemaking, thus broadening and prolonging the visual experience of sex and the production of visual erotic pleasure. In this sense, cameras’ erotic function is similar to mirrors’ (a comparison also suggested by some respondents). Once the eye has been given so major a role in the production of sexual pleasure, it can prosthetically utilize optical instruments in order to see more, from other views and for longer periods of time. Furthermore, documentation-materials are sometimes consumed pornographically, i.e. for solitary masturbation (usually by males) or (for couples) as appetizers for new sexual sessions. Thus, familiar practices of porn consumption gain an autobiographic twist (as well as increased legitimacy, compared with consuming commercial porn, which at least one respondent interpreted as manifestation of unfaithfulness to her partner). This user-generated porn doesn’t only incorporate personal memories of lovemaking, but also structures them as predominantly-visual memories, while taking porn as a frame of reference. Taken as porn, it has the advantage of being real: Since the nineties, pornographic fantasies have changed, and
the stress within commercial porn shifted from glossy glamour and perfectness to realness and ordinariness, 'amateur porn'. The sexual home-videos I study only go further with the same logic of the commercial 'reality porn', namely the 'eroticization of the idea of reality itself': Authenticity itself has become an 'erotic stimulant'. Like the Reality genres in general, these documentary videos extract pleasure from the meeting point of indexicality and intimacy, quasi-scientific accuracy and voyeuristic pleasure (Barcan, 2002; Dovey, 2000). If sex was indeed integrated into the economy of mediated-experiences, then watching videos/photos may be seen as a secondary-consumption of the same sexual encounter, thus a more efficient/economic exploitation of the encounter, related to the secondary-consumption of vacations through photos and souvenirs. Yet, this may explain only a relatively small part of sex-photography and its consumption.

3. **Self-Documentation.** Photo-documentation of sex is sometimes an integral component within an extensive, radical project of life-documentation. Nowadays, self-documentation is no longer restricted to formal ceremonies and family vacations. This vernacularization relies on both technological changes and the concept of the mundane as most 'real', (e.g. Davies, 2007; Cohen, 2005). Once work and home routines were penetrated by intensive photo-documentation (as happens especially among the group over-represented among respondents, the new petite-bourgeoisie of representation-oriented occupations: Bourdieu, 1984), holding the camera 'during the act' as reported by more than 20 respondents, is no longer absurd. While most people have extended their repertoires of photographed objects and events, only a minority went as far as penetrating the sanctified privacy/intimacy of sex. But even photography not intended for a life-documentation project may invite autobiographic consumption once it exists: its consumption may be organized by the same emotional and practical conventions as home-videos and photo-albums, with which almost everyone is intimately familiar. Thus, sex photos and videos are used for reminiscing and reflection on the past, on one's sexuality, on the nature and value of the documented relationship (even after it ended), etc.iii

These aspects are not mutually-exclusive, yet both reflexive and pornographic consumption of images are acquired capacities, unevenly distributed across gender (and probably class). Whereas males are more prone to pornographic consumption, women, traditionally in charge of compiling the family's visual memory, are more prone to nostalgic consumption (Chambers; 2001; Larsen, 2005; Schwarz, 2009). Thus, in at least two couples, the male partner consumes documentation-materials pornographically, whereas the female partner consumes the same materials for reminiscing and other non-pornographic uses. In other cases, both pornographic and nostalgic uses are precluded by the common practice of deleting documentation-materials shortly after the event for information-safety reasons. Only one consumption pattern is indispensable: When sex turns into image-production, it's never over before the participants watched the video/photos. Important as these above-mentioned aspects may be, the rest of the article will focus on a fourth aspect:

4. **The Will to Knowledge.** While designing the questionnaire, I didn't expect knowledge to become a main focus, yet the answers clearly indicated that producing various sorts of knowledge is a major consequence of and motive for photographed sex. Both phenomenology and post-structuralism decline the conceptualization of knowledge as an external objective entity 'in the world'. Knowledge is rather the product of different practices (including discursive and perceptual practices), modes of embodied being-in-the-world, and 'positive' power. Foucault acknowledged the fact that truth is produced not merely by discourse, but also by techniques of knowledge-production like the confession, the optical organization of space, or the statistical graph. Sexuality has been formed in modernity as a privileged site for producing knowledge of the subject. Foucault contends that since the 19th century, a new *ars erotica* developed, which produces pleasure through the production of truth: We 'invented a different kind of pleasure: pleasure in the truth of pleasure, the pleasure of knowing that truth, of discovering and exposing it, the fascination of seeing it and telling it, of captivating and capturing others by it, of confiding it in secret, of luring it out in the open—the specific pleasure of the true discourse on pleasure' (1978:70-71). Yet, this is production of pleasure/truth restricted to confessional techniques
of talking about sex, or can it also be produced non-discursively? Foucauldian scholarship often over-emphasizes the discursive practices (or worse, discourse as an abstract system, a langue), on expense of the non-discursive practices which are surely no less important in the moulding of sex and sexuality. Furthermore, I found strong evidence that the pleasure of knowledge and corporeal pleasure may co-exist in a single event. Williams argues that hard-core pornography produces pleasure by showing what would otherwise be invisible, producing "documentary evidence", truths of the female body and female pleasure. However, for her, 'however much hard core may claim to be a material and visible thing, it is still fundamentally a discourse, a way of speaking about sex' (1999:228). For Koch (1989:14), porn produces knowledge by offering both 'sex education' and a catalogue of perversions (similar to the psychological one). Lillie (2002) claims that porn is 'filling a vacuum of knowledge of the body and of pleasure that the confessionals of medicine and morality could not fill', including anatomical truth (how bodies look), commercially precious knowledge on consumers (IP and credit-card information), and truths on desire and power relations. Sexual interactions are bodily experiences, which produce somatic 'private knowledge' in the first-person that cannot be faithfully translated into the third person (Archer, 2003). However, documentation renders sex a production site for other sorts of knowledge. It's a very objective knowledge (in both reifying sex as an object, i.e. video/photo; and in representing a POV other then the subject's), hence a highly authoritative one. But as demonstrated below, it also produces very subjective knowledge: local, relational, non-discursive and non-sharable. The prosthetic visualization of the invisible enables replacing the ego's POV with that of the partner (in a quasi-effort to peep into the partner's subjective experience of the sexual encounter); as well as viewing one's body and sexual activity from an objective (distanced) or pornographic ('meat shot') perspective. Objectified documentation may be compared with the subjective experience or with mainstream pornographic images, and serve as an aid for self-assessment (and possibly self-improvement) of one's own body, sexual performances, or emotional and sexual relationships. Sexual documentation is interpreted as a source of knowledge on the self and the partner, their relationship and their sexualities. This knowledge also endows its producers/objects with a feeling of emancipation, often interpreted as moral salvation in which sexual liberation leads to sexual truths, which in turn produce pleasure. Pleasures, truths and morals are all being moulded by the advent of new techno-social practices of documentation.

Knowledge, Assessment and Self-improvement

After a year in a relationship, 21-year-old Dana and her partner decided (spontaneously and jointly) to videotape their lovemaking, 'for variety's sake'. Yet while asked about the camera's effect on the lovemaking, Dana didn't refer to the sexual encounter at all, but rather to the watching event, described as 'a nice experience, it's fun to watch later, learn and improve yourself'. She watched the video 'the day after, to watch and take interest, to learn new things about myself'. The knowledge gathered is both introspective ('learn new things about myself') and practical ('learn and improve'). After watching the 30 min. video with her partner, they deleted it.

The external, 'objective' gaze let individuals explore and objectively assess their selves, bodies, sexualities, and partners. Those documented no longer judge their sexiness by their feelings or their partner's feedback alone. When people view documentation, they can assess their sexual 'performance'. In Dana's case, the knowledge acquired by photography facilitates a rational project of sexual self-improvement. This knowledge takes its authority from its objectivity: being produced by a machine, unaffected by the participants (Dana's camera stood still on the television, facing the bed). As another respondent said, 'The camera helped us see the act from the outside'.

Modern sexuality turned into a reflexive rational project of self-improvement (even if like reflexivity in general, sexual reflexivity is characteristic of habitus of specific classes and groups: Adams, 2006). Women's magazines, for instance, present sexuality as a form of psychological, bodily and emotional work, a process of never-ending self-improvement (Barcan, 2000). Utilising a camera for this project is a self-initiated technique of self-improvement and self-surveillance, creatively taking sexual reflexivity to unpredicted directions, unguided by cultural authorities like self-help literature. But while rationalising
sexuality in general is a quasi-psychological project, focused on selves and relationships (or even on sex as an act), here it's sexuality as an image, an appearance which should be monitored and reflexively improved. The reflexive project of rationalising sexuality is thus re-formulated as aesthetic/performative rather than psychological. Implicit in the answers of many respondents is a concept of sex as a highly visual performance, despite its being usually performed for a single person who, being a participant, cannot fully view it. Hence, improving sexuality demands some monitoring of the appearance of moving bodies (either to the partner or to a hypothetical outside-viewer).

Photography also turns lovemaking into an artefact, which in turn may be compared with similar artefacts, the obvious candidate being porn. The comparison may leave the performers/viewers ashamed or proud, feeling sexy or unsexy, and possibly knowing better how to improve themselves (which may mean closing the gap between their own performance and pornographic performances). 20-year-old Gal was photographed fellating her partner. While he kept the video in his mobile phone for sexual arousal ('because he's a horney man'), she occasionally watched the video as well, but in a different manner: 'I watch it, since I wanna see myself, and it's pretty much intriguing to see my performance'. While being photographed, she felt, 'I have to perform the "mission" perfectly, since I'm being photographed'. Sex is turned into a task, or a test of worth, assessed according to objective criteria. In this case, she passed the examination: Watching the video later made her feel that 'I'm photographed because of my good performance' and she felt 'very sexy'. This is what Dennis Waskul (2002) called 'looking-glasses eroticism': Being watched is exciting since it renders the body an object of desire. In Gal's answers, sexuality is a field in which women may evince excellence by showing technical knowledge (knowhow), which may be objectively assessed. Not only could she watch her performance and assess it, the video's pornographic consumption by her partner and its arousing effect reconfirmed her success.

For women in particular, watching photographed sex often raises another question, besides performance: Am I beautiful or plain, desired or pathetic?" Here again, the camera offers seemingly-objective answers. My findings are in line with classic feminist conceptualizations of women as the object of male gaze (Berger, 1972; Mulvey, 1985): Even when heterosexual couples jointly watch films showing both partners, women often experience the viewing as those viewed, rather than those viewing, experiencing the 'body for others', in Bourdieu's words (2001). This often conditions women's emotional reaction to documentation-materials. A 30-year-old heterosexual woman reported upon watching her sex-videos (with her partners): 'There were times when I felt uncomfortable, because my body didn't look good enough', yet there were also 'other times, when I felt sexually-arousing and really enjoyed looking at my performance'. Another heterosexual woman in her late-twenties presented her reaction to the documentation thus: 'I felt... that I rather like my body and that it will be nice to remember it when I'm older, I thought how others might respond if they see my photos'. A young respondent usually felt embarrassment and degradation, since she 'didn't feel comfortable with my body shape', yet whenever she looked pretty in a photo, watching was 'pleasant'. The answers are in line with studies showing that women's reservation from porn often derives not from political (feminist or conservative) reasons, but rather from comparing their own bodies with the idealized sexualized representations of female bodies (Shaw, 1999; Eck, 2003). 'Images invite comparisons' (Featherstone, 1991), but comparison undoubtedly intensifies when pornographic imagery are compared not with one's body-images, but with one's photographed sex.

The desire for objective knowledge of her appearance during sex motivated a female graduate student to document a sexual encounter with a camera-phone held by both partners: 'I wanted it, and I asked him for it – to tell the truth, I just wanted to watch myself. I wanted to check the gap between the look and the photo'. Before the photographed event she thought about how her sexual encounters look from the outside, but today she get[s] rid of these thoughts pretty fast. Especially since thinking "it's interesting how it looks from the outside" leads me to the conclusion that it probably doesn't seem so amazing. I don't recoil from photographing, all-in-all it was a positive experience, but that's life, life is not a movie and I don't have Photoshop.

This last image brings us back to body-images: Being unable to makes one's body similar to cinematic representations (like still photos doctored with Photoshop-software), and having had her primary curiosity satisfied, documentation should be avoided.

Seeing the Break-up Coming
The camera's external perspective on sexuality is given much greater tasks than showing the appearance of one's sexuality: People also ask the camera 'what kind of person am I', and 'what kind of sexuality characterizes me' (the latter question, at least since Freud, should help answer the former, since sexuality is believed to be the core of our selves). Photographed sex may also be a site for production of knowledge on the partner and the relationship. A 27-year-old woman who photographed a sexual encounter with a still camera standing on a tripod wasn't very content with the photos ('eventually it doesn't look that good from the outside'), yet once in a long while she does 'return to these photos and reminisce, and also make a thorough examination of the whole relationship with the photographed person'. For her, photos of sex and kisses are those most prone to evoke this reaction. This is no coincidence: Sexuality is both a site of truth, in which hidden aspects are revealed; and a major component in late-modern romance.

36-year-old Shir, who documented her sex-life in stills and video, usually watches the materials with the partner immediately after lovemaking. Watching is 'fun', conducted in a 'smiley atmosphere', but also an act of learning about oneself. The prevailing mood before watching was 'huge curiosity (...) everybody was curious about themselves'; Truth is about to reveal its face. While watching she had thoughts like 'I didn't know I'm so pretty... Shit, he's more beautiful than me. I didn't know I'm so gentle...' The contemplative aspect, i.e. acquiring knowledge on their relationship, sexuality and personality by scrutinising moving pictures, was even more salient in the rarer events of solitary-watching, 'usually after a quarrel' with her partner. Then, videos are watched 'with my clothes on', as 'a sort of a souvenir', turning into reflection-aid, in a 'sad atmosphere', 'a feeling of a memory of something... nostalgia, pain, frustration and what else, a wide range of after-quarrel-emotions'. Her thoughts during such a watching event were: 'How beautiful he is... what a shame it's only external... he's more beautiful then I am...Bummer! He's a pig, why are you with him?'

This question about their common future was probably raised by the quarrel, not by the video, yet Shir used the video to clarify her feelings and search for answers. As Kitzmann (2004:152) suggested, documentation is an 'extension of the past into the future', not a narrative but raw past materials which can beget new insights with each watching. Shir utilized this material to diagnose their sexualities (hers as 'gentle', his as piggish). Unlike reminiscing, it's based on objective representation of now-accessible past sexual encounters, producing harder, more authoritative and more visual knowledge in third-person of the events and the relationships' hidden truths. Watching in retrospect makes the sexual encounter accessible in a very different mode of attentiveness: It may be scrutinized by disenchanted eyes, undisturbed by the passion of the moment.

Similarly, 50-year-old Eli, a male executive, said that when he documented sex with his wife-at-the-time, he 'thought about the camera, and it really turned me on', but his wife, 'as usual, wasn't very excited, in spite of the camera's presence'. The video was kept in a safe, and he watched it only 'once or twice', in bed, but 'seeing her lack of lust only depressed me, so I stopped watching'. While watching, he 'died of boredom. Watching her lack of lust and inactivity in bed killed any sexual feeling (...) I didn't feel anything except depression from watching my wife'. Although Eli enjoyed and was excited during the sexual encounter, watching in retrospect evoked (or at least supported and enhanced) his thoughts about his wife's problematic sexuality, and became evidence for their sexual incompatibility. Being a porn-consumer, watching the video in bed, and emphasising the lack of arousal while watching, it seems probable that he watched it in order to experience sexual arousal, and possibly masturbate. However, in the video's failure to produce this reaction, it succeeded in producing knowledge and reflection on their relationship. Watching the video tested their relationship (just like Gal's relationship), only here they didn't pass.

Seeing Through the Eyes of Another

Many photobloggers wish they could integrate cameras in their eyes and share with others the world as they see it (Cohen, 2005). Until this becomes possible, using digital cameras and blogs serves as the best approximation. Similarly, Japanese youths use camera-phones to share their subjective experiences with romantic partners, creating an intimate visual co-presence (Ito, 2005). Sharing perspectives is an exchange of knowledge, which may encourage empathy (the ability to identify with another's point of view and feelings) and intimacy (closeness based on empathy), two main imperatives (or even raisons d'être) of late modern relationship (Giddens, 1992; Illouz, 2007, 2008). Photography takes the imperative to see through the other's eyes in a literal manner. In photographed sex, the desire is not to share one's own perspective with one's partner, but rather to peep into the partner's perspective. The result is nonetheless similar.
One male interviewee said that his girlfriend wanted to videotape sex, since she wanted to see the intercourse from his POV.

'Women are often curious about the man's point of view, and women also asked me about this thing (...) I think that for many women (...) Doggy-style is very intriguing, because you are on top, from behind, and they usually see the mattress, or something like it, and then suddenly seeing how everything seems from your point of view, it's interesting'.

Here, changing the POV helped the girlfriend learn something not only about her boyfriend as an individual and the way he experiences sex with her, but also about male sexual experience in general. The camera enables a surrogate-crossover under controlled circumstances, learning about gendered subjective experience usually inaccessible to those in different subject-positions. A female respondent reported passing the camera between her and her partner, “since each one photographed from a different angle”.

Another respondent asked his partner to film a sexual encounter 'from her point of view, me fucking her in missionary [position]. It was sort of a pretext to start shooting, that I wanted to know how I look while fucking'. Though describing it as a pretext, and later taking the camera to document them from additional perspectives, he still asked her to produce a representation of the way he looks during intercourse from his partner's perspective.

Technology is thus utilized in an effort to break through the limits of subjectivity and of somatic knowledge in first-person, not only for enhanced intimacy, but also in order to learn about the ego through the gaze of the other and experience controlled gender-crossovers. Obviously, the camera can't give access to the other's subjectivity, yet it promises access to objectified approximations of sensory data, facilitating identification through imagination. Photographed sex naively aspires to narrow the gap between standpoints, so central to feminist thinking.

**Mimesis and Revelation, Knowledge and Emancipation**

Psychological discourse has established sexual enlightenment as a modern path to salvation. Sexual knowledge has become prerequisite to self-knowledge, liberation and mental health. Yet, enlightenment isn't sought only through sexual discourse. Above, I mentioned lovemaking in the light and celebrating scopophilia. The camera exposes sex to even more enlightening a gaze, presumably extinguishing darkness and inhibitions and paving the way to maximization of pleasure. It is no coincidence that photographed sex often takes place in 'wild' and 'daring' sexual relationships characterized by 'testing the limits', sometimes with an extramarital lover or while drinking alcohol. Photography doesn't only transcend traditional sexual restraints, but also jettisons the concept of sex as truly private, i.e inaccessible to any external gaze. This transgression is often experienced as exciting, producing so-called “exhibitionist” pleasure. Visual knowledge of sex thus amounts to sexual liberation, strongly identified with the ‘bourgeois bohemians', who fuse emancipatory politics and consumer culture into a 'fun ethic' (Jancovich, 2001). These were indeed over-represented among the respondents.

Furthermore, for some respondents sex photography meant liberation from casual sexual scripts. As demonstrated above, sex-documentation materials are often monitored by participants in real time, compared with familiar cultural models for representing sex and desire, and enable participants to adapt their performance to these models, borrowed from advertising, cinema, television, or porn. This borrowing is often done playfully and consciously, but not always. Since people 'read' in their sexuality (and in photographed sex) truths about themselves, it may be a site where mimesis is interpreted as the uncovering of hidden truths, unconscious desires freed at last.

A middle-class 30-year-old queer respondent reported wanting to photograph 'everything' in order to reveal, uncover and know everything. She photographed herself while masturbating and in both lesbian and heterosexual encounters. If sexual experimentation is experienced by many as a path to self-knowledge, photography may be the flashlight. Even before first experiencing sex-photography, she used to wonder during sex 'how my face and my eyes look, how the voices I make sound'. Photography made this perspective accessible:

'Ve didn't shun presenting anything, since we wanted to document and see EVERYTHING. What the whole body looks like, how the voice sounds, how the [female] partner looks during the act, the face expressions and the bodily movements. Different photos were taken in different situations, e.g. when one is taking a shower and the other photographing her from the outside, when one is masturbating and the other photographing her, and also close-ups of genitalia. Apparently I don't
believe in showing only a part of the picture'.

Her experience of photographed sex was essentially different from her usual sex experience: She had difficulties 'sexually concentrating' and experiencing sex from the inside, yet a video-documented domination-game made her experience increased pleasure 'both physically, and in the feeling of freedom to make louder voices of pleasure, to talk during the act, and in the immense intensity of sexual excitation'. Implicit is the presumption that the desire to make louder voices or talk during lovemaking has always existed in a repressed form, liberated at last by the camera. Curiously enough, this desire has cinematic roots. Cinematic conventions must externalize inner feelings and pleasures (Williams 1989:93-119). Loud voices testify to female sexual pleasure having been experienced. Yet, this convention of representation influences in turn repertoires of interpersonal sex. Thus, after reality porn was reshaped to imitate "authentic" ordinary sex, mundane sex may now be reshaped to imitate porn and its "uninhibited" pleasures, further reducing the gap between the two.

Although mutual leakage between praxis and representation is universal, it seems that the participants' conscious and active involvement in the production of a film invites externalization of pleasure while relying on pornographic conventions of representation.

Similarly, a woman in her late twenties recoiled at first when her husband suggested they take still photos during sex, but later she became so enthusiastic she initiated photography herself: 'It made me loosen up ['Lehishtakhrer', literally denoting 'get liberated'], make [sex] positions I'm not normally used to', 'photography itself didn't alter the sort of pleasure or excitement in sex, but opened [me] up'. This woman, who came from a religious family, felt liberated in front of the camera, but she didn't describe the new practices she adopted as experimentations.

New sexual repertoires (including those borrowed from porn) enacted in front of the camera are interpreted and experienced as hidden desires, whereas mundane sexual repertoires represent a compromise with restrictions and inhibitions. Yet, this objective analysis should not hide the fact that subjectively, adopting new scripts indeed produces pleasure.

Conclusion

The question of knowledge-qua-emancipation is part of the broader question on 'vision as pleasure', partly addressed above. The knowledge I discussed comes from and is embodied in vision (the exposure to the previously invisible, and the dialogue between the views of the spectator and the camera: Sobchack, 1995); whereas the so-called 'sexual liberation' is gauged by the increased sexual pleasure it produces. These new ways of seeing – how I look while closing my eyes and coming, how my partner looks during the act (i.e. how would she seem to someone else, not involved in the lovemaking), or the 'meat-shot' (a view endemic to porn, which cannot be turned to oneself without a camera, and which at least 8 respondents adopted) – don't only give pleasure to the participants qua viewers, but also demands from them pleasure qua photographed, extorting pleasures from bodies and hidden desires from souls.

Any attempt to distinguish between the sexual activity and the production or consumption of representations is thus doomed to fail. Yet, caution should be taken against a Baudrillardian lamentation of the loss of the real, taken-over by images. The pleasure produced by images is a real one, integrated in real relationships. It's indeed culturally and historically-specific, relying on scripts disseminated by different media-mechanisms, and on specific materiality (like cameras), but in this sense it's not different from any other economy-of-pleasure in history: Pleasure is always mediated by cultural categories. What's new is the increasing importance of vision; the rationalistic privileging of the objective, externalized/objectified and visual over the subjective, internal and haptic in the production of knowledge and pleasure; and the embodiment of this preference not only on macro-level social order (the role of visual sexual desire in capitalist economy, through advertising), but also in the micro-level of pleasure/knowledge economy, in the hidden theatres of private sexual performances. Photographed sex (like porn, and to a higher degree) undoubtedly helps us uncover the contours of this cultural trend.

References


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### Endnotes

1 Only 40% of the males and 19% of the female in Kinsey’s data preferred any degree of light, compared with ca. two thirds of the males and half of the females in a survey recently conducted in Israel: Kinsey et al. 1953b; [http://www.mirpaot-on.co.il/PageDisplay.asp?Artnum=25](http://www.mirpaot-on.co.il/PageDisplay.asp?Artnum=25).

2 Watching porn is also integrated in pornographic films' plots: Dyer, 1985; Williams, 1995.

3 A case in point is Pamela Anderson and Tommy Lee's video, showing mostly their vacation activities like fishing, but also their sex. The video was stolen, edited and sold as a porn film, yet Anderson explicitly indicates her documentary motivations in a fellatio-scene, while she waves Lee's penis in front of the camera, saying "I get this for the rest of my life! Look kids! Mom is a happy camper!" then laughs and says "Oh! I guess we're not to show our kids that bit". Hillyer, 2005.

4 All names are fabricated: questionnaires were anonymous, and interviewees' names were changed to protect anonymity.

5 Only one male respondent, a homosexual, replied in such a manner.