

Pornography in a Voyeuristic Society

by Mark Debono

During a discussion organised by Philosophy Sharing, the speaker investigated the role of pornography in modern society. The talk started by tracing the Greek origins of the word 'pornography'. This led to the question whether pornography, particularly in its cinematographic form, consists of pre-determined roles. How does the fact that everything is set up on stage before the production of the film affect the viewer's perspective on sexuality? This question was engaged with a thorough critical review of the industry of cinematographic pornography. One particular point of interest that was noted specified that the porn industry enabled technological products like the VHS, DVD to infiltrate the market. Further technological inventions, particularly that of the internet both enabled the distribution of, and access to pornographic material but at the same time also generated the possibility of surveillance of users. While surveillance of internet activity remains justified due to cyber crime, it also raises serious doubt about the privacy of individuals.

From this point, the talk discussed Kenneth Clark's distinction between the 'nude' and the 'naked' in order to investigate to what extent pornography re-forms the body. In pornography, one notes the lack of the intimate ecstatic look between two people. The example of Bernini's statue of St. Theresa of Avila in the Cornaro chapel, Rome was used to argue that in contrast to the pornographic form, the erotic creates its effect by remaining a step shy of being explicit. The speaker considered Georges Bataille's discussion about the role of violence in *The Tears of Eros* to continue examining whether the 'veil' in its revelatory and concealable aspects becomes the object that 'separates' pornography from eroticism.

At this point, the speaker evaluated whether today's culture privileged fluid spaces, a position which turns reality into a complex structure. Pornography, works against spontaneity, because it is itself determined by the protocol of work. What role does pornography play in adult entertainment, particularly if this role is determined by the laws of the market implied in a capitalist society. There is no space for the secret in pornography, and one questions whether there can be alternative ways of presenting sexual scenes to the audience. The speaker concluded the analysis by pointing out that in a surveilled society, nothing can be measured in terms of the intimate private space. Through the blanket surveillance of its citizens, contemporary society has transformed us all from the possible targets of playful Eros, to unsuspecting porn stars.

This short article was submitted by Mark Debono following his talk at Philosophy Sharing's monthly public meeting held on 5 February 2014.