

Sexual Organ Hatred and Adoration

Sexual desire is ingrained in our bodily, emotional and thought systems as an inextinguishable drive for the continuity of the species and as a fountain of ineffable pleasure. Sexuality gathers and focalizes powerful feelings (Cartledge in Weeks, 2003:11) as it catalyzes strong attraction, fear and hate. In consequence, sex and sexuality can generate unsweetened social and political divisions from within very sensitive and deeply embedded cultural fibers and forces (Weeks 2003:11), while raising gender assumptions that may encompass sharp differences or antagonism; thus, the catchphrase, “the battle of the sexes” (2003:11).

We all experience sex quite subjectively: it flourishes feelings and desires related to “love and anger, tenderness and aggression, intimacy and adventure, romance and predatoriness, pleasure and pain, empathy and power” (2003:11). Sexuality has become the realm in which essential political and ethical aspects of the human experience are being battled. What occurs in the enclosed rooms of sexually interacting individuals, the domains of the LGBT political discourse and, what we see in mainstream pornography, may give us extrapolated hints on how societal and economical patterns have modeled the Western world we dwell.

But, sexuality is circumvolved by even deeper and perhaps more controversial meanings: the rendered sense of communion with the *self* or with the other and the links this experience may have had within ancient fertility rituals, spirituality, religion and their related power play. These dynamics have generated domination systems where women and other class and race groups may, at present, still be subjected to a diffused white male-colonizing abuse model. They invite us to revalue the words spoken from the vulva,

from a source of intelligence that aims to unleash the creative forces that could prove useful in saving the species (Caputi 2002:180).

Thus, in this paper, we are set to explore, succinctly, some aspects of sexuality that may interconnect relevant female physiological functions, prevalent pornographic imagery and religion. First, we will ponder on just some of many relevant symbolic worship rituals and expressions related to vulva representation, manifesting in ancient and modern cultures. Second, expose some of the portraits and possible causes and meanings of the vagina, as a deeply feared organ, produced from a domineering phallic gaze (2002:181). Finally, we will bridge both matters to religion and mysticism, as cultural components that, in actuality, are deemed contrary to the most intimate and essential spiritual quests, which both males and females, consciously or not, tread.

Goddess of Fertility

The Venus of Willendorf, an artifact dated between 22,000 and 24,000 years old, carved in limestone, depicting a female detailing her vulva, large breasts and abdomen, is a part of the series of figurines that highlight the reproductive and nurturance attributes of women. The morphologic traits of the statuette could indicate that the capabilities of women to reproduce and to sustain life were worshiped within a matriarchal society (Karayanni, 2009:454). Older than the Venus figures, stone carved vulvas and engravings were also produced during the Upper Paleolithic Era (27,000-30,000 BCE), as unequivocal symbols of feminine reverence, striking in realism and detail.

In historical records we see goddess Bastet, who was worshiped in cat form, chronicled by Herodotus in his travels amid Egypt during the 5th century BC. In his words, women who “go in the marketplace, transact affairs and occupy themselves with

business, while the husbands stay at home and weave” (Blackledge 2004:12), would perform *ana-suromai*, a display of their genital organs, as a way to avert evil and to beckon fertility. The term coined by Herodotus himself, meaning to raise one’s cloths, has traveled throughout history to our days, to remind us that in other times, the view of the vulva was considered to be expressive of female power and pride. Vaginas were flashed during the biggest and most popular, at the time, Bubastis festival of ancient Egypt.

The vagina, regarded as divine, a symbolic origin of the universe, an emblem of generating powers and fecundity, a life force, the “very visible gateway into this world” (2004:44), a common tribute within ancient Hinduism, Buddhism, Tantric and Taoist systems of belief, philosophy, religion and practice, is represented in the yoni. In Hinduism, Shakti, both an anthropomorphic goddess and a symbol of female genitalia, embodies the source of power indwelling every deity and living thing. In some temples in India, the yoni may be represented engulfing the lingam (phallus), as an icon of both cosmic and manifested nature (2004:44). A Hindu tradition reveres goddess Kamakhya’s life giving menstruation, believed to flow once a year in order to nourish the world (Urban 2010:53). Female genitalia connected to the womb, are both viewed as the origin and the divine passage or source, which have been regarded in Hinduism and related philosophies as “a sacred area, a pad of pleasure, an occult region” (Blackledge 2004:45), worthy of utmost reverence.

Christian, Judaic and Islamic moral codes, renowned for their sexist and sustained sex-negative stances, for centuries have pushed the idea that sex is only good for procreative objectives, not for pleasure. Regarding sexual intercourse within the

atmosphere of pleasure was deemed unnatural and sinful (2004:51), and most surely, unimaginable as a spiritually enlightening activity or practice. In England, during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, sex was banned on certain days of the week, and also, for forty days preceding Easter and Christmas (2004:51). Early church St. Agustin (354-430), infamously stated that we are all born *inter faeces et urinam, entre caca et pisse*, casting a shade of dirtiness and moral darkness on the female genitalia (2004:52). Alessandro Botticelli may have been one of the first European painters to overtly evoke the vagina, while depicting the *Birth of Venus*, emerging as an adult woman in a seashell over the sea (2004:50). He was one of the pioneers rendering female value during the renaissance period, which was marked by the flowering of a human reflexive gaze extended to literature, science, art, religion and politics, bridging the middle ages and the modern era.

L'Origine du monde, a realistic painting by Gustave Coubert of 1866, portraying the genitals and the abdomen of a semi-nude lying woman with her legs spread, may mark the renaissance of the female influential values over the political and social realms. It was produced just one year after the claim of women's suffrage right, which was presented by John Stuart Mill's platform to the British electorate in 1865. These were the times of Victorian morality, an era associated with values of social and sexual discipline, which was infected with deep contradictions of social phenomena, such as utmost elitism, prostitution and child labor, while having a prevalent outward appearance of dignity and restraint.

The phallus, the erect penis, the phallic symbol, has also been deified as an emblem of fertility and power, amid countless cultures. The *Hohle phallus*, an ancient

polished siltstone phallic representation, dated 28,000 years old, could also be linked to adoration rituals seeking to secure the favor of procreation, wellness and good health. Patriarchy, which may have developed as a result of social and technical innovations rendered by the domestication of plants and animals, and also by the notions of property and patrilineal inheritance, seems to have been ruling for the past 6,000 years. The representation of the phallus in art, mythology and religion can be widely seen in a vast number of obvious and evocative forms. A more egalitarian philosophy, seeking change in the relationship of gender and power mainly in the Western world, has been emerging at social, political and economical levels, since the past century.

The Dark and the Specular in Pornography

Within the realms of sex and sexuality, and perhaps since the very dawn of consciousness or birth of the sense of ego (a self-perceived feeling of separateness from nature and the *other* as understood in the Eastern spiritual traditions), a quest to reconnect, to return to abide with the supernatural, to regain a faculty of communion with the Self and the other, to expand in time and space the luring and metaphoric *petite mort*, may have become linked to the individual's desire for and religious pledge of reunion between body and spirit. Orgasm, as the conclusion or resolution of the plateau phase of sexual excitement, accompanied by muscular spasms in the lower pelvic area surrounding the anus and the sexual organs, increased circulation and stimulation, elevated level of respiration, while inducing a euphoric sensation in both males and females, may have invoked in early humans, such an existential quest. The receding experience of the ego, of a *sense of doership*, of separate existence, of mind and sense of time, and which may be experienced during orgasm, could be one of the driving forces behind the necessity of individuals who recourse to pornography as if to a reading glass, a telescope, a keyhole, a

microscope (Williams 1999:66) that represents the attestation and reawakens the memories and vicarious sensations of such an experience. With the advent of the Internet, the genital choreography has been globally democratized: the vision of the sexual organs, which *textilist* mores (obsessive covering of the body) deny to individuals on daily basis, is now readily available through the web. Religion and pornography may have much more in common than commonly accepted. The etymology of religion, if accepted that derives from the Latin word *religare*, to bind, to tie, to reconnect, may support the above assumptions.

Nonetheless, a phenomena of sexual self-cast and voyeurism in the Internet may not only be conveying a more liberal approach to sexuality in general, but a social movement which, in the present, could be perceived as a renaissance, as a phenomena of great relevance to philosophical and social thought, if we permit ourselves to read it more in depth. What could be unraveling with regards to pornography's increased diffusion and use, is the reification of spiritual wisdom (Goss 2002:34), the integration of sexuality to spirituality, undergoing a process of collective unveiling. The mind of its own that St Augustine ascribed to the phallus, the atmosphere of divorce between sexuality and spirituality (2002:37), may be fading away. The phallus and the vagina's intelligential dynamics could be resuming a determinant synergy within human consciousness, while in search of a full-bodied orgasm, which could render and be perceived as a transcendent and transforming mystical experience.

The cycles and circuits of desire, of the sense of separateness and fleeting communion, the "sight and performance played out by characters/performers and spectators/performers" (Waugh 2001:284) within the filmic vision of a penis, of a breast,

of a vulva, of a male or a female ejaculation, of menstrual intercourse, of groans, moans and sighs, a gaze and an intonation directed right at us (Williams 1999:71), wonders of the unseen world which could perhaps mark the “end of obscenity” (Rembar in Williams 1997:85) or the “repositioning of pornography within [...] social formation” and re-education (Ellis in Williams 1997:85). The social value that denial or gratification has in the personal realm of sexuality (1997:88) is extended to the many aspects of personal life as a reformer of views and reactions of those who, for periods, practice celibacy or abstinence, cultivate an erotic consciousness connected to reproduction, or search bodily pleasure and/or a mystical experience. Pornography, no longer overcast by the laws of the wrong (1997:89), has swollen as a river, which obliges the social and the political discourse to focus on its symbolic meanings, in relation to gender power play: an erotic text from which one can learn. Beautiful expressions of pornography, like the one depicted in the paradoxically difficult to find academically informed essay-film “In the Dark,” by Lisa Steele and Kim Tomszak (1986), shape strong political reactions against the commoditization of sex within and without pornography.

Social forces determine the shape of sexuality and that of pornography. The truth of our nature may be seen in our sexual desires (Week 2003:24). The signification given to sexuality in the Western world has been deeply influenced by Christianity. Three key moments could to have determined its evolution (2003:32). The first seems to have happened during the first century A.D., when sexuality started to be cast into austerity and disapproved of when practiced for pleasure’s sake. Husbands, during this time, should not fall into incontinent behavior with their wives. The second period for sexuality’s constraint, came amid the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, with the triumph of

the Christian mores on marriage. A tight set of rules became relevant to the connivance of two strangers sanctioned as a couple. The third turning point occurred during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a period when sexual behavior started to be normatively defined in relation to the opposite sex. In consequence, the categorization of other practices was deemed deviant, hand in hand with the emergence of norms regulating new medical, psychological and educational aspects of sexual/social behavior (2003:32).

The looser, many of the times, may have been the cunt (spellchecker underlines the term in red), a part of the woman's body, which for centuries had remained hidden (Williams 1999:66). The cunt became an obscene word only in the seventeenth century once its powerful sexuality was acknowledged and envisioned as more scientifically mysterious, while medical sciences started to dissect the human body (Caputi 2002:185). The term "cunt," amid discovery, conquest and colonization adventures endeavored by the white European male, persevered in its vicious separation from the women's body, mind and soul. The term became a synecdoche, along with the term "pussy," as it started to name the whole individual. The unattached vagina, "in contrast to ancient male fertility symbols, [became] the emblem of the rejection of sexuality and the body cultivated by patriarchal religion," reaffirming misogyny and violence against women (2002:184).

The ancient phallic symbol, gradually, was also detached, but from the lower *biological* body, to be situated with and associated to the superiority belonging usually to the white male intellect, its rationality and first-class mind (2002:184). The cunt was ascribed to inhabit this dark world of brutality and lower class, with the black male penis and with the sexless and phallus-less lower bodily zone of Oriental males (2002:184).

And moreover, the phallus was also to shame the penis that was further demonized while associated to softness, darkness and death (2002:184). Whereas the phallus was triumphant, the vagina was profane and the most low, linked to menstrual decomposition, “darkness, smell or ‘essence’, instinct, irrationality, chaos, the depths, and the common” (2002:185).

Thus, apart from being positioned as the lowest class of organs, we can give a glance to some snapshots of how the cunt was racialized and persecuted: prostitution of the exotic other, rape in war zones, Sarah Bartmann as spectacle, the female genitalia mutilation of Native American women during the Sand Creek Massacre, the witch-hunt occurring in Europe and America, Jack the Ripper, female circumcision, and by displacing humiliation unto women’s faces, the specular and recurrent cum shot in pornography. These have been oppressive operations, rituals and ceremonies born not so much from hatred, but from theological ignorance and the deepest patriarchal fears of women (2002:185): the vagina’s perceived paramount sexual pleasure capacity and its presumed connection to supernatural or spiritual powers.

A Future in Sexual Understanding

Amid the conflict between a need for sex and for the expression of feelings and aspirations in relation to a sense of communion, patriarchal power is constantly being negotiated and extrapolated to the battleground of pornography. The battle of the sexes may be anchored both within a language of impossibility and the agencies of a deficiently educated sexual compulsion. (Multi)-orgasm, vaginal or clitoral, full-bodied (also recounted by men) or simply connected to deeper emotional ties, that is to say, the links of the vagina to the overcoming of the sense of existential separateness could be the

factor, which a corporeal male sexuality drive may not tie to the more essential women sexual, emotional, nurturing and transcendent necessities.

Tied to sentiments of inadequacy is the menstrual experience, which has a psychological impact on many of the individuals, who from an early age are prompted to handle menstrual fluid and its associated physical, emotional and social effects, added to a strong, mild or flimsy sexual desire. The same is true for male youngsters, bearers of penises that often undergo erections, which for many, could be challenging to appease. The acquaintance, the psychosexual development of women, men and transsexuals with their sexuality, biologically and socially shaped, brings individuals into intimate relation with forces that are overwhelming, ineludible and mystifying (Synnott 2009:251).

Medical science, psychology, anthropology, sexology and other humanistic disciplines on one hand, and pornographic and erotica material, photographs and videos on the Internet and other printed and electronic media on the other, exploring sexuality within academic frames or depicting explicit sexual matter or soft-core scenes aspiring to be regarded as high art are becoming increasingly influential amid social discourse and pop culture, modifying the perception of sex and sexuality in the Western world and within the global scheme. These materials, scholarly informed or popularly generated, have become available to the public of almost any country during the last decades, following the sexual revolution. *The dark continent of the vagina*, as Freud described woman's sexuality (2002:186), is presently emerging as a realm worthy of rediscovering in terms of mystery unveiled, while being rendered public for both women and men to explore amid a sense of legitimate fathoming.

The meaning of intercourse and its value varies from culture to culture, as well as in the course of history within any one culture (Dyer 1987:17). Nonetheless, the nature of female sexuality seems to, comprehensively, have a particularly mysterious or mystifying significance in every culture (1987:24). The mythical *vagina dentata* (Raitt 1980: 416) symbolically ceases to be “the castrating female,” (1980:421) the cannibalistic organ for the phallus, as female genitalia becomes more visible, tangible and civic. Women, endowed with testicles (ovaries) and penis (clitoris), with womb and breasts, may be perceived with the power to dominate, to castrate, thanks to her “sufficient perfection” (1980:419). Women have many aspects to envy: limitless pleasure capacity (no refractory period to reengage in intercourse), two perineum orifices of pleasure, an erectile clitoris and extra-sensitive nipples provided with far more nervous endings than the penis and nipples of men. Orgasm for women may be vaginal, clitoral or full-bodied; it can also be accompanied by female ejaculation. Women embody the source where to nestle, gestate and deliver human replicas, with which they lay deeper emotional connections. Moreover, they also are endowed with a mythical capacity to perceive untaught and noninferential knowledge, along with communicational skills developed while ancestral men were practicing silence amid the chase of prey. No wonder medieval and colonial inquisitors saw in them “a foe to friendship, an inescapable punishment, a necessary evil, a natural temptation, a desirable calamity, a domestic danger, a delectable detriment, an evil of nature, painted with full colors,” (1980:422) and not the cosmic egg, the embodiment of the primordial source of energy that cultures and traditions as Tantra, Buddhism, Shintoism and many nature-positive others, recognized.

Before expanding on the notion of Tantra, it is important to balance the above statements, in order to avoid further widespread of a negatively biased perception of masculinity and of misandry. Men, their psychological traits of thought and their symbolic and physiological phallus are also regarded as embodiments of perfected natural evolution. The phallus adoration and male attributes and feats are well recognized and celebrated. Men, women, transsexuals, the mineral, the animal, and the vegetable kingdoms have undergone an astonishing path of evolution and transformation to render life and its sentient and inert expressions to be what we know them today. Men and women, endowed with the level of consciousness they reveal in modern society, are both responsible for overpopulation, depletion of natural resources, extinction of species, climate change, warfare, consumerism and corruption. Gender power relations have to be analyzed from diverse points of view in order to understand its dynamics and conflicts, while working within inclusive and balanced patterns of interaction, and amid the acknowledgment of the small but fascinating asymmetries that make males, females, and, in the continuum, transsexuals, different. To this approach of equality, all other existing models of understanding gender must be pondered for history's passing from adolescence into adulthood. The five models exposed by Synnott in *Re-Thinking Men: Heroes, Villains and Victims*, the romantic, the patriarchal, the misandric, the postmodern (chaos in theory), and the gender/class/ethnic conflict (2009:59), give an ample picture of how men and women have posed their gaze on each other, always with the aim of widening comprehension, compassion, acceptance and forgiveness amid mutual or opposing values.

Tantra, the ancient Hindu philosophy, is gradually entering the Western mind. The Greek and Roman civilizations seem to have ignored it, or kept it in arcane premises until it was lost in the interstices of rituals and customs of politically charged, dogmatic and puritanical religions. This *science* of body, mind and soul, considers the sexual experience as religious and integral to every aspect of the individual's existence, making self-study and human adventure the lab where empirical observation is carried out. Thus, in a world conditioned and compelled to seek fulfillment within outer and material experience, Tantra remains a fairly unrecognized epistemological discipline in Western scholarship. Nonetheless, such a seemingly strange Hindu philosophy is not completely in countersense to the Western academic domain, as it reemerges as a fresh and, at the same time, millenary alternative tradition that offers a multi-dimensional approach to sex, sexuality and gender relations. In present times, Tantra, as a philosophical practice, is becoming a more seriously and respectfully addressed and researched subject, amongst the hands of an increasing number of scholars.

The domestication of Oriental philosophy and wisdom (Said 1977:4), in the case of Tantra, may embed Western societies with a atomic-spiritual *time-delayed bomb* that could render new dimensions to the obsession of sex, sexuality, sexual organs, and subsequently, to its reflection within the social and political structures. Puritanical or essentialist views on sexuality are constantly challenged within assumptions interplaying between sexuality itself and politics (Mellen 2004:22). Political and sexual repression portrays two faces of a same calamity (2004:25): sexual and political liberation are tightly interdependent. The connections between sexuality and spirituality, denied during centuries all together, are drawing a historical loop, while resurfacing thanks to the

“extreme” Hindu, Buddhist, Tibetan and Shinto traditions, which have kept them alive (Urban 2010:4) within monastic and secular traditions. Colonizers from the West during the last centuries held these pockets of wisdom as multifarious, depraved and degenerate (Urban 2010:1).

For many years I have pondered and studied the subject of Tantra, but when drawn into Western academic, social and, on most occasions, intimate space, the "yoga of sex" (Urban 2010:1) is readily questioned or disregarded as an excessively exotic, bizarre or subversive notion. Non-frictional, non-orgasmic meditational sex, as an occasional spiritual practice, may offer a therapeutic space, which could bring new dimensions to couple's aims and life projects. Being a Martian among men has thus been my vocation. A day will come for couples not to be ashamed of remarrying religion to sexuality. Orgasm, however fantastically it may be experienced amid a loving relationship, is not the *summum*, despite the obsession which Western and puritanical societies may have developed around it. From the latter dynamics of compulsion, men and women compete to conquer the fittest sexually and economically providing partner, only to menace the world out of deeply ingrained egotistical, repeated and frustrating gymnastics. These, extrapolate to sociocultural and economical practices, which ultimately generate ecological disaster and shameful lack to third party solidarity. Religions profit in divorcing sex from spirituality. Orgasm, *la petite mort*, self-acquired communion through sexuality, purports the cardinal competitor for the organized religious institution. If the religious quest and sexuality are re-amalgamated as a self-guided democratized mystical experience, the religious institution renders neither anymore an atmosphere for a gender-based rivalry nor for antagonism between religion and sexuality. Mystical accounts of

well-known saints have used erotic metaphors to narrate mystical events, because one and the same energetic material, love-erotic and love-transcendent, construes such an experience.

Humanity, in making a liberal and judicious use of conflicting forces, movements and approaches related to gender and sexuality, may be at the dawn of an era that will bring about new and deeper understandings in such realms, while enabling discovery of and connection to the Self. The adoration, which diverse cultures amid pre-historic and historic rituals have devoted to the fertility and procreative symbolic qualities of the sexual organs, and which may be perceived to be in profane practice on the Internet through an obsessive depiction of genitalia and its choreography, will beget new models of gender dynamics, and consequently, of social and political structures. The phallus and the vagina intelligentsia, generating an afresh revolution inspired in self-motivated exploration and inquiry like those proposed by the sexual/spiritual tributaries of Tantrism and Tao, may prove further liberating for humanity than material and scientific advancement.

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