

# Grains of Resonance: Affect, Pornography and Visual Sensation

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The image on the screen in front of me is multiply layered. The interface of the web site comes with looping and blinking animations, still images and menu items that disappear only when moving to full screen view. The video image itself is equally layered: a compressed MP4 file of a 1970s 8 mm porn film transferred on videotape, dubbed and later digitized. The multiple media layers are present as noise and texture and the image surface is markedly tactile. The image is slightly jumpy and the camera moves close to, and further away again from bodies gesturing, moving and having sex. The heavy visual pixilation reverberates with the overall fuzziness of the *mise-en-scène* including beige-brown wall-to-wall carpeting, upholstery and wallpaper, and the pink skin and beige body hair of the performers. The clip is titled *Je später der Abend* ('The later the hour') and I am watching it on the site xhamster.com. In addition to the visual layers, the film comes layered with personal connotations.

In the 1970s, my father bought two Super 8 mm film porn reels from Germany. My parents watched the reels with their friends and stashed them away for safekeeping. Later, I would only hear stories. Much later, I inherited the reels. The projector once used for screening them has long ceased to function yet I am very attached to the physical copies of the films that now decorate my bookshelf. While I have never been able to watch the reels in their original format, I enjoy their vintage look, feel and even their scent of film. Watching the clip online, it resonates with both my memories and my knowledge

of pornography – a genre which I have spent the last decade studying. Yet it also resonates on the level of texture and feel.

In what follows, I draw on the example of *Je später der Abend* in order to unravel the possibilities of resonance as an analytical concept in and for addressing the intensities, connections and moments of captivation in acts of looking. According to thesaurus definitions, resonance refers to ‘the quality in a sound of being deep, full and reverberating,’ ‘the ability to evoke or suggest images, memories, and emotions’ and ‘oscillation induced in a physical system when it is affected by another system that is itself oscillating at the right frequency.’<sup>1</sup> In academic conference discourse, resonance refers to arguments and points that relate to, or somehow echo those made by others. In its more theoretical uses, resonance has been used for discussing affective, precognitive intensity separate from emotions as ‘intensity owned and recognized’ (Massumi 2002: 25–30; Shouse 2005). While building on this notion of affective intensity, I follow Sara Ahmed on the factual inseparability of affect and emotion. For Ahmed, emotions, as intensities, are not ‘after-thoughts’ to the affective ‘but shape how bodies are moved by the worlds they inhabit’ (Ahmed 2010a: 32). Affect and emotion ‘are contiguous; they slide into each other; they stick, and cohere, even when they are separated’ (Ahmed 2010a: 32). Resonance implies connectivity and contact between objects, ideas and people as they affect one another: it is a dynamic sensory relation with varying intensities and speeds where the affective and the emotional stick and cohere.

Moving from theorizations of the gaze influential in feminist studies of visual culture to date (studies of pornography included) to considerations of resonance and materiality at play in encounters with images, this article explores our myriad ways of engaging with images – not as mere surfaces but as material entities that we are constantly drawn to and impressed by.

### **The gaze**

Laura Mulvey’s discussion of the male gaze in her 1975 article, ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,’ has been widely cited, critiqued and applied in feminist research for soon four decades. Exploring the psycho-semiotic dynamics and the gendered positioning of characters and viewers in 1930s Hollywood cinema, the article frames the gaze as male and the woman as its object (Mulvey 1988: 68). In pornography, bodies are routinely presented as fragmented through close-ups and zooms, and the female body is positioned squarely at the centre of

action as a visual feast in most heterosexual porn. It is possible to interpret such fragmentation and stylization as exemplary of fetishistic scopophilia, as theorized by Mulvey (1988: 65; see also Ellis 1980: 98–99; Williams 1989: 82). Applying the theoretical model of the gaze means subscribing to a particular conceptualization of looking as underpinned by objectification, fetishization and control. When applied to studies of pornography, one is likely uncover such gendered dynamics over and over again, and to then pin down its representational conventions through gendered dynamics of control (Paasonen 2010a).

My concern is that identifying these visual conventions falls short of accounting for the conventions, modalities and characteristics of pornography as an intermedial genre, and the range of sensations involved in watching it. Contemporary pornography is divided into endless niches and sub-genres in terms of target audiences, sexual preferences, body styles, aesthetics, production values, ethics and economies of production. Within these, displays range from hyperbolic depiction of embodied differences to the minute documentation of body parts, gestures and motions. Pornography can be fitted into a singular model of looking only at the risk of effacing its inner diversity and the range of affective intensities it affords. Mulvey set out to deconstruct, and indeed to destroy, the visual pleasures of narrative cinema. Her article speaks little of visual pleasure in the positive spectrum, or of the more visceral sensations involved in encounters with film (Kennedy 2000). The notion of the male gaze is peculiarly affect-less in its emphasis on how vision is structured and how viewers are positioned in terms of identification. At the same time, experiences of looking are underpinned by affective dynamics: intensities of feeling that grab the viewer, resonate in the body and create connections to the things watched before one is even aware of them. When opening up the notion of the gaze to definitions beyond those of control, a range of other potential visions and sensations becomes evident.

In *Scented Gardens for the Blind*, novelist Janet Frame describes the gaze as both generous and lingering. For Frame (1980: 15), ‘our pattern-crazy sight’ is ‘rich, ambitious, loving.’ Rather than constantly aiming to control that which we see, we equally enjoy the texture and rhythm of the visions unfolding in front of us, we are impressed and affected by them. Some images stick and linger whereas we hardly pay attention to others as they slide by. Vision can, and it often does, take up intimate modes of engagement. In addition to looking, a range of other sensory engagements and bodily affectations is taking place – and not least, or only, in acts of porn watching geared towards

sexual arousal. Vision varies in intensity and orientation in synch with the resonances that acts of looking involve.

Philosopher Elizabeth Grosz proposes a typology of looking alternative to the gaze, one ranging from the ‘seductive fleeting glance’ to ‘laborious observation,’ ‘a sweeping survey’ and ‘the wink and the blink’ (Grosz 2006: 108). The plurality of potential visions dictates ‘how objects are seen and even which ones are seen’ and it is not reducible to any singular model based on visual control (2006: 109). Grosz does not develop her discussion much further, yet she points out a range of visual engagements that are not automatically or in any direct manner associated with mastery and distance. A look may, then, be controlling and it may aim at mastery but this is not all that it can be, or do. We gaze, scan, glimpse and grasp that which we perceive with more or less intensity (Barker 2009: 37). Like hearing, touch, smell and taste, sight comes in endless nuances and variations that we risk loosing sight at if relying on generalised models of looking. A similar flattening out occurs in studies of pornography where the genre is considered a singular entity, cultural symptom or metaphor (for example Jensen 2007). In both instances, a conceptual structure is set into place that effaces diversity and variation from view.

Vision is easily used as metaphor for distance and control whereas other senses, such as touch, are granted more intimacy and ambivalence. Sight and hearing involve more bodily distance than taste or smell and, due to this, sight has historically been given higher value due to its assumed ‘purity’ (Serres 2008). Yet the boundaries between vision and the other senses are by no means clear-cut. Writing on affect, Brian Massumi defines it as synesthetic and ‘implying the participation of the senses in each other’ as ‘the measure of a living thing’s potential interactions is its ability to transform the effects of one sensory model into those of another’ (Massumi 2002: 35). For Massumi, the senses are meshed in, and they resonate, with one another (2002: 145–146; also Sobchack 2004: 67–68). We feel out the world with our eyes: ‘And no one knows how much the world is worn out … by the continual rubbing of human sight upon its edges, corners and open pages’ (Frame 1980: 16).

We make sense of objects through sight, by observing their luminosity and surface, their slickness, grain, width, height, depth and weight. Looking and touching both involve ‘gradations of the material’ between the hard and the soft, the heavy and the light, the tangible and the ephemeral (Miller 2010: 73). As ‘a dynamic and shifting entanglement of relations’ (Barad 2007: 35), materiality is an issue of both physical properties (such as density and mass) and acts of

perception where the bodies of people meet with the bodies of artefacts.

### Texture

The MP4 video file of *Je später der Abend* is 8 minutes and 20 seconds long. The clip carries the grainy texture, hiss, noise and low sound resolution of home video, copied some times over, with some of the jumpiness of the 8mm film still evident. The colours are tinted sepia and the film has been further pixelated in the course of being digitized, compressed and saved as a video file. The dubbed dialogue is off-synch with the actors' lip movements, and the exchange and narrative simple enough for me – one who learnt my rudimentary understanding of the language from 1980s German TV detective shows such as *Der Alte* and *Tatort* – to follow.

Different material incarnations of the film (in terms of file formats and technical platforms) facilitate different sensory engagements, resonances and uses. The digital file remediates video and film porn of the analogue kind and carries traces of their technical specificity (cf. Bolter and Grusin 1999). The MP4 file can be accessed online at any time and from any location, downloaded and distributed further. Embedded in the xhamster.com interface design, the clip is accompanied by links, banner ads, rating and commenting tools. New windows pop up advertising live sex cams, animated gifs loop and still images display young women rubbing their naked bodies, masturbating, having anal and oral sex. As a digital video file, the clip can be endlessly copied and redistributed, while videotapes and film reels wear over time and break. When watched on a computer screen, its grainy qualities connote VHS and, possibly, media nostalgia. At the same time, video cannot be 'completely encoded into digital media' (Hayles 2003: 270). It is part of a database, searchable through tags and keywords – a different kind of creature.

The 'gradations of materiality' involved vary across media formats and platforms. Beyond and besides its representational aspects, the same images encountered on different screens or in different media both are and are not the same. A super 8mm film, like videotape, exists as a material object yet materializes *as a film* when projected onto a screen with the aid of a projector, its lamps and reels. Electronic images materialize – become perceivable – as magnetic tape is played on a VCR connected to a television receiver, as computers are connected to network servers and as files are searched for, downloaded, opened and read with appropriate applications, and displayed as pixels

on a screen. Digital still and moving images materialize according to their size, resolution, colour contrast and the luminosity of the screen.

All this concerns texture and feel. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (2003: 17–19) points out how the term *feeling* carries with it a sense of proximity, contact and touch. Following Sedgwick, texture is intimately tied to affect and considerations of both looking and materiality should be expanded to our tactile engagements with media technologies, screens and surfaces. The act of looking at TV and handling a remote control differs from the sensations of typing on a keyboard and clicking a mouse. The rhythms of clicking 'play' on a VCR, changing channels, clicking from one hyperlink to another, moving between windows or applications are crucial to how we engage with, sense and make sense of, images, videos, texts, sounds and combinations thereof. We may wait a second or fifteen minutes before changing channels or opening another web page, we may stop and study an image, or our eyes can just scan over it, paying little attention.

Our modes of looking may be glancing, sweeping or laborious, intimate or distant, controlling or caressing. As media users, we rarely just look or listen but also choose, pick, fast-forward, download, upload, tag, save, browse and click. Engagements with media have particular tempo, rhythm and intensity that both changes from one moment to another and marks differences between applications. Theresa M. Senft argues that on the Web, '*spectatorship functions less as gaze than grab*'. By "grab," I mean to clutch with the hand, to seize for a moment, to command attention, to touch – often inappropriately, sometimes reciprocally' (Senft 2008: 46, emphasis added). Online, images, videos and stories are grabbed, linked and incorporated to other sites, shared and framed with user comments (2008: 47). The tempo is one of rupture rather than contemplation, of immersion in parallel action rather than engagement with a singular story or character. The notion of the grab involves a departure from theories of the gaze in screen theory in that it addresses the shifting and multiple positions of viewers as users (or producers) of media and the complex circulation of attention and data this involves.

On a yet another – and a less media specific – level, the notion of the grab can be used to describe resonance that occurs as images and sounds snatch our attention and invite closer inspection. That which grabs, resonates by involving intensity, potentiality and affectation. Depending on the affective resonance at play we may turn away from, move closer to or merely blink in disbelief at that which grabs our sensorium and attention. Like the grab and unlike the gaze,

resonance does not presume visual control, any particular gendered psychodynamics or modes of relating to, and identifying with images. Resonance reaches and grabs as intensities sensed in the body before we even know what got us. These initial, near-instant encounters then give way acts of revisiting, revision and reflection with their own degrees of intensity where affect and emotion are impossible to tell apart (cf. Armstrong 2000).

When watching television, browsing through a glossy magazine or a porn site, some visual, textual, sonic and haptic constellations have stronger resonance, some weaker and most of them seem not to resonate at all. All resonance alters in form and intensity over time, depending on who one is encountering the images, how, where and when. As intensity encompassing and connecting the human sensorium, the operations of media technologies and the textures of sound and image – both soma and *techné* – resonance can be understood as somatechnic by default (Sullivan and Murray 2011: vi). Created in affective encounters between media technologies, images and viewing bodies, resonance is a dynamic that oscillates and ranges in rhythm and tempo. Resonance gives rise to connections between these different bodies that then layer as personal ‘somatic archives’ – impressions, associations and imprints – that we constantly draw upon when encountering images, sounds, objects or people. Considerations of affective resonance can be productively connected to somatechnics as interrogation of ‘the situated material processes in and through which corporealities are shaped, experienced and lived in dynamic and complex ways’ (Sullivan and Murray 2011: v). Such processes and resonances may be difficult to account for or to translate into language: What is this sensation? Why am I fascinated? What moves me here, and how?

## **Fascination**

As both precognitive and cognitive motion, resonance evokes a different mode of thinking about viewer engagement than theorizations of identification in screen theory. For Mulvey, scopophilia facilitates narcissism as simultaneous recognition and misrecognition where the viewer both temporarily loses her ego and reinforces it through identification with the figures on the screen (Mulvey 1988: 59–61). Broadly deployed, identification has ‘been used as a kind of commonsense term within some film and literary studies’ (Stacey 1994: 130). Encounters with all kinds of pornography are similarly discussed as involving identification (for example Williams 1989;

Patterson 2004; Moore and Weissbein 2010) to the degree that its viewers are assumed to have ‘a necessary close identification’ with the bodies on the screen (Martin 2006: 194). At the same time, the genre tends to focus on showing rather than narration, and on stylized types rather than characters. There is not necessarily much to identify with.

Reframing identification as *fascination*, Jackie Stacey (1994: 25) explores the issue as aspiration and mirroring. She suggests that fascination is by no means an automatic process that requires similarity between the self and the characters depicted. Situations, clothes, settings, props, movements and bits of dialog can all fascinate – and resonate. This is not necessarily a matter of identification. Extending the discussion from the cultural form of cinema towards visual culture more broadly, identification fails to describe much of the mattering and resonance occurring in engagement with images, from advertisements to works of art, profile images distributed on a social networking site and porn film clips searches online. Identification implies sameness – recognition between people, viewers and images of human bodies – yet in order to resonate with one another, objects or agents do not need to be human, or similar to one another. They merely need to relate and connect.

The narrative of *Je später der Abend* is minimal: a woman’s car breaks down and she rings the doorbell of a man reading *Playboy* on a sofa, dressed in an open bathrobe. Failing to reach a car service by phone so late in the evening, she agrees to spend the night and changes into something more comfortable. There are some drinks, some romantic mood music, and, half way into the film, the couple begins to have sex in various positions. After, the man awakens and wonders if it was all a dream, for photos of this very same woman grace the pages of the *Playboy* he had been reading. A bathrobe thrown on the floor and a message painted with lipstick in the bathroom mirror (‘Vielen Dank für die Nacht – Claudia’) nevertheless confirm that it was no dream, and the film ends. The narrative is something of a porn cliché. The performance styles are awkward: the 1970s interior design, the hairstyles, the hairy and non-toned bodies date the film even without a retro framing of the kind provided on xhamster.com (a site that amply hosts vintage porn). There are few options for identification in terms of narrative or characters: we know virtually nothing about the characters or their motivations beyond their evident liking for sex.

Watching the film, my attention constantly slips and slides towards the home decor, the details of sound work, the audiovisual hiss and the noise. The textures of the heavily remediated image, the dubbed

soundscape, the brown velvet upholstery and the flabby pink skin of the male performer fascinate. The clichés of the storyline, the dialog, the dubbed sighs, the grunts and the visual fuzziness all as if create quotation marks around the sexual action. The video does not facilitate visual control as it slips out of reach and fails to pull me close. It does not work *as porn* in that it does not sexually arouse. The clip remains curious, over-determined by family stories, its sex acts standard as much as explicit. Yet it is not without affective potentiality or fascination.

As pointed out above, resonance concerns multisensory affective intensity and relationality that precedes cognitive processing but the term is equally descriptive of relations between people and things that build and transform over time and where the somatic and the cognitive intermesh. Resonance points to the material factors of images and media technologies, to the fleshy substance of the human body, as well as to the texture and grain of images and sounds, through which somatechnical vibrations may ensue. Such frequencies are sought when buying a DVD, choosing a television programme or doing an xhamster search, and discovered by accident as particular images and sounds grab our attention and stick. Resonance is descriptive of the interactive nature of such attachments, as well as the power of sounds and images to touch and move us, to arouse our senses, memories, feelings and interest alike. This is not a relation of identification in the sense of recognition of sameness, nor is it merely an issue of projection.

The notion of resonance encompasses the affective and the cognitive, the representational and the sensory, and points to their mutual inseparability. Rather than mere 'good vibrations,' resonances can be experienced as disturbing kinds of dissonances or as sharp, revolting shocks (see Paasonen 2011), or as waves of amusement and lingering curiosity, as with *Je später der Abend*. The resonant and the dissonant may be difficult to tell apart and the interplay may in fact be central to the dynamics and motivation of viewing: when it 'works,' horror startles and even terrifies us, while lifestyle and makeover television aims to evoke a range of sensations from curiosity to shame, interest, amusement, embarrassment and disgust, underpinned by the dynamics of gender, class and taste (for example Dyer 2002: 140; Williams 1991; Skeggs and Wood 2012; Coleman 2012). Porn may sexually arouse, astonish, amuse or titillate in a more ambivalent affective register. All this involves both human and nonhuman agency, connections and attachments between people, ideas, images and technologies.

## Imprints

The human body is shaped by historically layered skills, experiences, and sensations that bring forth particular ways of relating to other bodies and reverberating with them. Dance scholar Susan Kozel (2007: 24–26) discusses this as resonance based on our assembly of senses and experiences. Through such ‘kinesthetic empathy’, the sight of bodies moving calls forth responses in one’s own (Laukkanen 2010). As we experience and experiment with embodiment, memories and imprints accumulate and change over time. When doing so, they give form to something that can be called somatic archives. I can, for example, readily recall the shocks – pleasurable or not – of another person’s naked body touching mine: our bodies entering one another, stroking, pinching, sweating and slamming to one another, and the scents, tastes, textures and sensations of all this. In my somatic archives, these imprints tie into the particularities of places, people and moments. Depictions of bodies heaving in the throes of sex may resonate with my somatic archives without these bodies being similar to mine in terms of gender, age or ethnicity. Nevertheless, somatic archives make it possible for me to sense some of the intensity involved – to catch some of its trail. The bodies having sex in *Je später der Abend* perform acts that I routinely engage in. This affords somatic proximity with a film that otherwise resists closeness. The weight, hairiness, stickiness and friction of the bodies performing resonate on the level of somatic archives: in addition to the temporal layer of distance, a layer of embodied recognition and proximity is present, faintly resonant in the bodies of the people, acts and objects depicted.

Pornography is an evocative object for thinking about the force and somatechnical resonance of sound and image, given that the genre – in its myriad contemporary shapes and forms – basically aims to bodily move and touch those engaging with it. 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, it can be argued that such inter-sensory translation will, by default, fail to mediate a range of intensity and motion experienced during sex. Yet resonance occurs as sensations of sexual arousal, lingering curiosity, sharp jolts of disgust and passing moments of familiarity. Some images and sounds stick whereas others – like the sexual routines of *Je später der Abend* – slide by with little viscosity. Recognition, then, does not imply affective intensity.

As mediated sounds and images resonate with one’s somatic archives, they give rise to sensations that may please, displease, perplex,

surprise or escape definition. Viewers imagine how things might feel or matter on the basis of their earlier sensations of touch, texture, heat, taste or motion. Following film scholar Vivian Sobchack, this might be considered carnal identification since somatic archives enable one to imagine how things could feel (Sobchack 2004). Attachment to acts and scenes is of the contingent and fleeting kind, moving between detachment and resonance, proximity and distance, similarities and differences. Such attachments are volatile in the connections and disconnections they afford, and always imprinted and underpinned by their technologies of production, distribution and consumption, their texture and grain.

Resonance works in and through somatic archives but the sensorium is also constantly open towards surprise, transformation and novelty. All this involves affection, which Henri Bergson discussed as ‘that part or aspect of the inside of our body which we mix with the image of external bodies’ (Bergson 2007: 60). For Bergson, perception and sensation are inseparable and the virtual actions of the body are ‘impregnated’ by its real 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 (Bergson 2007: 4–5).

For Gilles Deleuze (drawing on Bergson), bodies are defined through their capacity to affect and to be affected: bodies, like things, become through and in their affective relations to one another (Massumi 2002: xvi; Coleman 2009: 42–43). And, as Rebecca Coleman argues, ‘*it is the relations of affect that produce a body’s capacities*’ (2009: 43, emphasis in the original). In acts of looking, the bodies of people entwine with images (2009: 3, 19). Images animate the bodies of those watching while these bodies animate the images they encounter in return. This movement happens through and as resonance that is sometimes undetectably faint, sometimes almost overwhelming and sometimes paradoxical.

## **Hapticity**

When writing on Francis Bacon, Deleuze develops the notion of tactile, haptic visuality – a term coined by art historian Alois Riegel in his

discussion on close vision (Deleuze 2003). As opposed to optical images necessitating distance and visual control over a whole, haptic vision comes up close, involving both touch and vision. The terminology has since been taken up by Laura U. Marks, for whom haptic images are encountered through the skin as well as the eyes (Marks 2002: 2–3). Haptic images offer pure surface to view through extreme close-ups and, by doing so, depend on ‘limited visibility and the viewer’s lack of mastery over the image’ (2002: 15). Indirect and inviting ‘a small caressing gaze’ rather than voyeuristic control, they draw the viewer close (Marks 2000: 163; 2002: 6). All this would seem to reverberate with how porn is ‘able to zoom in and focus on the body, and especially the genitals, in minute details and present the flesh enlarged to proportions that are impossible to see in actual sexual encounters’ (Sargeant 2006). Such contemplative proximity intersects with much more observational shots (exemplary of optical visuality). Contrary to a haptic emphasis on materiality, texture, embodiment, and touch, optical visuality ‘privileges the representational power of the image’ and perceives of it as an object facilitating a sense of distance (Marks 2000: 163).

Pornography operates in the oscillating registers of hyperbole and documentary realism, predictability and viscerality. 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 image and sound, and the resonances conditioned 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 the close-up details of bodies, to whole body or long-shots, surprising juxtapositions and ruptures. The resonances they evoke differ from one act of viewing to another. I argue that such motion cannot be fixed by, or confined in, analysis based on aesthetic or formal properties alone, or in generalized concepts such as the haptic and the optic.

Identifying the potential resonances of an image through its formal or pictorial properties means shifting attention away from encounters and relations between people and images to the level of form. This says little of how it resonates and becomes sensed. An image that grabs me is likely to leave another viewer cold, just like, on

re-reading, a book I used to enjoy a decade ago now only evokes bored dismay. As affective intensity, resonance necessitates oscillation at the right frequency between entities that are appropriately tuned. But these frequencies constantly change.

For some scholars, phenomenological accounts of affect fail to address the level of force and sensation. When writing on images, attention nevertheless congeals on instances of resonance, as articulated by the scholar in question (for example Abel 2007; Shaviro 2010; Deleuze 2003). If such impressions are conceptualized as indicative of non-subjective intensity or potentiality, there is a risk of losing sight of the specificity of viewing bodies and their cultural conditions (Kyrölä 2010: 8; Coleman 2009). A similar loss of particularity occurs if potentialities are assumed to 'be there,' independent of the interpreting subject and her affectations (resulting from either processes of artistic creation or the images' formal and aesthetic properties).

I understand resonance as 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 (Massumi 2002; Shouse 2005). For Deleuze, resonance is about confrontation and struggle between different sensations or elements: a coming together of sensations with different levels or zones that confront, and communicate with, one other (Deleuze 2003: 46, 67–69). Deleuze focuses on the intensities and potentialities captured on the screen in processes of artistic creation (for example, he sees Bacon's paintings as encapsulating intensity). Grosz similarly discusses art as producing and generating intensity and sensation. Marks, again, explores haptic visuality in video and film art and connects it to the specific properties of an image. For Grosz, art submits its materials to intensity and sensation with no predetermined format and impacts the bodies of people by turning vibrations – life forces – into sensations. She separates art from material production that generates 'pre-experienced sensations, sensations known in advance, guaranteed to affect in particular sad or joyful ways' (Grosz 2008: 4). In other words, Grosz marks popular culture as unable to vibrate and therefore as not meriting conceptual interest.

Given that pornography is a genre often defined through the lack of any social, cultural or artistic value, it would also seem to lack in any vibrations whatsoever. On the one hand, there are the properties

and affordances of different objects to consider: the gradations of materiality they involve, the encounters they invite and the modes of analytical engagement they afford or facilitate (the question being, what resonates with what). On the other hand, the marking apart of the artful from the prefabricated reiterates the value hierarchies and premises of mass culture critique where some objects are marked as more worthy of intellectual engagement than others.

### **Encounters**

Two points are noteworthy here. First, not only art resonates. Second, there is no guarantee that art turns vibrations into sensations so that they *become sensed*. Following Spinoza (1992: 133), 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.’ 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 describe, or that the same image will affect us twice in quite the same way. Removing the phenomenological from the agenda may help in downplaying this dilemma. However, as Jane Gallop once pointed out (on reading de Sade), that which fascinates me ‘could leave another reader cold. What I assumed was a general desire, a “normal” attraction … turns out to be my peculiar tendency, my perversion’ (Gallop 1988: 53). This I have recurrently experienced with the images and sounds that have grabbed me (Paasonen 2010b), and those that have failed to do so when their intensities have been palpable to others. According to affect theorist Silvan Tomkins (1995: 54), “There is literally no kind of object which has not historically been linked to one or another of the affects.” In other words, any object may be attached to any affect, and vice versa (Tomkins 1995: 55). If this is so, where does all this leave the researcher attempting to theorize the affective force and power of images?

The notion of somatic archives – similarly to theorizations of body image (e.g. Coleman 2009; Kyrölä 2010; Featherstone 2010) – is one means of accounting for how affective resonances are marked and oriented by personal histories, experiences, traumas, tastes and fantasies, ethical concerns and political investments. While resonance is precognitive in the sense of preceding conscious processing (albeit intimately tied to it), the bodies resonating are historically layered and specific – they are attuned in particular ways (Ahmed 2004; Coleman 2009: 1–2; Coleman 2012).

It remains important to analyse and map the formal properties of images: how they are put together, how they work and, perhaps, what their creators aim to achieve with them. Analysis of such affordances need not lead to generalizations concerning either their effect on viewing bodies or their affective intensities – namely, it need not be argued that *this* very image is to evoke *this* particular affect. My attachment to *Je später der Abend*, for example, is highly particular and cannot be conceptualized as more general or nonpersonal. Neither can it be derived from, or reduced to, the formal properties of the clip itself. Doing so would risk a particular kind of ‘formalism’ where affective potentiality is deciphered by analysing the object, its properties and aesthetics without accounting for what it resonates with – who encounters it and how. In order to account for the work that resonance does, analysis needs to extend to the materiality and historicity of images, viewing bodies and their mutual attunements.

Rather than an impersonal force, I am then interested in affective resonance as a connection through which bodies – human and nonhuman alike – move together, shape and affect one another and give shape to contingent assemblages. The difference is similar to that which Ahmed identifies in her discussion on happiness. Philosophical concepts are detached from the everyday use of words, from particular instances or sensations: philosophy ‘brackets the everyday or ordinary and thinks with extreme forms, such as found in modern art’ (Ahmed 2010b: 14–15). In contrast, Ahmed is interested in ‘how happiness is spoken, lived, practiced,’ in ‘what it does’ (2010b: 15). Similarly, resonance for me is an issue of what encounters do. When resonating with one another, the representational and material properties of an image meet the layered, personal and corporeal histories of the viewing subject. Aspects such as density, hue or texture are central to our attachment to images yet affective intensity cannot be reduced to, or be captivated within, them.

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. The surprised titillation and affective charge of first viewing *Je später der Abend* – at last, after hearing all the stories! – have since faded into more distanced amusement experienced in relation to the *mise-en-scène*, considerations of genre and period. Fascination remains but also remains in flux. Watching the clip, I move closer and further away again, and the connections and intensities shift and change. This is something that Lynne Pearce discusses as ‘discomforting commute’ between forms on interpretation (Pearce 1997: 23). When watching porn, the affective intensities

of looking can be tangy or undetectably lame. Some images, films and texts speak past me, some remain inaccessible, some I simply cannot be bothered with and yet others grab me. These different intensities and affordances shape acts of interpretation, pull me closer or push me further away. Affective dynamics give rise to analytical affordance, potential means of engaging with and making sense of images. As images grab me or slide by me, analytical vistas are opened up while others are narrowed or even closed down without me noticing. Through such discomforting commute, it is possible to explore the affective dynamics between the viewer, the images and the somatechnical frameworks that these are embedded in.

**Note**

1. See [http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/american\\_english/resonance](http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/american_english/resonance); <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/resonance>.

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