

For Real

an exploration of today's fetish for reality, in porn and elsewhere

Topics class description

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In the past 10 years there has been a revolution in the way sexual imagery is produced and distributed. Along with the changes brought to the porno industry by the switch to digital technology, there has been another even bigger change. Thanks to cheap digital photography (and now video) and the power of the Internet, a new form of self expression has come about - amateur pornography freely exchanged online. These images are radically different from traditional pornography, and in fact some of them challenge the concept of pornography itself. I call it Realcore, because one of its aims is to portray reality in a believable manner. Realcore it's brave, very intimate, often stunning and creative; it's an endless catalogue of human desires, portrayed in a very honest and straightforward way. It seems that, once empowered to make their own porno, the users - instead of imitating mainstream imagery - developed a totally different style, and created online communities made up of users that become producers. This, along with the familiarity with the digital tools, suggests an idea: that today amateur pornographers are at the forefront of the digital revolution and, much as it's happening in other forms of expressions (like writing and blogs, for example), they are writing the grammar of a new way to self expression - in a very delicate and special area such as sexuality.

This seminar will explore many aspects of the rise of today's fascination for reality:

- Pre 1960es: when pornography, before the rise of the hardcore industry, was basically a vocational affair - and a cottage industry.
- Lifestyles: in many cases an important element of realcore imagery, they were an essential component in the early days of porno. From the "dancers" of naughty barbershop postcards or later the 50es strippers (who were attractive not only because they showed skin, but mostly because of their supposedly fascinating lifestyle), to "lifestyle cinema" of the 40/50/60es ("what really happens at beatnik parties?").
- Exotica, the dream lands (Paris, Sweden, The East). Colonial pornography and the first wave of "reality movies" of the 60es (some italian, like the infamous Mondo series). The National Geographic as a source of nudes.
- Gossip, crime news, true stories, diaries.

We'll also look up digital pornography from its inception (in the pre-internet era of the BBS) to the advent of digital photography (1994/'97) to today's Web 2.0, and will cover a brief history of digital sexual communities. We will also deal with the (very contemporary) relationship between resolution and credibility (in terms of reality) of an image. Part of the purpose of this seminar is to explore the dichotomy between fiction and non fiction, real and fake (or unreal), hot and cold media, and the act of documenting vs creating.