

MASTER DE SPÉCIALISATION EN ÉTUDES DE GENRE

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Hybrid Pleasures: Gender, Sexuality, and Identity

A visual analysis of the film *L.K.U.* by Shu Lea Cheang

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Résumé

Cette thèse examine comment le film I.K.U. de Shu Lea Cheang subvertit les normes pornographiques conventionnelles en plaçant le plaisir féminin et l'autonomie sexuelle au centre de la représentation. À travers une perspective féministe et queer, l'étude explore comment le film remet en question les récits visuels dominés par les hommes et offre une réinvention radicale de la sexualité féminine dans le contexte du film pornographique hardcore long-métrage. En analysant I.K.U., la thèse s'interroge sur le rôle du film dans la redéfinition des représentations du désir féminin et sur sa contribution aux discussions plus larges sur le genre, la race et l'identité au sein de la pornographie.

Introduction

It's not just friction and naked bodies: pornography has eloquence. It has meaning, it has ideas. It even has redeeming ideas. So what's everyone so wrought up about?

–Kipnis, L. (1998). *Bound and gagged: Pornography and the Politics of Fantasy in America*. Duke University Press.

At the turn of the 21st century, Shu Lea Cheang released a Japanese science fiction pornographic film, I.K.U., which offers a distinctive female perspective on the feature-length hardcore pornography genre. As the first pornographic film to be featured at the Sundance Film Festival, and one that continues to be shown at various film festivals around the world, the film's continued presence underscores its significant artistic and pioneering merit. Although the director is reluctant to categorise her film as 'experimental' in order to avoid conflation with the experimental film genre, which has its own tradition of challenging cinematic conventions, I.K.U. nevertheless embodies a spirit of radicalism through its distinctive aesthetics, which drift between the realms of Western sci-fi cyberpunk and Japanese animated manga imagery.

The film subverts and queers the genre's emphasis on male (phallic) bodily pleasure and the invisibilisation of female sexual pleasure. It offers a compelling case for exploring new possibilities in female hardcore fantasy, although it is not widely recognised. In order to investigate these possibilities, the thesis analyses how the film challenges traditional pornographic visual iconography and narrative, whereby the female and queer bodies and sexual pleasure are frequently overshadowed and fetishised from the perspective of the male viewer.

This study aims to elucidate the role of I.K.U. as a critical intervention in the feminist understanding of the representation of sexual bodies and pleasures in feature-length hardcore pornography. It seeks to understand how I.K.U. transcends the traditional representation of feminine sexuality in hardcore pornography and how it plays an important role in the

hybridisation of female and queer sexual agency. To achieve this, the study incorporates the perspectives of various feminist film scholars and theorists.

- Shu Lea Cheang

Artist and filmmaker, Shu Lea Cheang is first and foremost a self-proclaimed *net-worker*. The term describes aptly both her frequent travels around the world and her artistic practice, which foregrounds the ideas of transnational, net-based connectedness.

Born in Taiwan in 1954, Cheang lived in New York for twenty years throughout the 1980s and 1990s. During this time, she developed close relationships with New York queer communities, mingling with various queer artists and filmmakers. Cheang's artistic practice spans various media, including video, installation, and film, but she is best known as one of the pioneers of Net art. One of her most significant works is *Brandon*, the first web commission by the Guggenheim Museum. This online project addresses the tragic story of Brandon Teena, a transgender man who was raped and murdered in Nebraska in 1993. *Brandon* highlights a crucial aspect of Cheang's practice: leveraging cybernetic space as a refuge and alternative reality, transforming real-life issues into virtual narratives.

On the other hand, Cheang's work often delves into the intricate representation of sexual desire, gender identity, and power dynamics, all from a distinctly female point of view. While many Western, white female artists and filmmakers explore these themes, there is a notable lack of representation from racialized women's perspectives, especially those of East Asian women. Additionally, these kinds of works still lack recognition from the Asian public, where discussions on such themes are often less prominent or remain marginalized.

Currently based in Paris, Cheang works across various countries in Europe. I encountered *I.K.U.* by chance last autumn, even though I missed the opportunity to see both the film and the artist in Brussels, during a special program organized by *Our Story* at Cinematek. This serendipitous discovery felt more like a calling than a mere coincidence. Despite never meeting her in person and having limited information about her, writing about and experimenting with her work has given me valuable insights and critical perspectives on the notions of gender and sexuality, particularly from my viewpoint as an Asian woman. My

decision to focus on *I.K.U.* stems from its unique contribution to discussions on gender and sexuality, particularly through its critical examination of the often-overlooked intersection of race and gender within the realm of sexual and gender representation. This film intrigued me not only for its innovative approach but also for its potential to deepen the understanding of these complex issues.

Methodology

Since my analysis primarily concerns the feature-length pornography genre and aims for detailed content analysis, I extensively employ and adapt feminist scholar Linda Williams's critical analysis of conventions of hardcore cinematic pornography. In her seminal book *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the Frenzy of the Visible* published in 1989, Williams has examined the conventions of the hardcore pornography genre, tracing its meanings and functions in its visual and hardcore cinematic forms, from early stag films in the late nineteenth century to modern feature-length hardcore films of the seventies and eighties.

Williams' analysis focuses on North American mainstream hardcore films and comes from the perspective of a heterosexual white woman may be reductive, in a sense it dismisses non-Western and marginalized viewpoints, but her work nevertheless serves as a handy tool for understanding the dominant norms in the genre's representation in a systematic way. She demonstrates how these hardcore representations are constructed based on male-oriented and heterosexual frameworks, investigating the underlying power dynamics and social norms that shape the depiction of sexuality.

This thesis examines the visual representation of *I.K.U.* and its challenge to the prevailing dominant representations of bodies, sexualities and desires within the context of feature-length hardcore pornography. The thesis is divided into three sections, in which the sexual numbers in the film are analysed in terms of their function within the narrative, as they relate to the main protagonist, Reiko.

To achieve this, I applied Williams' framework to categorize and analyze the different functions of sexual scenes. According to Williams, sexual numbers can be interpreted in several ways:

- 1) **Sex numbers as regular moments of pleasure** that may be gratifying either to viewers or to the characters performing the acts;
- 2) **Sex numbers as statements of sexual conflicts** that are manifest in the number;
- 3) **Sex numbers as statements, or restatements, of conflicts** that are manifest in the narrative;
- 4) **Sex numbers as resolutions of conflicts** stated either in the narrative or in the other numbers.

The initial section, entitled *Pleasure and Visibility*, will investigate the manner in which the film's sexual scenes serve to provide pleasure. This analysis will investigate the inaugural sexual encounter between Dizzy and Reiko, focusing on the film's utilisation of diverse camera angles, along with their explicit display of female genitalia. The scene in question, however, situates the (presumed) male protagonist in an unresolved conflictual state that resonates throughout the narrative, ultimately finding resolution by the film's conclusion. This topic will be revisited in Part Three. The subsequent section will focus on an examination of Reiko's role as a provider of pleasure through her embodiment of the dildo, as well as the sexual interactions between female characters. This will entail an analysis of how these moments cater to the female characters and, potentially, female viewers.

The second section, entitled *Conflict and Subversion*, will examine the ways in which the film's sexual scenes serve as expressions or reiterations of conflicts, and how these scenes are narratively structured in order to challenge the genre's male/female dualism and introduce new possibilities. This section will examine the role of Tokyo Rose, a virus decoder who presents a significant narrative challenge to Reiko, creating tension by hacking Reiko's data. The analysis will focus on the S/M spiral scene between Tokyo Rose and Reiko, which is pivotal in establishing the context for Mash later guiding Reiko in self-masturbation. This is a crucial moment that significantly contributes to Reiko's self-recovery and personal growth.

The final section, *Resolution and Transformation*, will entail an investigation of sexual numbers with a particular emphasis on their function in resolving conflicts and in advancing the transformative potential of the characters' desires. This analysis will commence with an

examination of the masturbation scene between Reiko and Mash, which then transitions to Reiko's solo masturbation. These moments will be considered in relation to their significance in Reiko's journey towards self-discovery. Subsequently, the issue of unresolved sexual tension between Dizzy and Reiko, which resurfaces at the conclusion of the film, will be addressed in further detail. This concluding scene will be analysed in order to demonstrate how it resolves the narrative tensions and facilitates the evolution of Reiko's desires, thus contributing to the formation of hybrid pleasures within the film.

Plot I.K.U.

The time of I.K.U. is set in 2030, looking ahead from the future imagined in Ridley Scott's acclaimed science fiction film *Blade Runner*. In Cheang's vision of the future, the Genom Corporation stands as the largest company catering to sexual desires, by broadcasting live porn on internet TV featuring surgically enhanced replicants. Genom conceives the I.K.U. project, aiming to sell orgasm data via I.K.U. chips, which can be easily purchased from vending machines on the streets. These chips allow people to receive pleasure signals directly into their brains. The collection of orgasm data began in 2019 by Generation X replicants, and the last I.K.U. coder, Reiko, appears to complete the collection. These chips connect to mobile devices such as cell phones or laptops, enabling consumers to download and enjoy orgasmic experiences via the I.K.U. server, all without physical contact. Available in a variety of colors, each hue corresponding to the user's sexuality, these chips have quickly become essential for personal satisfaction and sexual exploration. The last coder, Reiko, has the ability to transform herself into seven different bodies depending on her partners' desires. Her mission is to collect the most exciting orgasm data. Regardless of her counterpart's gender or sexuality, Reiko provides ecstasy by penetrating them with her forearm, which transforms into a digital penis.

The film begins with Reiko meeting Dizzy, the I.K.U. runner who assigns her missions. The narrative follows Reiko's orgasm data collection with her various incarnations engaging in different sexual encounters with a diverse array of partners. Tokyo Rose, a rival from the competing company Bio Link Corporation, attempts to steal Reiko's data by having sexual act with her. Reiko is subsequently shut down by a virus, but retired agent Mash appears and

teaches her how to reboot herself through masturbation. At the end, Reiko completes data collection and Dizzy retrieves the data with a dildo gun. Reiko is then shut down and retired and the I.K.U. chips start being sold in the vending machines, bringing the film to the end.

1. Pleasure and Visibility

TOWER 1



(Cheang, 2000, 0:13:33)

The opening scene of the film, in which the protagonist Reiko and the I.K.U. runner, Dizzy, engage in sexual intercourse, takes place in an elevator. The scene commences with a direct reference to the conclusion of the film *Blade Runner*, in which the human protagonist, Deckard, rescues the replicant, Rachael. In this scene, Dizzy and Reiko enter the elevator together. In the elevator, Dizzy issues an instruction to Reiko to say "*Kiss me*," which she then repeats. Subsequently, Dizzy prompts her with the phrase "*I want you*," which Reiko also repeats. Furthermore, Reiko continues to express her desires, stating, "*I want you, please, touch me...*" The scene then progresses to include the performance of foreplay by Dizzy and

Reiko. The camera focuses on specific parts of Reiko's body, including her genitals and nipples, and captures various intimate acts such as touching, licking and rubbing, which serve to intensify Reiko's growing arousal. While Dizzy caresses Reiko's genitalia, Reiko gently rubs Dizzy's erect penis concealed beneath his underwear. As Reiko's arousal intensifies, she attempts to remove Dizzy's underwear and perform oral sex on him. However, he declines, answering in a manner that is somewhat enigmatic: "*The day will come*," he states, his tone suggesting a certain degree of ambiguity. Despite Reiko's disappointment, she ultimately relinquishes her efforts. This rejection of fellatio provides a narrative twist, which is revealed at the end of the film. This moment will be discussed in greater detail in Part Three.

Following this rejection, the scene transitions to Dizzy performing cunnilingus on Reiko. The sequence is shot from a low angle, which serves to highlight Reiko's genital area and affords the viewer a clear view of her pubic hair and genitalia. Subsequently, the camera angle is altered to a high angle, providing a close-up view of Reiko's facial expression as she experiences pleasure from Dizzy's caresses. From a low angle, Dizzy and Reiko engage in a kiss. Dizzy inquires of Reiko, "*Do you love me?*" Reiko, her gaze directed downward towards the camera, responds affirmatively, saying, "*I love you.*" Dizzy, maintaining his gaze upon her, inquires once more, "*Do you trust me?*" Reiko responds in the affirmative, stating, "*I trust you.*" Both individuals direct their gaze towards one another. Dizzy, with a look of reverence, scans Reiko's arm. The code "x x x" is inscribed on Reiko's wrist, signifying her new role as a coder.

- Female genital



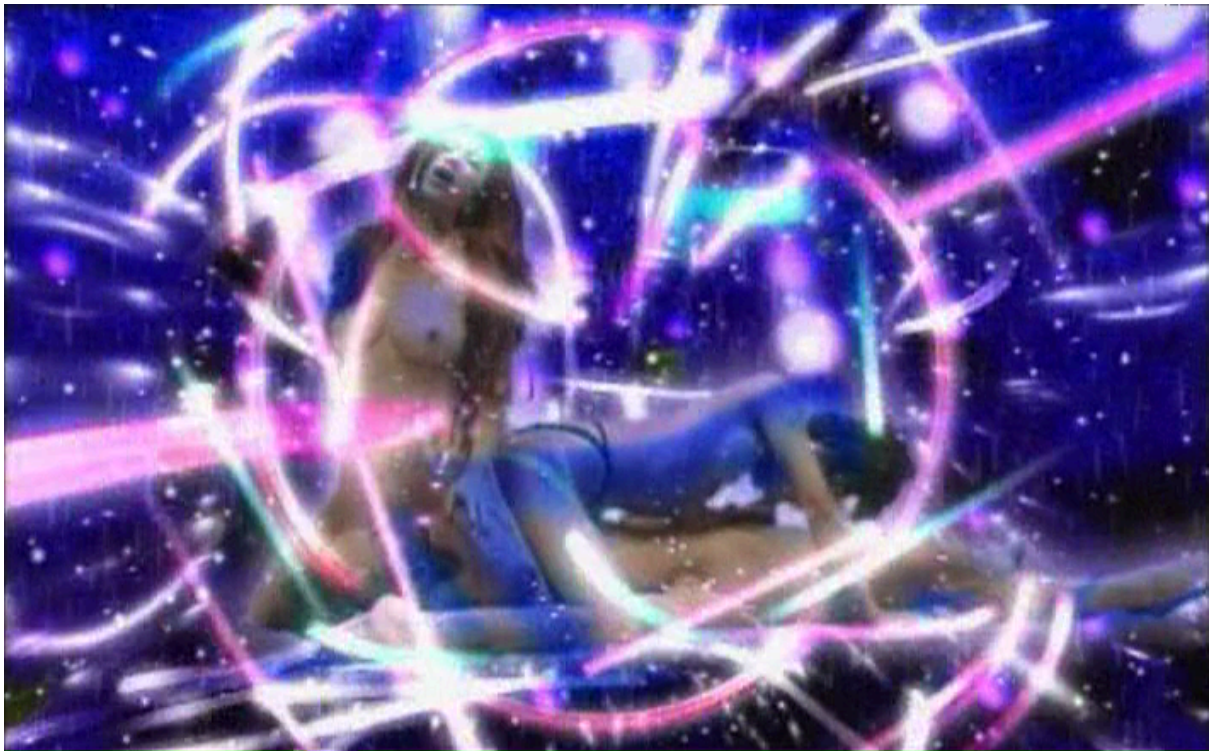
(Cheang, 2000, 0:11:50)

The film's opening elevator scene can be said to focus, among other things, on the visibility of female genitalia. Furthermore, the film's motivation to address this issue is evident in its portrayal of Dizzy's rejection of fellatio within the narrative.

The scene employs a low-angle composition, which serves to enhance the visibility of the female genitalia by situating them in close proximity to the screen. This approach can be described in accordance with the principle of *maximum visibility*, as defined by Williams (1999), which is a defining feature of the hardcore genre. In particular, the overt display of female genitalia in close proximity to the camera is associated with the primitive representational mode characteristic of early hardcore cinema. Williams observed that the narrative-embedded hardcore sequences in early hardcore films afford the male spectator the opportunity to closely examine the female genitalia and to peer into previously hidden details. However, the male gaze is not permitted to fully penetrate the diegetic space of the narrative (Williams, 1999, p. 68). In this manner, the elevator scene re-enacts the primitive representational modalities of the hardcore genre, explicitly visualising Reiko's genitals. However, it disrupts the primitivism of this representation by bracketing the conflict between Dizzy and Reiko. Furthermore, the scene facilitates the visualisation of cunnilingus, a sexual act that is not commonly depicted in hardcore films. This is due to the technical difficulty of

capturing it effectively and the historical perception of its lesser importance compared to the visually more straightforward act of fellatio. The act of fellatio directly facilitates the all-important *money shot*, which is often considered more important than other sexual acts in hardcore cinema (Williams, 1999, p. 127).

HARMONY CLUB



(Cheang, 2000, 0:19:55)

The scene is set in a swingers' club, *Harmony*, where pole dancers perform on stage amidst a crowd that is mostly naked. These individuals dance and engage in intimate acts around the stage. One of the dancers, identified as Osaka, leaves the stage and sits on a man attired in costumes. Another man, attired in a casual t-shirt, turns his head towards Osaka and asks, “Do you like suits?” Osaka flatly answers, “No money, no meat!” The man in the suit, while caressing Osaka's breasts in a silent gesture, takes out his phone and hands it to her. Osaka whispers to him, “I love you, cheri.” Subsequently, Reiko Type B makes an appearance on stage. Thereafter, Reiko begins to dance with great intensity, removing the silvery garments that barely cover her body. The camera moves in a frenzied manner, zooming in on Reiko's movements in close-up. Reiko's voluminous breasts appear to vibrate, the sound creating a

heightened sense of tension. The man in the t-shirt, who is directly captivated by Reiko, gradually advances towards her on stage. He utters, “*You girl, I’ll take you... We’re going to take the fast train,*” and Reiko reclines on the stage, spreading her legs, and responds, “*Please, take me, please.*”

The two are joined by Osaka who, in turn, initiates a dynamic FFM (two women and one man) threesome. The camera employs a variety of movements to capture the scene, including vertical, horizontal, and diagonal movements, effectively conveying the chaotic and intense atmosphere of the sex party. The rapidity of the camera movement makes it difficult to fixate on a particular body part, instead emphasising the overall frenzy of the scene. Reiko is seated on the man's face, while Osaka is positioned on his penis with her back to him. The scene then transitions, with the man now in a standing position but filmed from a horizontal perspective. Reiko swings her forearm between his legs. The camera subsequently shifts from right to left, thereby demonstrating the oscillatory motion of Reiko's arm. Here, the visual discontinuity becomes evident, as the preceding positions are reintroduced concurrently with the advent of new positions. Reiko transforms her forearm into a dildo and proceeds to penetrate the man, who is lying face down with his hands on the ground. Upon penetration of the dildo, the scene undergoes a complete transition to an animated sequence. This sequence is employed not only in this scene but also throughout the film, functioning as a narrative device to conclude each sexual sequence. In this animated sequence, the camera is positioned to film the penetrating Reiko's dildo from the perspective of the penetrated body. The viewer is thereby positioned to observe the penetration from a deeper point of view within the penetrated body. The animation depicts Reiko's digital dildo moving back and forth, its texture becoming softer and more realistic, akin to that of a penis, as it freely explores the slippery, pink-hued canal. The man reaches orgasm, and Reiko continues to penetrate Osaka. Subsequently, the man and Osaka both collapse on the stage, marking the conclusion of the scene. Meanwhile, Reiko remains upright, continuing to dance around them, seemingly unperturbed by the events.

This club scene addresses two pivotal points of analysis, underscoring its subversive potential vis-à-vis the conventional norms of hardcore pleasure representation. Firstly, the use of the dildo as a signifier of pleasure, and secondly, the representation of anal pleasure.

- Dildo perversion



(Cheang, 2000, 0:19:58)

The sequence involving Reiko's dildo functions as a rhetorical device comparable to the *money shot* in feature-length hardcore films. The money shot traditionally signifies the climax of orgasm through its visual evidence of the mechanical and physical bodily pleasure caught in involuntary spasm (Williams, 1999, p.101). However, as Williams (1999) underlines, this represents only the male orgasm, thereby situating this ultimate confessional moment of visual evidence at the limit of the representation of sexual pleasure. In light of this, it is pertinent to inquire as to how Reiko's use of a dildo in the film serves to challenge the limited representation of pleasure implied by the money shot.

The hardcore pornographic films of the 1970s were more ambitious in their representation of sexual intercourse than their predecessors. Rather than merely demonstrating that penetration had occurred, these films aimed to convey that the participants had achieved sexual satisfaction. (Williams, 1999, p. 72-73). In order to achieve this elevated narrative objective, feature-length pornographic films introduced the convention of the external penile ejaculation, which is commonly referred to as the *money shot* (Williams, 1999, p. 73). The

significance of the money shot extends beyond the mere provision of visual or narrative confirmation of climax; it also symbolises phallic power and pleasure (Williams, 1999, p. 95).

In order to analyse the concept of the money shot in the context of hardcore pornography, Williams employed a comparative approach, drawing upon the theories of Marx and Freud on fetish. In particular, she argued that the fetish of the hardcore money shot literally embodies Freud's definition of fetish as a penis substitute. In the view of Freud, the fetish represents a substitute for the woman's (mother's) phallus, which the young boy previously believed in and is reluctant to relinquish (Freud & Rieff, 1997, p.205). Consequently, he refuses to acknowledge the reality that a woman lacks a penis, as this would threaten his own penis (Freud & Rieff, 1997, p. 205). Freud further elucidated that this horror of castration establishes a kind of enduring memorial in itself through the creation of this substitute, namely, an aversion to the actual female genitals (Freud & Rieff, 1997, p. 206). In a parallel to this Freudian fetish, Williams (1999, p. 116) posited that the ejaculating penis of the money shot appears to disavow castration by avoiding visual association with the woman's genitalia.

Consequentially, therefore, the money shot is a form of repressive power that emerges from the convergence of two distinct ideologies: the Marxian fetish of commodity capital and the Freudian fetish of castration disavowal (Williams, 1999, p. 118). One of the key characteristics of this repressive power is its failure to acknowledge the existence of sexual difference or to establish a relation to the other. The predominant utilisation of the money shot in heterosexual pornography can thus be understood as an endeavour to represent the inflated, powerful penis as a source of pleasure (Williams, 1999, p. 118). In this way, the phallus becomes “*despotic signifier*”, representing the “*One*” that constructs absence and determines the quantity of possible pleasure in relation to itself (Hocquenghem, 1993, p. 95).

One might posit that Reiko's forearm dildo merely reiterates the phallic fetish, thus aligning with the money shot, which epitomises the tenets of commodity culture and phallic subjectivity. It should be noted however that the penis is implanted in a female body, with the result that it operates on a transhuman level. Thus, the penis implanted in Reiko's forearm, or Reiko's body implanted in the dildo, produces in itself a heterogeneous form that directly embodies perversion. Reiko's embodied phallus symbolises, among other things, a form of

sexuality that does not follow the reproductive economy, which can be seen as a practice of non-procreative desire and pleasure, and not aimed at procreation. Reiko's heterogeneous body can be seen as practising Michel Foucault's concept of "incorporation of perversions", which strategically uses the complex relationships between desire, power and sexuality to resist sexual oppression. Foucault (2012) argued that the persecution of marginal sexualities has been institutionalised through a variety of discourses, which entail, among other things, the "*incorporation of perversions*" and the "*new specification of individuals*." He cited legal sanctions, educational controls and medical treatment, or the efforts of moralists and psychiatrists to hereticalise minor perversions as examples of the means of power to construct a genital-centred, economically useful and politically conservative sexuality (Foucault, 2012, p. 63). This power over sexuality, he argues, envelops the sexual body, undertaking "*contacting bodies, caressing them with its eyes, intensifying areas, electrifying surfaces, dramatising troubled moments*" (Foucault, 2012, p.77). Foucault (2012) describes the concept of "*implantation of perversions*" as a kind of instrumental effect. Through the isolation, intensification, and consolidation of peripheral sexuality, the relations of power to sex and desire are initiated, multiplied, measured, and infiltrated into bodies and modes of behaviour. This concept of "*implantation of perversions*" is thus a timeless and effective strategy of sexual repression, which idealises the unity of pleasure and power. This is made possible by the multiplication of specific desires and heterogeneous sexualities through a network of interconnected mechanisms, with the aim of spreading them to places other than those where the intensity of desire and the persistence of power are maintained (Foucault, 2012, p. 84-85). Therefore, Reiko's body and its orgasm data, constitute a transnational and transhuman instrument for the experimentation of various sexual practices and the dispersal of specific desires and heterogeneous sexualities.

- Anal pleasure

It's not a matter of men having penises and women not having them; it's a matter of men presenting themselves as if they had no anus.

– Paul B. Preciado, Press, C. (2015). *Baedan: volume 3, journal of queer time travel*.

Another strategy of “*implantation of perversions*” that can be found in this scene is the representation of pleasure through anal penetration. The desire to achieve sexual pleasure through the anus is socially perceived as a perverted desire. This is particularly so because the anus is understood as an organ that is the counterpart of the phallus. In his discussions of “*Homosexual Desire*”, Guy Hocquenghem (1993) offers a foundational perspective by contrasting the social nature of the phallus with the deeply private and intimate nature of the anus. He argues that while the “*Great Social Phallus*” operates as a public signifier of power and identity, the anus represents a space of private and individual. Drawing on Freud’s theory of the anal stage as the phase in the formation of the self, Hocquenghem suggests that the anus, much like narcissism, plays a crucial role in the constitution of the individual. He interprets the anus as a source of energy that fuels the broader social sexual system, while also underpinning the structures of repression that this system imposes upon desire. Hocquenghem criticizes how heterosexual pornography fetishizes women’s buttocks and breasts, while the anus remains an intimate vacuum, a mysterious and private zone associated primarily with excremental production. Crucially, he posits that the anus is made to progress from lowest point to the highest, embodying a movement of sublimation: “*Our anal sexuality is enclosed somewhere between the sublime, rarefied air of the mind and the deep excremental swamp of the anus*” (Hocquenghem, 1993).

Building on Hocquenghem's libidinal theory of the anus, particularly his concept of anality as a form of sublimation, Paul B. Preciado (2015) develops the discussion by introducing the notion of the *anal revolution*. In Preciado's conceptualisation, the anus is positioned as a “*post-identitarian*” organ, transcending the binary distinctions by dissolving the oppositions between hetero and homosexual, between active and passive, penetrator and penetrated. The anus serves as the zero point from which the deterritorialisation of the heterosexual body can begin, or as the starting point for the digitalisation of sexuality that resists reduction to penis-vagina penetration (Preciado, 2015, p. 164).

In light of these theoretical frameworks concerning the anus and anal practice, the anal sex number in *I.K.U.* assumes a subversive role, challenging the conventional, heteronormative depiction of sexual pleasure which is often centred on the phallus pleasure. Moreover, the inversion of conventional roles in this scene, where a male character is penetrated, significantly disrupts the gendered hierarchy dynamic that positions men as active penetrators and women as passive recipients. This scene, therefore, suggests a fluidity of sexual

experience that transcends gendered expectations by restoring the anus as a potent site of desire and pleasure. This aligns with the idea of “*communising the anus as a weapon, whose possibility of action is close at hand and infinite*” (Preciado, 2015, p. 166).

BACK SEAT



(Cheang, 2000, 0:29:10)

A boy and a girl whose name is Yuko begin to have sex in the back of a van, which is padded with a soft, bubbly cushion-like material. The boy starts to talk to Yuko, saying “*We’ll go away, you and I...*”, Yuko says “*My papa comes, he chases us,*” glancing at the back window, but it’s shown as if she’s pretending. She continues saying, “*he will come right away, and he will find us, you understand?*”, but smiling at the same time. The boy who is busily doing his job to her, saying “*I will declare a war with him, I will fight, you’re mine*”. Yuko gets undressed by him, and starts to say “*Oh baby, I will take you to the end of the world,*” “*only daylight, the sun never goes down, flowers blossom...Tulips, only tulips...*” and then she starts to say “*more, more, harder, harder...*”. The camera glides over Yuko’s body, capturing the boy as he performs oral sex. He tells Yuko that her papa is chasing, checking behind the van through the back window, but still aroused, making him can’t stop to have sex with Yuko, he

then changes position by leaning back in the seat. Yuko straddles him, engaging in penetrative sex. When the camera focuses on the penetration, the part of the genitals is censored with a mosaic effect. As the sex continues, Yuko gestures to the driver to stop the van. The vehicle halts in the middle of the street, and Mash's superbike pulls up beside it. Reiko type C dismounts the bike, saying "*Thank you, Mash*", and Mash's saying back "*Nothing, Enjoy*". This blue hair with silver lip colored, Mash is retired I.K.U. coder.

The van's door opens, and Yuko asks Reiko, "*Hey babe, you want a ride?*". Reiko joins the car. Mash rides away on her superbike, passing through a tunnel. The camera follows Mash as she rides into the tunnel, swirling around her. The sexual scene in the van resumes, echoed with mixed moaning sound, but it is depicted as if being viewed through Mash's helmet, which functions as a screen to monitor Reiko from distance. This scene is shot in such a way that it appears to be seen through a small circular hole, reflecting the curved, arched surface of Mash's helmet, giving the visual impression of a rounded, enclosed view. Seated against the van's cushioned seat, the boy touches Yuko from behind, and Reiko approaches from the front, beginning to caress Yuko's body. The camera captures intimate close-ups of their naked bodies, intertwined and mingling with one another. Shot with wide-angle lenses, the bodies appear magnified whenever they move closer to the camera, nearly filling the entire screen. Reiko's glittery buttocks move up and down, the camera closely following the motion of the man licking them from below. Positioned behind the man, Reiko transforms her arm into a dildo, and the scene shifts to depict all three characters engaging in penetration, Yuko in front, the boy in the middle, and Reiko behind the boy. The boy penetrates Yuko from behind while Reiko simultaneously penetrates him from behind with her transformed arm. As Reiko penetrates the boy, he reaches orgasm, from which Reiko extracts orgasm data.

The scene moves to its next part, where only Reiko and Yuko engage two of them, the boy now absent from the frame. The music also changes into a slower paced and gives a more erotic mood. Reiko and Yuko make out passionately, their moaning sound is intensified especially with its echoing slurp of kiss. After the camera shows Yuko's face, looks as if she is telling something with her eyes full of excitement. Reiko looks at her forearm and Yuko brings out a plastic ring, placing it on Reiko's hand. While it covers Reiko's forearm, it transforms into a condom. With Reiko's dildo now covered with this condom, Yuko lies back, spreading her legs towards Reiko. Reiko slowly inserts her forearm dildo into Yuko's vagina, gradually increasing the pace until she reaches orgasm. Yuko reaches orgasm, the scene

transitions into an animated sequence. The scene concludes with all three lying down in the van, their bodies spent, as the driver turns his head toward them saying “*now, we go home*”, making the end of the sequence.

- Lesbianism

Finally, as an example of analysing the role of the sexual number in maximising desire, I will analyse the lesbian number between Yuko and Reiko type C in this van scene. According to Williams (1999), in Ziplow's *Guide to Making Pornography*, it is simply described as “*a major turn-on to a larger portion of your heterosexual audience*”. Lesbian numbers did exist in many stag films and hardcore porn, but only as a warm-up or rehearsal for the better, more satisfying “*the big production*” number that would follow. The characteristic of the “*obligatory lesbian*” scene in these 1970s hardcore narratives is that the women themselves are not performing their true desires, but rather going through the motions to satisfy the male viewer (Williams, 1999).

Reiko and Yuko's lesbian numbers in the van scene visualise meaningful desire in its own right, rather than as a tool for the fulfilment of heterosexual desire. Initially, Yuko's role in her sexual relationship with the man seems to embody the submissive female sexuality of mainstream hardcore cinema. However, once Reiko joins the group, Yuko is shown to take a more assertive and initiative attitude. It is as if Yuko wants to realise a new sexuality within herself, one that she has been embedded with, through her contact with Reiko. From Yuko's words as she receives oral sex from a man, we can infer that she is unknowingly expressing a desire for “*that place where the sun never sets, where there are only tulips, tulips, tulips,*” a desire that exists in an unknown world that she has imagined but is not yet familiar with. Reiko, or Reiko's dildo, is for Yuko both the desire and the tool that can lead her into that unknown world; through Reiko's dildo, Yuko can finally realise her lesbian desires. Thus, Reiko and Yuko's lesbianism can be seen as a refusal to reproduce mainstream hardcore practices, which are represented as inferior to heterosexuality or as only a step up from it. This scene in particular literally subverts the traditional structure of always placing heterosexual intercourse at the end, instead positioning Yuko's heterosexual sequence with the man at the beginning as a warm-up for Reiko and Yuko's lesbian sequence. In her essay on lesbian pornography, Butler (2004) points out that although lesbian sequences used as

warm-ups in heterosexual pornography have historically been used in a variety of hardcore films, even in the golden age of pornography in the 1970s, there is no distinct lesbian presence, and that this lesbian lacuna throughout the 1970s and 1980s is due to the fact that pornography made for and by lesbians was not considered an important agenda in that era.

How can Yuko and Reiko's sexual encounter be seen as fully lesbian desire?

Perhaps the representation of intact desire can be measured by asking: who is the object of that intact desire, the object of true satisfaction? In heterosexual pornography, the object of satisfaction is most often the penis, as evidenced by the *money shot (come shot)* (Smyth, 1990). In this van lesbian scene, it can be seen that the focus is on Yuko and not on Reiko, the object of satisfaction. Cherry Smyth (1990) explains that the presence of the dildo in lesbian pornography in particular holds the potential to reaffirm female sexual self-sufficiency and subvert the power of the penis by proving that the female lover is more powerful than her male rival. Yuko confirms her sexual satisfaction through Reiko's dildo, while Reiko gives her sexual pleasure and controls the phallus in her own way.

Thus, the van scene, centred on Yuko, can be seen as a lesbian pornography that unmasks the impotence behind the phallus and suggests an alternative to the heterosexist model of pornography (Butler, 2004). Furthermore, Reiko's dildo penetrating Yuko should be seen as an important device for enriching lesbian sexuality, as it has more sexual agency than the male's constant premature ejaculation. Importantly, the fact that the dildo is implanted in Reiko's arm gives the scene the possibility of being interpreted as lesbian fisting.

- Fisting

Fisting is an art that involves seducing one of the jumpiest and tightest muscles in the body.
–Rubin, G. (2011). *A Temple of the Butthole, Deviations: A Gayle Rubin Reader*. Duke University Press.

The back seat of the van in which Reiko and Yuko's lesbian scene takes place is reminiscent of the “*back rooms*” of clubs, where sex parties take place in a clandestine manner. More precisely, the scene visualises the attention, intimacy, and trust that fisting demands (Rubin, 2011).

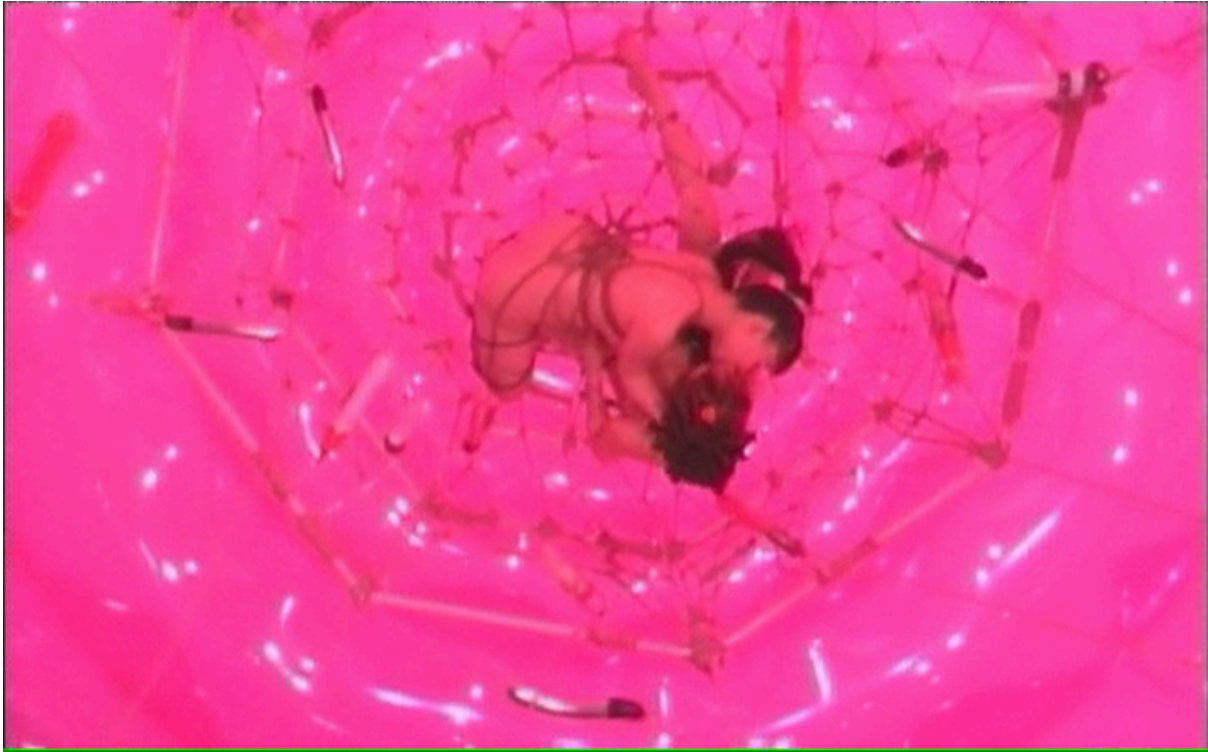
Rubin (2011) describes Catacombs, a popular venue for fisting parties in San Francisco in the mid-1970s, as "*designed to help the asshole open up, relax and feel good.*" You might also associate the decorative features of Catacombs with its emphasis on physical sensation, with soft materials such as waterbeds in the back of the van, which are padded wherever they might come in contact with the floor. Furthermore, the scene is filmed with a convex lens, with all the images and action concentrated in the centre. This creates a visual experience of clandestinely peering through a hole, thereby maximising the dimension of voyeuristic observation.

Fisting, or fist-fuck, is a subgenre of mainstream hardcore pornography. The history of fisting, in the context of 1970s America, is traced in Gayle Rubin's essay, "*The Catacombs - A Temple of the Butthole,*" through the history of The Catacombs, a shrine to fisting that began in the mid-1970s. The Catacombs played an important role in the history of San Francisco-based sexuality as a space for people of "unusual" sexual orientation to network and socialise, firstly as a space for fisting practitioners, and secondly as a space for people to focus solely on intense physical sensations through strict external controls and thorough venue management (Rubin, 2011). The impact of AIDS played a large role in the closure of The Catacombs. Rubin (2011) points out that at the time, the Catacombs was unable to offer any alternatives to fisting, which was identified in all guidelines as an 'unsafe' sexual practice. In particular, it was assumed by health professionals that fisting was already inherently unsafe regardless of its association with AIDS, and contributed to the correlation between fisting and AIDS through a variety of institutional tools that reinforced fisting as a sexual practice with a high likelihood of transmitting AIDS. Rubyn (2011) expresses regret that no separate risk reduction guidelines have been developed for fisting, especially in comparison to anal sex with condoms, which is considered safe.

In the back seat scene, Yuko is shown putting a condom on Reiko's dildo. This action by Yuko creates a safety net for herself and her partner, and shows mutual respect. This mutual respect is perhaps the most important driving force in Catacombs, allowing people to freely enjoy their sexual desires.

2. Conflicts and Subversion

PINK SPIRAL



(Cheang, 2000, 0:51:23)

Tokyo Rose is the character who is a virus decoder from *Bio Link*, a rival company of *Genom*. The Pink is where she performs “*Net Glass Show*”, in a spiral web filled with dildos tied on. The first number where she appears is where Tokyo Rose sends an invitation to a male I.K.U. coder, Sasaki, as a special guest. Tokyo Rose and Sasaki have sex in the backstage. This scene depicts a typical heterosexual act between a male and a female. Sasaki reaches orgasm by penetrating her from back, and suddenly his body is stiffened as if he is electrocuted. The warning message shows up, “*Tokyo Rose virus detected*”. His body becomes pixelated, and breaks down on the floor.

Meanwhile, Reiko searches for the way to Pink. The last Reiko type F finally arrives at Pink, and joins the “*SM Special*” performance by Tokyo Rose & Akechi. While the message saying “*Don’t go to the underground too much*” keeps appearing, Reiko still walks down the spiral staircase. The camera follows Reiko walks down, the pink spiral of Tokyo Rose appears overlapped with a rose, from the bottom of the staircase. This rose gradually closes in

spinning, the whole staircase being sucked into the pink spiral, with rose petals floating in the air. The scene keeps spinning faster and shifts to the deep down spiral space completely covered in pink. The rope net spiral is in funneled shape, and different dildos are tied up all around the spiral. Akechi, wearing sunglasses, appears, and ties Reiko professionally with ropes. When Reiko is ready, Akechi throws the rope into the spiral. He then sends down Reiko inside the spiral where Tokyo Rose is.

Tokyo Rose welcomes Reiko saying "*I wait a long time... for you*". Reiko asks "*Is your show finished?*". Tokyo Rose replies "It never finishes", and starts to play with her dildo over Reiko's body. Reiko, still with her hands tied with rope, follows obediently and lets Tokyo Rose to titillate her. Tokyo Rose begins to put one dildo in Reiko's mouth, and the other one in her vagina, saying "*Sweet pussy, I want...*". Reiko grabs the dildo that is put in her mouth, and starts to suck. Tokyo Rose encourages Reiko, saying "*Lick it, taste it, swallow it*". Reiko moans harder as Tokyo Rose penetrates her vagina simultaneously. The sound of slurping continues to be heard.

Reiko asks "*Do you like strawberries?*". Tokyo Rose says back "*I want it, very much, Reiko...*". Reiko asks again "*You know my name?*". Tokyo Rose answers, with a naughty voice, "*I'm Tokyo Rose, Reiko. Nice to meet you*". The camera starts to spin, Reiko comes over Tokyo Rose and starts to lick Tokyo Rose's body. Tokyo Rose, looking above, says "*You trance me,*", "*Show me your Utamaro*" and moans harder. The camera spins and frames big dildos tied in the net moving as if they're living beings. When Tokyo Rose gets aroused, Reiko starts to swirl her forearm to make it dildo, the camera very fastly spins. Reiko penetrates Tokyo Rose with her forearm dildo, when penetration is shown digitally from inside her vagina, a dream-like sound starts. Reiko slowly breaks down, and the virus detected message appears. Tokyo Rose watches fainted Reiko, and starts to laugh loudly.

- Sadie-max (SM)

Tokyo Rose hacks Reiko as a virus decoder and steals her orgasm data, creating an important conflict in the story's development. The significance of this scene is more than just a narrative turning point; it is an attempt to challenge and subvert the typical pornographic representation of sadomasochism.

The scene opens with Tokyo Rose preparing for her SM performance. Tokyo Rose announces her performance to the audience from the stage, while the screen shows close-ups of the various tools she has prepared. Reiko is sent to the stage by Akechi and sits helplessly in a spiral net with ropes tied around her body and hands. Akechi is in charge of lowering Reiko to Tokyo Rose from one corner of the stage, her expressionless face and cold, calculated movements reinforcing the impression that this is a thoroughly choreographed performance, not violence.

Furthermore, the SM scene begins with an advertisement for Tokyo Rose's SM performance appearing on screen, making it clear to the viewer that the scene is 'staged'. Therefore, it can be argued that this scene falls into the category of 'aesthetic sadomasochism' as defined by Williams. According to Williams (1999), "*aesthetic sadomasochism*" refers to sexual behaviour that is represented in a more symbolic and aesthetic way, rather than through the actual recreation of violence or pain. It is a process in which the act itself is elevated to a performance, an artistic expression, rather than simply providing sadistic pleasure. Akechi's role is to tie Reiko up with ropes and lower her down to Tokyo Rose. Akechi thus functions like a stage director for Tokyo Rose's performance, providing the visual and physical frame for Tokyo Rose's exploration of sexual identity and pleasure. Akechi's role in this context can be interpreted as that of a planner who aesthetically constructs and orchestrates sexual performance, rather than a mere executor of sadomasochistic violence. His actions contribute to the sublimation of sexual experience into an artistic expression within the structure of "*aesthetic sadomasochism*." Akechi maintains an indifferent or emotionless attitude in his interactions with Reiko, which serves to make Tokyo Rose's performance an even more cold and calculated aesthetic act.

Williams (1999) notes that feminists who oppose pornography point to violent hardcore pornography as representative of the inherent sadism inherent in patriarchal dominant power. This sadism is understood as a sexual perversion that emphasises patriarchal power or represents a typically masculine desire to watch, know, and control (Williams, 1999, p. 201). Williams explains that the conventions of pornography, which place greater emphasis on the visibility of the "*convulsive experience of involuntary pleasure*," and the "*male gaze*" that dominates cinema, encode sadism as a structure of "*gaze*." This "*gaze*" that dominates cinematic narratives is based on the voyeuristic and sadistic male desire to treat women as objects of display, fetishise their differences, or inflict sadistic punishment. As a result,

dominant narrative cinema is dominated by sadistic fetishistic interpretations (Williams, 1999).

Mulvey (1975) points out that the act of viewing in cinema has two opposing hedonic structures. The first is “*scopophilic pleasure*,” which comes from the use of other people as objects of sexual stimulation through the visual. The second, which develops through narcissism and the formation of an ego, is the pleasure that the viewer derives from identifying with the image on the screen (Mulvey, 1975). In a cinematic context, the first involves the separation of the subject's erotic identity from the object on the screen (“*active scopophilia*”), while the second derives from the viewer's identification of the self with the object on the screen and the fascination and recognition that results.

Analysing female characters in cinema from a psychoanalytic perspective, Mulvey suggests that women symbolically represent sexual difference and castration complexes due to the absence of a penis, which causes anxiety in the male “*gaze*.” The male unconscious can address this anxiety in two ways: first, through sadistic voyeurism, which confirms guilt and controls it through punishment or forgiveness; and second, through “*fetishistic scopophilia*,” which emphasises women's physical beauty to relieve anxiety. She analyses that the sadistic approach fits well with a linear narrative structure, while the fetishistic approach tends to focus on physical appearance and transcends the passage of time (Mulvey, 1975).

In PINK SPIRAL, the sexual interactions in the relationship between Tokyo Rose and Reiko transcend the binary of masculine-active and feminine-passive, and go beyond simple sadomasochistic sexuality to reimagine feminine pleasure and agency.

While Tokyo Rose physically subdues Reiko through her own SM performances, she also explores her own sexual identity and pleasure in the process, moving beyond the role of a mere perpetrator to become a part of the sexual game and a double agent. Reiko enters the game by seeking out Tokyo Rose herself, and while she functions as an object of sexual stimulation, she subsequently becomes an active participant in the game as a sexual subject herself. The scene thus highlights the bisexual appeal of sadomasochistic pornography and explores how sadomasochistic sexual exchanges, particularly between women and women, can subvert conventional pornographic norms.

Williams' discussion, which borrows from Carol J. Clover's (1987) concept of the “*Final Girl*,” provides important insights into the analysis of Tokyo Rose and Reiko's interactions. In

her analysis of slasher film gender, Clover's (1987) concept of the "*Final Girl*" is described as more than just the survivor of a horror film. She is the only female character in the film who survives after defeating the villain or monster, and she mediates complex issues of sexual identity and power (Williams, 1999, p. 206). In the end, the interaction between Tokyo Rose and Reiko goes beyond the typical sexual dominance and subjugation relationship, and does not simply deliver sadomasochistic pleasure from a masculine perspective, but establishes a new structure of visual pleasure that is more complex and ambivalent.

3. Resolution and Transformation

BATHTUB



(Cheang, 2000, 0:57:50)

When Reiko is attacked by Tokyo Rose, Mash comes to rescue Reiko. Mash starts to contact her skin to Reiko, says "*I, X generation*", and "*We're sisters, Dr. Tenma's babies*". Mash then starts to lick around Reiko's face, continuing "*Dr. Tenma studied me, and created you*".

Mash continues “*I loved Dr. Tenma, he fixed me*”, “*Version 1.0., my belly button*”, while she slowly takes Reiko’s hand, and brings it on her genital, and lets her rub it. Reiko with her closed eyes, starts to be gratified by touching her genitals herself, and Mash comes to lick her face again. Reiko rubs her genitals under her underwear, quietly moaning. She starts to breathe hard, and stops the movement. She then takes off her hand and slowly touches her belly button where a little square metallic device is stuck in, now turned on again. Mash smiles delightedly, and the scene transitions into where naked Reiko type A swims in the water. Reiko is lying down somewhere, like in a glass tube. The scene is depicted as saturated, so almost making the image white. The scene then shows Reiko, type A, who is naked, in a bathtub. Shot from above, and nothing is around her. Reiko A slowly starts to masturbate in the bathtub. No music, only her breathing and sounds of water are heard. Reiko starts to breathe hard, when she reaches orgasm, she slows her movement.

Reiko F appears, who was shown previously in a glass tube, opens her eyes. And, she wakes up in a cube hotel, and gets out of the shell. She buys underwear from the vending machine, then discovers the mark of I.K.U. coder on her wrist again. She encounters Akira, and kisses him saying “*Take me, love me*”.

- Female Masturbation

If they don't touch themselves when they're alone, when do women connect with their own fantasies?

–Despentes, V. (2010). *King Kong Theory*. The Feminist Press at CUNY.

Masturbation was also a common element in hardcore pornography during the 1970s, with close-up shots frequently employed to emphasise the act. This indicates that the act of masturbation was primarily performed by women. Williams (1999) observes that feature-length hardcore pornography seldom depicted male masturbation in comparison to early hardcore films.

Female masturbation is closely linked to the experience of female orgasm. French feminist filmmaker, Virginie Despentes (2010) has posited that the social response to female orgasm

can be understood as twofold. Firstly, there is a social pressure that leads women to feel like failures if they are unable to reach orgasm. The second assumption is the belief that only men are capable of achieving orgasm in women. She also highlighted the problematic tendency to view female masturbation as inferior and secondary (Despentes, 2010, p. 97).

In Reiko's masturbation sequence, we observe that she learns to masturbate with Mash's assistance and experiences an orgasm as a result. As a fellow woman, Mash is able to comprehend the process of Reiko achieving orgasm through masturbation and provides guidance and support. Female masturbation is an essential process of connecting with one's own sexual fantasies and is a process of self-awareness, enabling the discovery of ways to give oneself pleasure (Despentes, 2010, p. 98). Consequently, masturbation represents a process of forming a relationship with oneself, becoming an integral aspect of the process of regaining sexual independence and agency.

Reiko's masturbation facilitates her recovery from trauma. She awakens in a tub filled with transparent water, evoking the image of a newborn being cleansed in a womb. The camera remains static and undisturbed, accompanied solely by the sounds of respiration and the gurgling of the water. The masturbation sequence is captured from a wide angle and at a distance, employing unedited long takes that allow the viewer to connect with the subject's experience of self-control in her own way, without the need for external assistance.

TOWER 2



(Cheang, 2000, 1:08:21)

The enigma surrounding Dizzy's rejection of Reiko's fellatio in the elevator scene, as discussed in Chapter 1, is unveiled in the film's ultimate scene.

Reiko, having recuperated from her injuries, begins to resume her role as a coder with the assistance of Mash. Having reacquired the orgasm data, she reunites with Dizzy at the yakitori bar. Dizzy and Reiko return to the Tower together, with Dizzy forcibly escorting Reiko into the elevator while holding a dildo gun in one hand. Reiko removes her undergarment and begins to stimulate her genitalia. Dizzy and Reiko kiss, then Reiko disengages from the embrace and assumes a kneeling position in front of Dizzy's boxers. She then removes his clothing, revealing his penis to be of a diminutive size. Reiko then proceeded to stimulate Dizzy's penis with her fingers, subsequently initiating oral contact. Dizzy moans, and the camera focuses on Dizzy's face, capturing his or her expression of satisfaction. Dizzy grasps Reiko's upper body and guides her towards the wall. Dizzy promptly and repeatedly inserts his penis into Reiko, and the camera shifts to a close-up of Dizzy's posterior. The sound effect of penetration is repeated. "*Wait, wait, slow down,*" Reiko says to Dizzy. Dizzy persists and states, "*If only you could feel how I feel, your arm.*" Dizzy

holds the Dildo Gun in his hand and states, "*One moment, excuse me. May I?*" and slowly places the dildo gun in the middle of Reiko's chest. Reiko makes a brief pause, uttering the words, "*Oh, you, my heart...*" Reiko tilts her head and opens her eyes wide, a look of astonishment on her face. The camera then pans to show the dildo entering Reiko's genital area and subsequently focusing directly on Reiko's face. Subsequently, Dizzy begins to insert the dildo into Reiko at an increasingly rapid pace. The act of penetration is depicted through the use of mosaicking. As the dildo is inserted, Reiko's breathing becomes more laboured. The sound of the dildo being inserted is superimposed on Reiko's breathing. The penetration persists, and Reiko begins to perspire and experience pleasure. Following the attainment of multiple orgasms, Reiko becomes disoriented, and Dizzy ceases the insertion of the dildo. Subsequently, the camera shifts to an elevated angle, depicting Reiko seated on the floor, leaning into Dizzy's embrace. Dizzy asks, "*Do you love me?*" Reiko replies, "*I love you*". Once more, "*Do you trust me?*" and Reiko replies, "*I trust you*". Dizzy kisses Reiko. Dizzy then proceeds to kiss Reiko. Reiko lowers her head and tilts her neck back, as though unable to maintain her equilibrium. The screen then switches to show Dizzy and another Reiko lying on the floor. "*One hundred percent, system down for retirement,*" Dizzy states to the camera as he gazes at the screen, leaving Reiko lying unconscious on the ground. Subsequently, Reiko reappears, swimming underwater, and the screen is filled with water as we transition to an animated sequence. Akira then makes an appearance in front of a vending machine, and purchases an I.K.U. chip from it. The film ends with a shot of Mash's superbike traversing a tunnel.

Conclusion

Pornography remains a contentious issue today, and this year, anti-pornography rhetoric took center stage in Project 2025, a political initiative launched by the Heritage Foundation aimed at advancing conservative and right-wing policies in the lead-up to the U.S. presidential election. According to a recent article, the scope of this initiative extends beyond the regulation of adult content to encompass broader social issues such as abortion, contraception, marriage equality, trans rights, drag culture, and even access to certain books in public libraries (Grant, 2024). This initiative highlights that the focus is not solely on restricting access to pornography but reflects a deeper, ongoing cultural and political struggle within the United States, particularly among right-wing factions. This underscores that pornography is not an isolated issue but is deeply embedded within broader socio-political agendas, acting as a flashpoint in the larger debate over cultural values and individual freedoms.

When I embarked on this thesis, I was confronted with a multitude of questions. Should I focus on the repressive aspects of pornography or explore its potential for pleasure? Should I speak from a personal perspective or adopt a more universal approach? Should I anchor my analysis in my current context or reflect on my cultural origins? These questions, complex and daunting as they were, began to find tentative answers through my analysis of the I.K.U.. However, the subject of sexuality and its intersections with gender, race, and identity, remains elusive and difficult to fully grasp. Choosing pornography as the focal point of my research was a deliberate challenge—a decision to engage with a topic that is multifaceted and often controversial.

Over the past year, I observed an increase in film festivals dedicated to exploring pornography, which underscores the ongoing relevance of this genre. These festivals indicate a growing interest in critically examining pornography, not just by those who produce or perform in it, but also by audiences who consume it. This trend suggests that pornography is not only a subject of social concern but also an area ripe for scholarly inquiry and artistic exploration. There is a collective effort to interrogate the genre, to understand its implications, and to challenge the narratives it presents.

My analysis of “I.K.U.” is intentionally selective, focusing on certain aspects of the film while inevitably leaving other scenes, details and sounds unexplored. My aim was not to identify with the content but to project my own interpretations onto it. The film *I.K.U.*, created in Japan with a predominantly Japanese cast and directed by an Asian filmmaker who transcends geographical boundaries, exemplifies a culturally hybridised product that resonates with global audiences. As someone who has also navigated different cultural contexts, I found myself deeply connected to the film’s exploration of sexuality and identity. The film’s transnational nature and the fluidity of its themes allow it to establish a unique, hybrid connection with viewers, including myself.

To conclude, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Professor Renaud Maes for his guidance as my thesis supervisor, and to Professor Sylvia Botella who kindly agreed to read my thesis. I also extend my thanks to everyone who provided me with crucial references and help, which significantly enriched my analysis.

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