

# propeller

When we look at *Été*, from Man Ray, we ask ourselves: why have we not seen this before? Was this artwork targeted by the sort of censorship allowed by art's history? Or, in other words, why is it that a photographic representation of an explicit sex scene is somehow left outside the sphere of what we usually understand as art?

To answer this question we could attempt to evoke the impact the moral dimension has on our culture and how it affects the quality of pleasure usually associated with sexual experiences. However, what we're really after, here, is an idea of aesthetic qualities that can justify the clash between sex and art.

May it be that what is expected from an aesthetic experience goes radically against the sort of pleasure usually associated with sex? Or is there something in our sexual dimension that is fundamentally impossible to aestheticize? And still regarding such a dimension, could we consider different levels of pleasure? And what qualities do we project in a penetration scene that could justify us constantly using it as a maximum example of pornography?

*Été*, from Man Ray, triggered Propeller's number zero and this was the set of questions we shared with the heterogeneous group of authors who were challenged to join us here, in thinking about the aesthetic limits of the photographic medium, when confronted with what is commonly understood as *pornographic*. When is the representation of sexual scenes "too explicit"? And obscene? And beautiful? When does it repulse us? When does it arouse us? When does it disinterest us? When does it compel us? On the other hand, because we hoped to propose an expanded field for pornography, we extended the invitation to authors who could be interested in thinking and writing about the field that separates *pornography*, as a set of representations of sexually explicit content, and what can be understood as *pornographic*.

In sum, we are looking for traces of an aesthetic dimension for pornography's expanded field, a field we situate precisely between the representation of sex and the exploitation of the sexual dimension of the other.

In photography's case, when we think about what we consider to be truthful (and authentic), it's impossible not to take into account the exemplar nature of its technical features, not only because all photographic language is about resemblance, but overall because photography is often confined to mechanisms of representation. And this is when truth becomes particularly dense, because photography brings with it a promise of reproducing the real. Because of its indexical nature, we expect a photograph to be able to communicate. When facing a photograph, the standard observer expects to be able to interpret it, for in his/her daily life one is able to interpret the signs that go his/her way.

Maybe what we understand as *pornographic* falls victim of the same paradigm, i.e., of the pressure to attain a certain goal, namely a sexual one. Is this one of the reasons why we tend to exclude intercourse scenes from an aesthetic experience that follows an unspeakable order? Is this *Été's* paradoxe?

Somehow, society agreed that erotic content is more suitable for an aesthetic experience. It's understandable. With eroticism we tend to associate a certain opacity, more likely to comprise with art's open space of interpretation. Knowing that this openness is something photography's indexical nature tends to compromise, we could be driven to conclude that a photographic representation of a sex scene is doomed to be either "too explicit" or "too vulgar".

However, and this is what we think Man Ray's artwork brings to the discussion, there is a truthfulness that transcends the content of the artworks and, through its own dynamics, gives rise to a pleasure that does not obey the mundane. It's the lines, the space between the dots and the uncanny landscape of these bodies. Here we find the author. Not an author using these bodies for a deterministic end, but instead an author looking for an aesthetic truth, which in turn has no moral boundaries, for it obeys only its own ethics.