

pōrnsaints

* Brief Essay on Pornography and Transcendence *

"There are as many saints among the whores as there are whores among the saints"
– Attributed to Master Chang

I – What is a saint

from wikipedia.org:

Saint is a term used to refer to someone who is a holy person. The term comes from the New Testament, where it is used to refer to all Christian believers. Over the years the term has grown to be used and accepted in other Christian, religious, and even secular contexts, to refer to those who are considered to be exceptionally virtuous or glorified in heaven. Hence a "saint" (cont. with sinner) is a (usually deceased) person whose life is regarded by a community as a good example, and their life story is remembered for sake of inspiring others.

Defining a *Saint* is a feat which is so difficult that it becomes ridiculous. *Saint* is one of those words, like *God*, *Soul* and *Love*, that have so vast a span that they mean at the same time everything and nothing. In an indefinite space of significance, often words are filled in so much that they overflow into nonsense, generating the wrong impression that they might have no meaning at all, that they are words used to denote non-existent entities. Simply put: if a word can mean anything, then it can mean nothing. Obviously, the aptest word for denoting everything (and nothing) is *God*. Which after all goes to His greater glory.

Looking more carefully, though, those words are not as useless as they seem – at least by no means more than any other word. Those are words that, under an innocent appearance, hide very dangerous uses. It isn't by chance that cultural, religious and social colossuses stand everywhere giving these gargantuan-words definitions which are as much interesting as they are incompatible with each other. Not to speak of the uses, sometimes delirious, that they suggest.

It is therefore impossible to give a definition of *Saint* without falling into heresy in one place or another; but what is worse is that the real underlying problem is to find a definition of *Saint* that tells us at least *something*. The *Saint* is a five-letter minefield.

We'll get partially out of the scrape with a common subterfuge: we'll quote a good authority with which we agree. In his masterpiece (*The Man without Qualities*), Robert Musil definitely manages to say *something*. The hero of the novel, Ulrich – after more than seven hundred pages in which he meditates over anything in any field of the culture of an entire age – thinks well of "learning the ways of sanctity". He consequently acquires a number of hagiographies and retires with his sister Agathe to their home, where they engage in a series of "holy dialogues". Ulrich defines the experience of sanctity as: "...*Contemplating a vast surface of mirroring waters; everything shines so much that the eyes believe they see in the dark, and on the other side the objects aren't set on the ground but are suspended in air with*

a delicate translucency which baffles and almost hurts. There is an enrichment as well as a detriment in that impression. One feels in unity with all, and can approach nothing. You are here, and the world is there, over the Self and over things, but both are almost painfully clear, and what unifies the two ordinarily separate things and what separates and unifies the two ordinarily mixed things is an obscure sparkling, a flooding, an extinguishing, a fluctuation."

More to follow: "... *The saints say: I was confined before, then without understanding I was drawn out of myself and immersed in God. The hunting emperors, of which we read in the reading books, describe it in another way: they tell that a deer with a cross between the horns appeared to them, and that the deadly spear fell from their hands; then they built a chapel on that location so they could go on hunting undisturbed. And if you asked the rich and elegant ladies that I visit regularly, they would promptly answer that the last painter who depicted those visions was Van Gogh. Maybe, instead of a painter, they would mention Rilke's poems; but they usually prefer Van Gogh who represents an excellent investment of capital and cut himself off an ear because his painting didn't satisfy him in the presence of the fervor of things."*

The shared experience of saints is for the man without qualities the conscious loss of identity, where the communion with the world and the synthesis of the differences that define it are one with an uninvolved perception of those differences. It's a feeling of crossing the boundaries without losing them from sight entirely. It's an experience akin to asceticism and it characterizes many of the saints and mystics of almost every religion, from Christianity to Buddhism, from Taoism to Zen.

The oppositions and differences which constitute the world of men disappear under the glance of the saint. Relationships between things, which are the source of all identities, merge, seriously undermining the foundations of a non-omniscient knowledge of reality. With the concurrence of every opposition the Saint surpasses the world of man, and draws from a source of knowledge which is imaginable but not practicable. Saint is he who loses his human attributes in favor of divine attributes, where human is whatever can be human, and divine is everything else.

Man, who is hardly able to attain an illusory freedom within the immense boundaries of his world, can never be free of himself. If he were free, his freedom would begin where his humanity ends. He would be free then, but no longer a man.

In lack of better options, he can delight (or torture) himself in imagining some impracticable freedoms: we can think of him as a man who doesn't need to eat, to drink, to love, or capable of altering the way he looks at the world. We can imagine a radically inhuman human being. It's as impossible to truly obtain *real freedom* as it is easy to obtain *imaginary freedom* – which is another way to say that things are easier said than done. Real freedom is so much yearned for that some religions, sects and individuals actually believe that it is possible, exactly as it is imagined. The shattering of illusions is less pleasant than the screeching of a thousand cats' claws on a thousand chalkboards: it might seem strange, but many prefer to believe that they can't reach this freedom due to a specific guilt or fault of their own rather than admitting that it's simply unreachable. Christians are right on this subject: the original Sin is being and knowing as a man does; it is human knowledge which closes the door to divine knowledge. In a few words: man's greatest sin is not being God. Only the son of God, the Saint *par excellence*, will relieve us from this tiresome burden through his life and his death. Nice try, but too easy. That impossible freedom is unsuitable for men: only *saints*, the missing links between man and God, can come close to it.

If – and how – the saint is really able to do all this is another seriously intricate matter.

II - What is a pornstar

from wikipedia.org:

A pornographic actor/actress or a porn star is somebody who appears in pornographic movies, live sex shows or peep shows. Many actors and actresses may appear nude in films (usually filmed in explicit sexual genres). Most genres have specialists who achieve most of their recognition in a specific niche market such as bondage or strap-on sex.

Defining a pornstar is much easier – although useless. Everybody knows what a pornstar is: an actor specialized in enacting explicit sex scenes. Unlike mainstream actors, the work of a pornographic actor is not to impersonate a character within a more or less narrative context, but to perform one of the most well-known of human activities: sex. Characterization doesn't matter, and in most cases the story doesn't matter either: only sex does, over and over, in infinite variations and reiterated styles, from Altocalciphilia to Sacofricosis.

As interesting as it might be, we'll not discuss here about the characteristics of the genre, nor about its role in the history of cinema; and we'll not even mention the infinite quarrels about the importance (given or denied), the quality (given or denied) and the ethics (given or denied) of porn movies. Sex – like nuclear energy – can be used in horrible and wonderful ways; it may be interesting to point out one of its many aspects, but it would be sterile, and every generalization would be inexact *a priori*.

Sexual intercourse is flypaper for symbols, and as all highly symbolizable events (like death and the often intermingled love), often gives the impression of having an intrinsic meaning. Not so: it's simply suitable for all sorts of *powerful* uses and meanings. It can be experienced in antithetical ways: as a door to freedom, or as the greatest form of slavery. Paraphrasing Bergman: we could say that anything can be said about every *important thing* without fear of saying anything wrong.

Here we find the connection with the *imaginary freedom* we discussed above. Sexual intercourse is – also – the dilution and loss of identity through pleasure. The boundaries of the self disappear with the clothes, and skin to skin the boundaries of the body become friable too. My body is also yours, your body is mine, my identity touches yours and becomes yours to the point that it almost vanishes, at least for the duration of this brief union. But even this freedom is imagined, or at least short-lived. Whenever this abandonment happens, returning within the self may be brutal, or softened by love. From this perspective, love is only a variation, a leftover or even a theoretic fetish of the imaginary freedom experienced through the union of bodies. The freedom from the self obtainable through sexual intercourse is short-termed and limited in comparison with the one that we can obtain through death, but it's a freedom that preserves human characteristics, as it occurs with a brutal, primeval physical pleasure. It's in virtue of its hybrid human and uber-human nature we could venture to state that sex is to saints as death is to God.

As we said, we're not interested in pornographic movies, but in their actors. Generally well paid, more or less secret celebrities, they intrigue everyone: which is testified by the growing biography on the subject. These professionals of eroticism, who actually made a job out of the ultra-significant activity of sex, don't represent a character, they just play a role common to every man. They don't represent an individual, but *anyone*.

It's this apparently insignificant nuance that interests us.

III - What is a pornsaint

Having briefly and superficially defined both saints and pornstars, we're ready to define a pornsaint: we will call Pornsaint whoever attains sanctity through pornography. This doesn't mean (quite obviously) that each and every porn actor is a pornsaint – for what we know, they're simply pornstars. Pornsaints might not even actually exist, but what interests us is that they might exist, and how they might exist.

Besides, the common criteria of existence, drawn for the most part from our relationship with worldly things (or phenomena), when it comes to transcendence it is out of place like a Pope at a porn festival: a lot, but not altogether. It's scarcely adaptable to the way of the saint, which is more similar to a straight line infinitely extending than to a line connecting two points. After all, it's well known that words can't capture the bottom of things, which is of a savage and ungraspable nature, but can at most chase and surround it more and more, so as it may at least be glimpsed.

We saw earlier how the saint dwells where definitions lose meaning, beyond the limitless borders of the human world. From thence the saints look at the world with detachment, managing to discern the ridiculous misery of its seeming greatness. To the eyes of the saint, the world is but a small facet of a much greater diamond, a tiny reflection of the infinite. Sizes and hierarchies are only comparatively defined: free from the bonds that compel us to deem great what is small, the saints can measure the world with God's ruler. They can unwaveringly consider how names define each other, and how things are born from relations. For the saint, the sentence holds true: *"The name that can be named is not the eternal name. Unnamed is the principle of Heaven and Earth, when it is named, it is the mother of the ten thousand creatures."*

To attain this, the saint has given up on judgment and feeling, having long gazed closely at the boundaries of reality. Free from the most part of his humanity, and harshly trained in applying God's measure to things, he resembles God in attitude. The saint partially participates of divine knowledge, and dwells only partially in our world.

The pornsaint dwells too in the house of the saints, but got there traveling a different way, and came in knocking at another door. If the saint, in a way, obtained the absolute by clambering up on God (any God), the pornsaint obtained it climbing *over* man. His way doesn't go through renouncing the world of man in favor of the world of God, but through the utmost simultaneous participation in opposite aspects of the human world.

We saw how a pornstar makes a profession of sex and its infinite variations, converting an universal drive of man to a job. He relinquishes so much of himself to his humanity (in this case to sexual desire) that he can treat it with detachment; hence the synthesis of opposites of which he's a living representation.

An actor represents various human traits without ever actually being them. His catharsis consists in this: to be *and* not to be at the same time a penny-pincher, an assassin, a lover, etc.

A porn actor doesn't play the part of one or more individuals, but of anyone. Playing sex, he plays man in his most primordial and generic instincts; where the actor dismisses his social and personal characteristics to wear others – thus freeing himself – the porn actor dismisses his own human traits to take on *generic* human traits. Playing anyone, he is free from everyone.

Being made at the same time of participation and detachment from one of the most common and meaningful actions of the human species, the pornstar's interpretation opens a breach beyond the world of man. The representation of man enacted in a porn movie is profoundly inhuman, and what is truly proper of the pornsaint is to free himself from the world by participating to the maximum degree – with detachment. In this sense, acting in a porn movie may be a spiritual exercise.

This is the attaining of sanctity through simultaneous opposites, a decidedly Western and religiously secular alternative to Eastern style mystics. Detachment from the world and awareness of the loss of identity happen here not through renouncing the world or the contemplation of the absolute, but through the experience of man's opposites, the synthesis of which nullifies the value of differences and unequivocally leads to the loss of the self. The oppositions and diversities which are the foundations of the world of man, of relations and so of identities, are also the conditions of a non-omniscient knowledge of reality. Their overlapping is beyond the world of man, a knowledge imaginable but not practicable, a divine attribute. Inaccessible to man and accessible to the saints.

And to the pornsaints.

IV - An introduction to be read at the end

This short essay is actually a presentation of several works created in collaboration with pornstars. But above all it's an article of deep everymanism – not so much because it's connected so deeply with everyman, but because it's deep *and* everyman's.

It can't be read as a thesis or a demonstration, as it hasn't the bases. Only Hegel could sell as rigorous a text where, like here, just about in every line bulky words like God, Saint, Absolute, Transcendence, World, and so on show up. Without adding that the word Sex is added in the text here concluded. But the deep everymanism doesn't have its roots only in this: the way of the pornsaints is in fact more than an actual way to holy life, is at the same time a destructive act and one that gives value to religion; which is so as to say that sacred is sacred; *whatever* this may be.

The ways to sanctity after all are more than the saints themselves, to the point of leading Ulrich to affirm, again in *The Man without Qualities*: "*I am not religious, I think about the way to sanctity asking myself if it would be possible to go by car!*"

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