

Nasty pleasures: xenovisuality and schizo eroticism in trans-species pornography

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Short bio: Sara Méndez Lozano is a pre-doctoral researcher at the University of Valencia in the Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology. She holds a degree in Sociology (2022) from the same university and a master's degree in 'Human Rights, Interculturality and Development' from the International University of Andalusia and the Pablo de Olavide University. She has worked as a university lecturer and cultural manager in various art centers. Her doctoral thesis project currently focuses on posthumanism, xenofeminism and affective relations with other species. In her research work is dedicated to studying identities, bodies and dissident sexualities from *queer* and *cyborg* theories. She has attended and published in different national and international sociology conferences and in the spring of 2025 her first essay 'A posthuman crossroads: Orientations from a critical ecofeminist theory' will be published in the *Frontera* collection of the University of León.

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Abstract: Trans-species pornography is challenging the binary, white, heteronormative identity of human sexuality. Following in the footsteps of French post-structuralism, *queer* and *crip* theories, Deleuze and Guattari's *schizoanalysis* and cyborg posthumanism, this study addresses the interpretation of *xeno* or *queer* sexual practices from pornographic audiovisual productions. Different spaces of porn will be put in relation, trying to identify similarities and differences linked to the social imaginaries of each one of them. Visuality is presented as a field in dispute that is fundamental for the construction of new

speculative posthuman and trans-species narratives in the field of sexuality.

Keywords: Posthumanism; Sexuality; Transespecismo; Furry; Xenofeminism; Pornography.

INTRODUCTION

The appearance of non-human identities and practices in pornography is becoming increasingly common. Pornhub's annual statistics show us the growth in searches for categories such as 'Furry' or 'Sex Machines' (Pornhub, 2023-2021). We are seeing the alien, robotic and monstrous emerge as an

erotic identity confronting the human with its more radical constitutive Other. From sociology we cannot overlook these new imaginaries intimately related to the deconstruction of the classic binary identities of gender, race or species. *Queer*, *crip* and *cyborg* theories give us renewed glasses with which to understand the flashes of a booming posthuman current.

Art, literature, music, and philosophy are already taking account of the new direct interrelationship between the human and other animal and technological species. The redefinition of kinship and community ties from critical ecofeminist, socialist and queer proposals draw new symbiotic scenarios with the rest of non-human existences. The irruption of the *xeno* (weird, strange, foreign) is imminent and certainly desirable. Consequently, the transformations in erotic relations can respond to the same wave that is radically critical with human essentialism. Entering the analysis of this *xenosexualities* gives us the opportunity to study these practices in relation to new partial, abject and *nasty* imaginaries.

This research is organised along three thematic axes that interrelate and interrogate each other: posthumanism, sexuality and xenovisuality. The posthuman question emerges from the inevitable hybridisation and questioning of the material and symbolic limits of the human present in the trans-species erotic relationship. Understanding the trans-species as any practice, identity or relationship that exceeds the - socio-historically understood as - *human* (López-Guzmán, 2021), a trans-species eroticism or sexuality would include

those erotic relationships that include machinic, fictitious and/or animal elements. The *xeno* (*strange*) is used in this research in an almost analogous way to the trans-species, understanding that the xeno body, the strange or unrecognisable body, is also - and inevitably - non-human.

The understanding of *humanity* as an ontological place of porous and permeable borders appears to be aided by the epistemological turn popularised and extended by the post-structuralist currents of the last decades of the last century. The new focus on the fluidity and indeterminacy of reality through the acquisition of external and/or invisibilised points of view allowed thinkers such as Luce Irigaray, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Judith Butler or Gilles Deleuze to open up and broaden the way of approaching explanations of the social and political organisation of the time. This revolution in thought, together with the anti-humanist ecological, feminist and decolonial critiques of the 1960s (Braidotti, 2015), would allow, for the first time, the rejection of humanist moral imperatives in favour of reconstituting a different, paradoxically less human, humanity. Understanding the human as historically delimited to a white, masculine and bourgeois excluding identity, there would be no other alternative than to shake all the semiotic-normative-symbolic foundations that sustain it (Braidotti, 2015; Haraway, 2020).

The radical contributions of second-wave feminism (1970s) together with the development of queer and cyborg theories would give way to a heterogenisation of

human identit(ies), validating and vindicating the place of non-binary, black, crippled and/or mad bodies (Butler, 2017). Such questioning of the symbolic apparatus of humanism has in turn been supported by quantum field theories that defend the constant interrelatedness of matter, unable to delimit its boundaries (Barad, 2023). Thus, reality is understood as sticky. In Timothy Morton's terms, we could understand the world as inhabited by hyperobjects that merge, connect and hybridise endlessly (Morton, 2021). Posthumanism thus appears as a reaction to the disenchantment of the human ideal and to recent proposals and discoveries that call into question the existence of the 'individual', 'identity' and 'unity'. The philosopher and biologist Donna Haraway develops an important part of this post-human proposal on the basis of the concept of *Chthulucene*, which refers to a universe cohabited by constant symbiosis between living beings. Her epistemological contributions concerning string figures and a tentacular and rhizomatic thinking (Haraway, 2019) are aligned with these new sticky materialisms as the ontological basis of the posthuman being. Similarly, the *Xenofeminist Manifesto* of the "Laboria Cuboniks" collective marked in 2018 a practical-discursive line in defense of human hybridity with technology and the denaturalisation of the binary body (Hester, 2018).

The critique of this binary and white humanity as a device of power is fundamental to address an object of study that questions the boundaries of the human, desirable and agential. The recent defense of monstrosity

as a profoundly insurgent signifier (Rusell, 2022; García, 2023) accompanies the focus of this research, genealogically studying the origin and evolution of what is considered monstrous in direct relation to what is considered *inhuman*. Characters such as Frankenstein's monster take on special relevance as figures of appropriation of the abject and unrecognizable for trans and queer political and artistic movements across the planet (Stryker, 1993).

Interspecies relationships, both with other animals and with technology, are also undergoing a gradual but profound transformation. The non-human animal understood as a "pet" entails a series of patterns of coexistence and truly intimate and private emotional implications, just as the cell phone or the computer accompany our daily lives as bodily prothesis. It is visible that, compared to the last 200 years, in the West today we coexist with other species in a much more intimate, emotional, bodily and even sexual way. We only have to take a look at the popularization of technological sex toys.

Recent research at the Autonomous University of Querétaro asked university students to reformulate their family trees by including every being they considered affectively part of the family (Vázquez & Fernández, 2024). In an attempt to construct *deanthropic genealogies*, the research managed to reflect the evolution and changes in the human-animal relationship based on the location of animal bodies in the household space, the degree of affective bonding and the type of service offered. To give a particularly interesting example, in the

more recent generations, a novel phenomenon emerged: pets began to have names of their own. Naming thus appears as a hinge between the passage from object to subject.

Just as naming and affective bonding contribute to the formation of a trans-species kinship, it is interesting to study these symbiotic filiations from the point of view of the erotic relationship. To do so, we will have to pay attention to the studies that have emerged on sexuality, from its relation to power and domination (Foucault, 1986) to the analysis of its affirmative, creative and nomadic power (Deleuze & Guattari, 1985). We will return to the Freudian *polymorphous perverse*, the sexual revolutions of the 20th century and the pathologisation of 'deviant' desire (Reich, 1936; Amezáua, 1975)

Xenovisuality, on the other hand, refers to new strange ways of looking and being looked at. Understanding the image as a privileged social code of high pulsional charge in what is currently known as *scopic capitalism*, the audiovisual analysis of the xeno is presented as an innovative technique appropriate to the digital context. The construction of new gazes is thus part of a political epistemology of the image that takes into account the concordance between political regimes and scopic regimes (Brea, 2005; Azparren, 2023). Image and power are indistinguishable. From critiques of the *Society of the spectacle* (Debord, 2005) to current analyses of the political influence of audiovisual content on social networks, visuality has emerged as a fundamental battlefield for the new xeno-trans-monstrous currents.

In relation to this trans-monstrous current, queer and crip theories become complicit in exposing and revealing the transformative potential of the abject, the monstrous, the unrecognisable and uncodifiable. Haraway's cyborg, Foucault's self-transforming and mutating impulse, or Preciado's *biohacking*, join forces to configure an *epistemology of disgust* that takes erotic relations out of the wardrobe of human heteronormative binarism. Therefore, the starting point is to situate the cyborg as a non-place, as a mixture, a crossbreeding between categories and bodies whose frontiers are diluted and linked in symbiogenesis with other bodies. The monstrosity of the cyborg thus makes it appear as an illegitimate existence, as Haraway calls it, a *bastard existence*. (Haraway, 2020). Unrecognisable and unclassifiable bodies, crip bodies capable of arousing rejection, terror, nausea.

Following Deleuze and Guattari - and understanding sexuality as the main index of what they call *schizoanalysis* - the object of study is understood as *schizo*. This adjective given to trans-species eroticism refers in this research to the transgressive and *detritorialising* character of a difficult-to-interpret eroticism that escapes the codes and rigid readings of sexuality, bodies and identities. The schizophrenic in the work of these authors refers to that which goes beyond the margins, which overflows, which bursts in an unexpected and disconcerting way. In this respect, the *schizo* is associated with the ability to speak outside the code, to express from the incomprehensible, to open new creative paths. In this sense, innovation is inherent to both the content of the analysis

and the approach in line with a continuous opening and broadening of horizons.

MAIN RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS

As a result of the interrelationship or mixture between the three thematic axes (post)humanity, sexuality and (xeno)visuality, this research tries to clarify and review how the three categories have historically determined each other. To be read as a desiring subject functions as the gateway to a regime of humanity founded on the capacity to exercise domination in the erotic-symbolic relation. Offering the non-human the possibility of being, firstly, object and, secondly, subject of desire, radically reconfigures our conception of the human, its relations, its identity and its sexuality. The relocation of these elements opens the door to destabilising - as the *xeno* and *queer* movements do - deeply binary, colonial and speciesist human behaviours and structures.

Recent news reports and annual statistics from the pornography site Pornhub (Pornhub, 2021) are manifesting the rise of sexual identities and practices that exceed the human and are situated in in-between and deviant spaces. During the year 2023, a number of news reports came to light concerning a case in the UK of children identifying as animals (Gordon, 2023). It seems that this was not an isolated phenomenon, but that in some Western countries it is increasingly common to find children who understand themselves outside the traditional human label. These

data, together with the popularisation of posthumanist themes in culture and art as a reflection of a social and productive system pushed to its limits, show that this is a truly topical issue. The novelty of the subject is also evident in the scarcity of scientific material dealing with it. In this sense, the void in the scientific literature becomes an impulse to begin to take small steps in its analysis.

We could come to understand these trans-species audiovisual productions as part of speculative narratives of the posthuman. Narratives that we are already seeing emerging in artistic and literary disciplines such as in the classic novels of Ursula K Le Guin, the ecosexual art of Beth Stephens and Annie Sprinkle (Sprinkle & Stephens, 2021), the “Xenovisual Studies” collective or the recent and interesting artistic research work of the Institute of Postnatural Studies based in Madrid. Speculative narratives, xenocreative, piercing in the sense that D. Haraway talks about in *Staying with the trouble* (2019): “in what way do these concave, hollowed-out things, these holes in Being, generate richer, more extravagant, fuller, inadequate, continuous narratives from the first moment; stories with a place for the hunter but which are not about him, the self-constructed Human, the human-making machine of history?” (Haraway, 2019: 73)

Therefore, the present research aims to study phenomenologically the emergence and rise of (xeno)pornographic search categories such as ‘Furry’, ‘Xeno’ and ‘Anthro’ in two different fields of

pornographic production: in *mainstream pornography* through the Pornhub platform and in the post-porn movement. The aim is to carry out an analysis of pornographic xenovisuality in spaces with different audiences and social reception in dialogue with the level of repression and/or cultural acceptance.

Finally, placing these three categories in a booming trans-species pornography, allows us to formulate the research question: how is the xenovisuality of trans-species pornography reconfiguring the regime of humanity and its socio-political implications?

Taking into account the currents and axes that guide the theoretical framework, the main objectives of this research are the following:

General objective: To study how trans-species erotic relationships are presented audiovisually and perceived.

Specific objective 1: To conduct an audiovisual analysis of trans-species pornographic content on the Pornhub platform, the *Deep web* and the post-porn movement.

Specific objective 2: To situate this erotic xenovisuality within the framework of an entry into crisis of the human as a cause and consequence of it.

METHODOLOGY

In order to carry out this analysis, a qualitative methodology is used, specifically oriented towards an audiovisual content analysis. This combines a qualitative

analysis of visual signifiers using Atlas.ti software, where key theoretical dimensions are coded in the form of indicators. This approach allows for a systematic interpretation of hybrid images and narratives, considering their impact on the construction of subjectivities and the reconfiguration of social imaginaries. This work contributes to methodological and theoretical development and innovation by focusing on an emerging field of sociology (the posthuman / trans-species), which is also located in an emerging space (the digital).

As indicated in the first paragraphs, this audiovisual content analysis is structured around 2 different pornographic spaces related to the Pornhub web platform and the audiovisual productions of postporn. In each of the 2 spaces, 100 videos corresponding to the categories 'Furry', 'Xeno' and 'Anthro' will be collected in order of number of views and likes. From these 100 videos, a selection of the top 10 videos will be made for each pornographic space, resulting in a total representative sample of 20 videos.

To select this sample of 10 videos, the main criterion used is the number of views. Considering that the number of likes may not correspond to the number of views of a pornographic content, it has been preferred to select the videos with the highest accumulation of views in order to analyze the videos with the greatest impact or social influence. In this way, the selection process is structured around the three tags, once the search is filtered by the tag "xeno", the 10 most viewed videos are selected. As for the temporal delimitation, none is

contemplated, understanding that video views are recorded cumulatively over the years and, therefore, prioritizing the most viewed content, regardless of the time of publication.

This representative sample will be subjected to the corresponding audiovisual analysis guided and organised on the basis of dimensions translated into indicators. Thus, for example, the 'human' or 'animal' dimension can be identified and studied in the videos on the basis of physiognomic and sound indicators such as 'skin colour', 'amount of hair' or 'intelligibility of the sounds emitted'. The sexual dimension, on the other hand, could be analysed on the basis of indicators related to the roles of power in the erotic relationship, the appearance or not of penetration or the incorporation of objects in the sexual act.



Fig.1. Screenshot of *xenopornography* on Pornhub with 435 K visualizations.

Once the samples have been organised and categorised we could begin to draw conclusions about how this trans-species sexuality is presented audiovisually, being able to compare the results of the 2 spaces and, therefore, studying the similarities and

differences between 2 places that, symbolically, represent trans-species sexuality from places that are accepted (Pornhub) or openly in a counter-hegemonic struggle (postporn).

The long process of audiovisual analysis is understood as a constant interrelation between theoretical framework and sample, so that categories and indicators evolve in direct relation to what is observed. The research, therefore, induces terminology and the creation of indicators from what the researcher observes, at the same time as she deduces part of her analysis and her gaze from a well formulated and structured theoretical framework. Nevertheless, the research is opposed to presenting itself as closed or solid, but rather its premises or theoretical categories seek to present themselves as flexible and open to their own revision during the process.

Based on this sample and the conclusions drawn from its analysis, we will be able to frame these erotic representations in our socio-historical conditions by analysing their inevitable interrelation as a cause and consequence of these. Thus, the implications of a trans-species and *schizo eroticism* - such as the one analysed - for xenofeminism, the posthumanist current and the resignification of bodies and identities can be studied

INNOVATION AND KEYFINDINGS

This doctoral thesis project aims to draw conclusions and relevant information regarding the way in which trans-species sexual and erotic relations are presented in

pornography. The exhaustive and rigorous analysis of the selected sample aims to understand the erotic imaginary of the trans-species based on its intrinsic xenovisuality, its practices and the identities that appear in them. Obtaining this information is essential to understand the identity and bodily transformations that queer, cyborg or trans-species existences confront us with. Therefore, the extracted data can be useful and interesting for any research interested in the questioning of human frameworks, the development of technology, speciesism and, of course, transformations in the field of sexuality.

The audiovisual analysis described above aims to approach a semiological and scopic understanding of the hybridisations, kinship and erotic relations with the non-human. It is hoped to describe the sexual practices viewed in relation to the social and moral framework in which they are inserted. The place that these xenopornographic practices occupy in today's social imaginary can give us clues about the popularity of posthumanism and the role that the sexual relationship plays in this ethical-political positioning.

This research is presented as a great epistemological challenge. According to Karen Barad, every epistemology is inseparable from its ontology, so that it might be more appropriate to speak of *onto-epistemologies*. This change in terminology is neither innocent nor innocuous but forces us to redefine the way in which we understand science and the subject-object of knowledge relationship. Assuming the impossibility of separating the studied reality

from the techniques and methodologies with which it is approached, a *xeno* or posthuman onto-epistemology requires us to escape from the anthropo-centered gaze (as far as possible) and to promote a methodological and terminological creativity. Therefore, this research seeks to permeate new fields critical with the classical theory of knowledge, whether from new materialisms, queer realism, feminist epistemologies or a queer phenomenology.

It is difficult, however, to predefine a clear and forceful methodological path under these onto-epistemic premises that require, finally, a more open, flexible and speculative science. In this sense, the fluidity of the study and its constant openness to new and strange views can ensure a direct access to scientific innovation, escaping from closed and stable methodologies that, although guiding and ensuring scientific results, are sometimes limiting for serendipity and unexpected, innovative discoveries.

Especially in fields such as art, humanities or social sciences, we have observed the emergence of different and innovative epistemologies that question what we have understood as *scientific*, *neutral* or *objective*. From epistemologies close to hermeneutics to critical and feminist epistemologies with emancipatory intentions, methods of a more interpretative and situated character are producing scientific knowledge. The body as receiver and producer of knowledge, the turn towards emotional and queer epistemologies of Sara Ahmed (Ahmed, 2019), the situated knowledge and string figures of Donna Haraway (Haraway, 2019) or the xenopoetics

and speculative science of xenofeminism (Hester, 2018).

However, not only are these fields exploring subject-object research relations, but, in the natural and physical sciences, cases such as Niels Bohr's quantum discoveries redefine the forms of scientific treatment based on a radical change in how we understand the minimum unit of analysis. From his research, he establishes that the minimum unit of analysis is not the atom, but the *relations* between matter, so that this ontological transformation derives in a new epistemological one from more relational and queer approaches - as developed by the scientist Karen Barad.

Therefore, and based on these innovative approaches with interdisciplinary implications, this study can make a substantial contribution to epistemological innovation and also in social research topics by addressing contemporary and novel themes through digital and audiovisual media, which are increasingly relevant and decisive in the configuration of social imaginaries and cultural meanings. Sexuality and visibility intersect in pornography to form a conductive mosaic of human fantasies and drives, appearing as potential guides for a reconfiguration of our biopolitical apparatuses. As Mon García tells us in *La resurrección de las monstruas* (2023): "bodies, pleasures, desires, sexualities are the challenge that the present is in crisis (...) the personal is political and the sexual as well" (García, 2023: 101).

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