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The Jaguar and the Anteater: Pornography Degree Zero

Bernard Arcand

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Over the last two decades, pornography has become not only one of the most spectacularly profitable industries in the West but also, in its own way, the most innovative, with the development of more and more individualized technologies of sexual stimulation and simulation. At the same time, it has been the focus of ever fiercer debates: political, ethical and judicial. Despite the media's expanding sexual obsessions, pornography remains largely a matter of public shame, while being privately consumed by millions of citizens, now female as well as male. It is a unique phenomenon of our time, and one whose real significance is still little understood.

In this remarkable study Bernard Arcand approaches pornography as an anthropologist, in an attempt to explain precisely why it exists in these forms at the moment, and with what consequences. To do so, he has assembled data on the state of the industry and its technology, on its history, and on the polemics it has engendered, especially, but not exclusively, among feminists. The result is probably the most comprehensive overview of the subject ever published.

But Arcand's main concern in *The Jaguar and the Anteater* is to elucidate the ways in which pornography is a mirror of our modernity—how we get the porn we deserve and need. Drawing on the work of social theorists such as Lasch, Sennet, Baudrillard and Lipovetsky, he examines the consumption of pornography and its wider significance in terms of privatization, specialization, isolation and extremism. And, while stressing the peculiar originality of contemporary porn, he uses anthropological material, particularly from South American tribal societies, to suggest that the phenomenon is also a new and uncertain response to a series of elementary questions concerning modesty and desire, masturbation and inhibition, death and illusions of eternal youth.

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