

‘Prepare your lube, cockring, and put the sound on high volume’

How Music and Sounds are used in inducing a Masturbatory Trance within online Male-to-Male Poppers Training



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Abstract

The industry of online pornography has become one with great influence, and academic interest in this field has gradually increased. However, the academic field of porn studies has generally neglected the role of music and sounds within pornography. Pornography is seen as a predominantly visual genre that relies on ‘witnessing’ sex and creating a real presence of sexuality. According to Linda Williams, removing music would intensify the (sexual) sounds and the sense of proximity and immediacy - bringing the spectator ‘close’. However, in this thesis I argue that this depends on the type of pornography, of music, and on the type of sounds that are used. Music and sounds *can* intensify the experience of watching online pornography. To support this claim, I focus on the role of music and sounds within (male-to-male) poppers training. These are online (instructional, montage) videos that guide viewers in the use of poppers: a recreational drug that is inhaled through the nostrils and may cause mild euphoria and a heightened state of sexual arousal. Within the genre of poppers training, music and sounds play a significant role in stretching and enhancing the so-called *masturbatory trance* - a concept from Paul Morris and Susanna Paasonen. Using Ruth Herbert’s theories on the concept *trancing*, I explain what exactly is a masturbatory trance and how music and sounds can play a role in inducing or influencing this type of trancing. I do this by analysing the most viewed poppers trainer on Pornhub: ‘POPPERS TRAINER - MEGA POPPERBATOR’. With this thesis, I should also like to encourage other scholars to step outside of the taboo on pornography, and contribute to the fields of porn studies, be it from a musicological perspective or from within a different academic field. The range of pornographic genres seems to be infinite and is constantly changing, just as the music and sounds that can play a role in it.

Introduction

Dear Reader,

Here is a little experiment. Go online, browse any pornographic site you please and try to find pornographic material in which music clearly plays an important role. Sounds simple, but without explicitly typing music-related queries into the website's search engine, it can be surprisingly difficult. Some videos start with a branded opening tune, but as soon as the sexual interaction starts, music seems to disappear. In fact, most videos completely exclude any music whatsoever. This experiment raises several questions: is the exclusion of music conventional in all pornography? How can we understand the way in which music functions within pornography if there is so little music present in our current online filth and dirt? As is generally understood in regards to pornography (and informally known as 'Rule 34'): if you can think of it, there is porn about it. And if not - then you are not looking hard enough. To make a long story short: I found something.

When searching on Pornhub, a well-known site for pornography with millions of uploads and daily visitors, I stumbled upon an intriguing pornographic niche: all-male poppers training. These are online (instructional, montage) videos, mostly focused on the gay community, that guide viewers in the usage of poppers – an inhalable, sexually arousing drug – and at the same time immerse them into some sort of sexual trance. Especially interesting is that music (and sounds) seem to play an important role in these videos. Why is it that music *does* have a prominent position in this form of pornography? And how are music, sounds, and moving images related to each other in these popper trainings? Can this genre offer us more insights on how music relates to pornography in general?

In this thesis, I give an answer on these questions. First, I shall describe the current debate on pornography (the so-called 'porn studies') and position the role of music and sounds within this debate. Then, I shall elaborate on a concept from Paul Morris and Susanna Paasonen called 'the masturbatory trance', contextualise this by using Ruth Herbert's perspective on trancing, and continue by mapping out the music and sounds of pornography with the help of the 'six propositions on the sonics of pornography' by Sharif Mowlabocus and Andy Medhurst. These theories form the lens through which I shall perform my analysis, which is a case study on Pornhub's most viewed male-to-male poppers trainer called 'POPPERS TRAINER - MEGA POPPERBATOR'. How are music and sounds used here in order to induce a masturbatory trance on its presumed audience? Finally, I shall conclude my findings, reflect upon them, and

make some suggestions for further appropriate research regarding within the sonic field of pornography.

Music in Porn Studies

Over the last decades, academic interest in the field of pornography has gradually increased. Established scholars like Mandy Merck, Linda Williams, John Mercer, and Richard Dyer managed to pull pornography out of its taboo status and critically engage with the topic from many different perspectives.¹ And they are right to do so: pornography is an enormous industry (revenue-wise) and has great influence upon us and upon our society. It has had crucial impact on the development of network technologies and online economies, as in the development of web hosting services, credit card payment systems, banner advertisement, web promotion, and streaming video technologies.² Pornography is a cultural form that is highly diverse and deserves both a serious and extended analysis that reaches beyond polemics and sensationalism.³

Not only was there a shift within academic interest in porn over the last decades - pornography itself has drastically changed as well. Whereas in the previous century our ‘filth and dirt’ was mostly consumed via magazines, VHS, and DVD, nowadays, the great majority of it is consumed online.⁴ Digital production tools and online networks have led to a strong increase in the general visibility, accessibility, and diversity of pornography: from webcams and their interaction possibilities to massive (do-it-yourself) video-sharing, hosting sites, portals, Web directories, amateur forums, torrent-sharing platforms, and communities for fringe interests. Access to porn is easier than ever, and it can be accessed free, anonymously, and in a seemingly endless range of niches, styles, subcategories, languages, and formats that have been impossible in other media.⁵

However, while celebrating the current critical focus on pornography in academic work, porn studies have been neglecting the role of music (and sound) within pornographic texts.⁶ Linda Williams, perhaps to be considered the founding mother of porn studies, wrote in 1999

¹ Shari Mowlabocus, and Andy Medhurst, “Six Propositions on the Sonics of Pornography,” *Porn Studies* 4, no. 2 (2017): 1, doi:10.1080/23268743.2017.1304236.

² Paul Morris, and Susanna Paasonen, “Coming to Mind: Pornography and the Mediation of Intensity,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Sound and Image in Digital Media*, eds. Amy Herzog, John Richardson, and Carol Vernallis (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1.

³ Linda Williams, “Introduction,” in *Porn Studies*, ed. Linda Williams (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014): 1-6.

⁴ Morris, and Paasonen, “Coming to Mind: Pornography and the Mediation of Intensity,” 1.

⁵ Susanna Paasonen, *Carnal Resonance: Affect and Online Pornography* (Cambridge, MA: Mit Press, 2011), 1.

⁶ Mowlabocus, and Medhurst, “Six Propositions on the Sonics of Pornography,” 1-3.

that ‘hard-core sound ... seeks an effect of closeness and intimacy rather than of spatial reality’. She claims that pornography is a genre that relies on ‘witnessing’ sex and creating a real presence of sexuality. Focusing on music would only undermine the pornographic text’s claim of reality and authenticity.⁷ Susanna Paasonen underlines this in her book *Carnal Resonance*: ‘Since there is usually no music, the sound intensifies the sense of proximity and immediacy, bringing the viewer close’.⁸ In other words: music would prevent the consumer from having effective interaction with the pornographic text - only bodily sounds intensify the pornographic text. This explains why most online pornographic videos do not feature any music.

Even though most online pornographic videos do not include music, this does not mean that music (and sounds) cannot play a significant role in the experience of pornography. In fact, the extensive diversification of online pornography inevitably brought us subgenres in which music *does* play a significant role - like poppers training. These newer subgenres might give us more understanding of how music and sounds function in pornography. However, most studies that *do* focus on sound and music within pornography texts seem to be stuck with analysing the medium of film and fail to incorporate online pornography. Of course, online pornography is intimately tied to the histories of porn films and videos, but it has transcended the limits of these media. As Zabet Patterson once stated: ‘[...] the physical apparatus of the computer, and the material habits it requires, places the viewer in a relationship with the images in Internet pornography that differs significantly from the viewer’s relationship to other types of pornography.’⁹ Thus, online pornography requires separate research, because of its unique relationship with the consumer.

When watching online porn, there is much more going on than gazing at a screen: structures of searching, the strategic uses of metadata and links, pop-up banners and advertisements, and user statistics gathered through cookies.¹⁰ Besides, the medium of film implies that there is a story or narrative event that has to be shown, whether this be in cinema, on television, or on your laptop screen. Online pornography, on the other hand, does not necessarily require a narrative. There are millions of (anonymous) videos, professional and amateur, that feature non-narrative sexual intercourse that exclude any signs of plot, setting, characters, conflict, and themes. Lastly, whereas film might also function as a form of (shared)

⁷ Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the "frenzy of the Visible"* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 123-125.

⁸ Paasonen, *Carnal Resonance: Affect and Online Pornography*, 79.

⁹ Zabet Patterson, “Going On-line: Consuming Pornography in the Digital Era,” in *Porn Studies*, ed. Linda Williams (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 108.

¹⁰ Paasonen, *Carnal Resonance: Affect and Online Pornography*, 28.

entertainment, online pornography is a more individual-oriented medium, whose goal seems to be masturbation. Margret Grebowicz underlines this in her book *Why Internet Porn Matters*, by defining internet porn as ‘all materials created specifically to aid in masturbation and circulated on the Internet, largely (though not exclusively) for commercial purposes’.¹¹

Music, Sound, and Trancing within Pornography

In 2013, Paul Morris and Susanna Paasonen wrote an article dealing with the subculture of gay bareback pornography (male-to-male penetrative sex without the use of condoms) within pornographic texts created by production company Treasure Island Media. ‘Documentary pornography, as visual ethnography committed to representing a sexual community to and for itself’, is how queer scholar Tim Dean defines TIM titles.¹² Interesting is that the analysis by Morris and Paasonen was done both from a practice-based producer’s perspective (Morris from TIM) and that of a media studies scholar (Paasonen). Both explain how online pornography captures and mediates the intensity and immediacy of sex, and – more importantly – how music and sounds play an important role in this. They write that:

[...] The soundtrack provides rhythm and tempo for sexual acts unfolding, possibly to support the motions of masturbation. Alternatively, the soundtrack may create a sense of distance by detaching the audience from the diegetic sounds of the acts performed. The textures of music may remain in the background, add to the intensity of the overall scene, or disrupt it. Once this additional, external layer of rhythm and texture is absent, the sounds of sex involve intensity that draws viewers – as listeners – into a different kind of proximity.¹³

If we summarise this, Morris and Paasonen claim the exact same thing as Linda Williams: ‘once there is no music within (online) pornography, sexual sounds bring the consumer close, into a different kind of proximity.’ However, what kind of proximity do the authors refer to? In order to answer this question, they shine light on different titles from Treasure Island Media. The production company’s documentary-style pornography is completely focused on creating exactly this feeling of ‘being there’ in a way that the consumer is grasped by the intensity of

¹¹ Margret Grebowicz, *Why Internet Porn Matters* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2013), 4.

¹² Tim Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections on the Subculture of Barebacking* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 119-120.

¹³ Morris, and Paasonen, “Coming to Mind: Pornography and the Mediation of Intensity,” 9.

the scenes and joined in some kind of resonating loop. Morris and Paasonen even talk about a *masturbatory trance*.¹⁴ They claim that this trance is the ‘work’ of pornography and is ‘as important to the development and elaboration of the personal fantasy as the sexual excitement of the imagery’.¹⁵ Noteworthy is that, contradictorily, not only (bodily) sound effects but also *music* is meant fully to engage the consumer with this masturbatory trance. Let us zoom out for a moment and ask ourselves the question: what exactly is this masturbatory trance?

Masturbatory Trancing

According to David Aldridge and Jörg Fachner, the word ‘trance’ implicates ‘a large group of altered states of consciousness (ASC) of which human beings are capable.’¹⁶ Consciousness here, from the Latin *con* (with) and *scire* (to know), includes the concept of mutuality, of ‘knowing with ourselves and others’.¹⁷ In relation to music, the authors write that trance simply means those kinds of altered states of consciousness, which are obtained by means of sound (sonic events), agitation, and in the presence of others (in contrast to ‘ecstasy’ which is attained in silence, immobility, and solitude).¹⁸

However, the problem with this is that using the word ‘altered state’ indicates a certain static situation. In her book *Everyday Music Listening: Absorption, Dissociation and Trancing*, Ruth Herbert writes about the concept of ‘trancing’ and its relationship with music. She defines trance as a *process*, characterized by a ‘decreased orientation to consensual reality, a decreased critical faculty, a selective internal or external focus, together with a changed sensory awareness and – potentially – a changed sense of self.’¹⁹ To make this more concrete, Herbert introduces a set of associated phenomenological criteria that indicate when something is considered to be trancing. Since she writes about everyday trancing, these criteria can be considered as quite broad and their occurrence is rather frequent in day to day life when thus measured along these criteria. Nonetheless, they are still helpful in defining the ingredients of trancing, and in my analysis I shall use them to see how music and sounds influence the masturbatory trance within online poppers training. Important to note is that these phenomenological criteria are

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid, 9-10.

¹⁶ David Aldridge, and Fachner Jörg. *Music and Altered States: Consciousness, Transcendence, Therapy, and Addictions* (London: J. Kingsley, 2006), 38.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid, 39-50.

¹⁹ Ruth Herbert, *Everyday Music Listening: Absorption, Dissociation and Trancing* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2011), 5.

overlapping, and not mutually exclusive. The trancing categories and associated phenomenological criteria are listed below.²⁰

1. Reduction in density of thought or internal dialogue (attentional focus external, internal or fluctuating):
 - a. relaxation of critical faculties
 - b. decreased activation
 - c. altered sense of experience or self

2. Change in sensory awareness (attentional focus external or fluctuating):
 - a. enhanced sensory awareness
 - b. sharpened awareness and increased activation (alertness, arousal)
 - c. multisensory experience
 - d. blending (stimuli perceived to interact with/affect each other)
 - e. changes in awareness span (narrowed, broadened, equanimous)
 - f. altered sense of experience or self

3. Imaginative involvement (attentional focus internal or fluctuating):
 - a. imagery
 - b. association, daydreaming and reminiscence
 - c. altered sense of experience or self

Besides these phenomenological criteria, Herbert introduces four broad categories plus a binary that all describe different *types* of trancing. I shall use these descriptions to frame the masturbatory trance within poppers training. Let me start by explaining the binary. According to Herbert, trancing can be *absorptive* and/or *dissociative*. The first, absorption, occurs when someone feels ‘focused, balanced or pleasantly dreamy - an immersion in sensation in which alterations of consciousness are not noticed until after the trancing’.²¹ A dissociative experience, on the other hand, generally occurs when someone feels ‘tired, emotionally overloaded, subject to external discomfort or internal rumination’.²² The main difference between these concepts

²⁰ Ibid, 109.

²¹ Ibid, 100.

²² Herbert, *Everyday Music Listening: Absorption, Dissociation and Trancing*, 100.

lie in the ‘dulling’ of consciousness.²³ Does an activity numb or flood one’s consciousness? Does it lead someone to a position of third-person dissociation from the experience or does it lead to fascination with the stimulus (and thus the experience) itself?²⁴

Now, let us take a look at the four broad trancing categories, in which both absorption and dissociation can occur:

1. ‘A simple awareness of heightened multisensory sensation rather than thoughts or feelings. This category captures a feeling of seeing things ‘afresh’ or in a new way, suggesting an element of dissociation from self via deautomatisation of thought. Such involvement often happens in combination with everyday tasks and is often spontaneous.’²⁵ Usually, this is triggered by vivid colours, textures, sounds, and/or acoustic attributes of music. Looking in a kaleidoscope, for example, sitting in the train, or making repetitive movements while weeding in the garden.

2. ‘A heightened, multisensory awareness coupled with raised arousal/alertness levels and/or a strongly affective tone, giving a feel of sharpened awareness. This type of experience often involves sound or music in conjunction with vision.’²⁶ Herbert uses the example of hearing the sound of seagulls in central London (an unexpected context), causing a ‘figurative slap on the cheek’.

3. ‘Sensory overload resulting in a gradually narrowed external focus where external stimuli gradually lose their meaning before receding from awareness (dissociation from surroundings).’²⁷ This occurs when you enter an overwhelmingly crowded place and gradually lose awareness of the sounds of conversations around you, for instance.

4. ‘A multilayered involvement (external and internal absorption) deriving from a combination of heightened or changed sensory awareness plus an element of mental or imaginative involvement.’²⁸ Herbert notes a large number of diverse experiences in this group such as the combined effect of mental, visual and emotional involvement in a live

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid, 130-131.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

rugby match, the combination of mental, motoric and visual involvement present in a life drawing class (involving outwardly and inwardly directed attention, plus alternation between restricted and contemplative awareness) or the use of imaginative involvement to heighten visual experience. Prior knowledge or imagination are crucial in terms of both the construction and intensity of such experiences.²⁹

Now, how does music influence the masturbatory trance? Morris and Paasonen claim that, from the perspective of a pornographer, 'sexual scenes are parallel to extended musical structures, and the masturbatory experience is parallel to the aesthetic experience of a musical structure'.³⁰ By stretching the masturbatory trance, one can enhance its quality. Music might play an important role in this, sometimes directly inducing trance, sometimes contributing to inducing trance, sometimes rupturing the engagement, but it can, if it works well, also deepen trance. This means that music which is too extended or functional (in the traditional sense of classical European functional harmony) draws the consumer into narrative and distracts from the depth of trance.³¹

Perhaps the inductive/distractive qualities of music can be further explained by comparing music in pornography to music in narrative cinema. In 1987, Claudia Gorbman writes about the concept of *suturing* within narrative cinema - the process in which music decreases one's awareness of the technological nature of film discourse, of unconsciously turning enunciation into fiction.³² One can debate whether suturing is also a form of what Herbert calls trancing. In fact, Gorbman herself compares suturing to hypnosis (and trance):

The cinema has been compared to hypnosis, since both induce (at least in good subjects) a kind of trance. The trusting subject (trusting the hypnotist, the system of cinematic narrative) removes defences to access to unconscious fantasies. The hypnotist has his/her induction methods: soothing voice, repetition, rhythm, suggestion of pleasantly enveloping imagery, and focusing the subject's attention on one thing to the exclusion of others. Narrative cinema has its own "induction methods"-including the harmonic, rhythmic, melodic suggestiveness and channelling effects of music. Film music lowers

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Morris, and Paasonen, "Coming to Mind: Pornography and the Mediation of Intensity," 8.

³¹ Ibid, 6.

³² Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (London: Indiana University Press, 1987), 5-6.

thresholds of belief. This begins to explain why it has continued to be indispensable even to "realist" narrative cinema.³³

Remarkable is that, audio-visually, Gorbman's perspective on the way music functions seems to oppose that of porn studies. Whereas music within online pornography is said to *distract* from the depth of trance by drawing the consumer into narrative, here, within narrative cinema, music is said to *induce* trance by doing exactly the same. This is precisely what Herbert gives an explanation for: there are many kinds of trancing. The masturbatory trance is something different than the trance that narrative cinema tries to inflict.

The Music and Sounds of Pornography

With this in mind, I asked myself the following question: if extended, functional music within online pornography prevents immersion into a masturbatory trance, what kind of music helps to create it? In order to analyse this, I rely mainly upon the article 'Six Propositions on the Sonics of Pornography' by Sharif Mowlabocus and Andy Medhurst.³⁴ They map out some ways to analyse the sounds of pornography (and, as they state: the pornography of sound) in the context of gay, male culture. The authors write that 'pornography speaks in particular accents, mobilises particular music, dances to particular tunes, and relies on the pants we hear as much as the pants we see. If queer cultures have their own distinctive worlds of sound, then the sonic armories of porn play a prominent role within them.'³⁵ To analyse the sonics of pornography, Mowlabocus and Medhurst provide a practical toolkit that is divided into six propositions: the uses and role of music in pornography, sexual sounds and noises, background sound and noise, voices in pornography, dialogue in pornography, and voice-only pornography.³⁶ Not all of these analytical propositions are relevant to poppers training (I have not encountered any poppers trainer that is voice-only, for instance). Therefore, I picked out the most important propositions for my analysis: the uses and role of music (which is the most essential), sexual sounds and noises, background sounds and noise, voices, and dialogue. These are elements that, although not always equally present within poppers training, form the sonic ingredients of the pornographic genre. I shall briefly touch upon each of them below.

The uses and role of music in pornography

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Mowlabocus, and Medhurst, "Six Propositions on the Sonics of Pornography," 1-26.

³⁵ Ibid, 2.

³⁶ Ibid, 1-26.

Music within online pornography can take on different roles. Sometimes it is used as a rather generic convention, or perhaps a reference to certain leisure practices of the characters represented. It can also occur as a form of aural ‘wallpaper’, not having any narrative functions.³⁷ Let me exemplify this last point by quoting Ben Winters, who writes about music and narrative in relation to films. He states that ‘it would surely be far more sensible to imagine that the majority of music we hear (in films) is not doing the narrating, but is instead part of the narrative *as it is narrated*: in other words, it is *the product of narration not the producer of narrative*.’³⁸ This means that, within online pornography, in order for music to narrate (and therefore distract from trance), there must be a narrative within the pornographic text. However, in most cases there is none. In fact, space in porn is usually incidental or functions simply as a background (outdoor, motel room, shower, toilet stall), and only if space becomes primary, the nudity or sex becomes embedded within a narrative. However, the work is then more likely to be considered as erotica rather than porn.³⁹ So within pornography, in contrast to film, the relationship with narrative is different, placing the role(s) of music in a different perspective as well.

Let us take a closer look at these roles of music within online (male-to-male) pornography. Firstly, Mowlabocus and Medhurst write that ‘the type of music used in gay male pornography may echo other leisure activities and experiences within gay male subculture’.⁴⁰ Yes, music can function as just an aural backdrop, but it can also trigger a process of identification and association. Further in this thesis, when I analyse a specific poppers trainer, I shall delineate what kind of identifications might occur and offer some possible examples. However, first, I should like to place this process of identification in perspective by quoting Anahid Kassabian. She writes about identification in relation to Hollywood films and explains that there are two main approaches to film music: the composed score and the compiled score.⁴¹ The first one refers to ‘a body of musical material composed specifically for the film in question’ - the latter is ‘a score built of songs that often (but not always) pre-existed the film’.⁴² She then connects these types of scores to two concepts: *assimilating* and *affiliation*

³⁷ Ibid, 7.

³⁸ Ben Winters, “Musical Wallpaper?: Towards an Appreciation of Non-Narrating Music in Film,” in *Music, Sound, and the Moving Image* 6, no. 1 (2012): 43, <https://doi-org.proxy.library.uu.nl/10.3828/msmi.2012.5>.

³⁹ Morris, and Paasonen, “Coming to Mind: Pornography and the Mediation of Intensity,” 5-6.

⁴⁰ Mowlabocus, and Medhurst, “Six Propositions on the Sonics of Pornography,” 5.

⁴¹ Anahid Kassabian, *Hearing Film: Tracking Identifications in Contemporary Hollywood Film Music* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 2-3.

⁴² Ibid.

identifications, in which assimilating scores are structured to draw perceivers into socially and historically unfamiliar positions.⁴³ Kassabian argues that:

When an offer of assimilating identification is (unconsciously) accepted, perceivers can easily find themselves positioned anywhere—sledding down the Himalayas, for instance – and with anyone – a Lithuanian sub captain, perhaps, or a swashbuckling Mexican orphan peasant. There is no necessary relationship between film perceivers and the identity positions they take on in an assimilating identification. Nor is there any relationship between their own histories and the positions. Scores that offer assimilating identifications, I argue, try to maintain fairly rigid control over such processes, even as – or because – they encourage unlikely identifications.⁴⁴

She continues with describing affiliating identifications:

More often, compiled scores offer what I call affiliating identifications, and they operate quite differently from composed scores. These ties depend on histories forged outside the film scene, and they allow for a fair bit of mobility within it. If offers of assimilating identifications try to narrow the psychic field, then offers of affiliating identifications open it wide. This difference is, to my mind, at the heart of filmgoers' relationships to contemporary film music.⁴⁵

In other words: affiliating scores bring *personal* external associations into the spectator's experience of the film. When applied to the genre of online pornography, for example, when someone watches a poppers trainer that contains contemporary dance music, this music might not only be used as an aural backdrop but also bring personal associations to the experience - layering it with meaning and (sub)cultural resonance.⁴⁶ In this example, I find the music a clear case of affiliating music.

On the other hand, this process of identification can also be reversed. Mowlabocus and Medhurst state that certain styles of music appear to reflect certain genres of gay male pornography, perhaps even certain types of bodies and performances. Extreme sexual activities,

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Mowlabocus, and Medhurst, "Six Propositions on the Sonics of Pornography," 3-12.

such as bareback, gangbangs, BDSM, urination, military or rape fantasies generally use music that helps to secure the generic identification of (and with) the text. This can be seen as a case of assimilating music. For instance, as the authors write: ‘in the UK, cheaply produced, repetitive techno has strong class associations and is aligned with white working-class youth culture. Using this type of music within a pornographic text supports the illusion of working-class masculinity at play.’⁴⁷

Finally, some musical genres might struggle to support the same meanings as the pornographic image. Take avant-garde jazz. This music is ‘arguably too abrasive and edgy, to determinedly antipathetic to background music status, to function as a plausible soundtrack to pornographic scenes’. Same goes for traditional English folk music - its ballads and narratives offer little opportunity to be combined with pornography.⁴⁸ Knowing this, we can perhaps theorise why certain musical genres are used in poppers training and why others are left out - why some music seems to work in supporting pornographic imagery and creating a masturbatory trance, and why others do not.

Sexual sounds and noises

As Linda Williams wrote: ‘the smooch of a kiss [...] the slurp of fellatio [...] the whoosh of penetration’ all serve to make sex appear ‘all the more proximate to the viewer-listener’.⁴⁹ Her words tell us that not only music but also the sounds of sex are able to underscore the intensity of the visual experience. Sound surrounds us and is therefore inescapable – without muting the television or switching off the computer speakers we cannot stop listening.⁵⁰ In my analysis, I map out these sexual sounds and argue how they contribute in creating a masturbatory trance.

Background sound and noise

In the understanding and appreciation of pornography, ambient sounds can play an essential role. Depending on the noise, these sounds can influence our enjoyment of pornography and be used as markers of authenticity – supporting the claims (or promises) made by the producer or user. For instance, the website *Jaysstraightguys.com* commonly uses material in which the sounds of female porn performers are heard (off-screen), establishing the heterosexuality of the male performers and validate the central claim of the website – that these performers are

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Linda Williams, *Screening sex* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press), 83.

⁵⁰ Mowlabocus, and Medhurst, “Six Propositions on the Sonics of Pornography,” 3-12.

straight. However, I have to note that sounds do not need to be pornographic in order to represent/establish a certain atmosphere or situation. Think about the barking of a dog or the sounds of a vacuum cleaner that imply a domestic, do-it-yourself setting.⁵¹

Voices and dialogue in pornography

Depending on context, style, and convention, voices and dialogue can offer the consumer both generic pleasures and generic identifications. Since most gay porn is driven by the notion of (heterosexual-inspired) masculinity, this particularly occurs in relation to gendered identity.⁵² Let me contextualise this by quoting Jean Baudrillard. He writes that ‘all pornography, no matter how hard or soft, is the ultimate medium of masculinity, but not because it has anything to do with power, or with men’s power over women’s bodies. Instead, pornography is hypermasculine because it makes sex hyperreal, more detailed and better than the real thing.’⁵³ So in general, and without dismissing the fact that many different preferences exist, if pornography is the ultimate medium of masculinity, the more masculine the content of a pornographic text is, the greater its pornographic power. Perhaps this partly explains why most gay porn is driven by masculinity. Voices and dialogue are able to establish this masculinity. A clear example is the use of boisterous sexualized language by a leather daddy in a BDSM scene. Or in a montage video, for instance, voices may be dubbed in the same language to make sure the overall vocal performance is masculine. On the other hand, voices and dialogue can also undermine the illusion of masculinity. A striking example of this is called the *gay voice* in gay male pornography: hearing a performer’s voice (intonation, phraseology, innuendo, camp humour, pitch, timbre and speed) might ‘reveal’ the inherent *queerness* of gay porn.⁵⁴ It introduces you to the (queer) person behind the performance.⁵⁵ The following quote by T. G. Morrison clearly describes this:

‘I remember once watching porn with some friends of mine... and there was dialogue and the performers were so gay. They sound like we do...they sound like the four of us

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² T G Morrison, “He Was Treating Me Like Trash, and I Was Loving It ...’ Perspectives on Gay Male Pornography,” in *Journal of Homosexuality* 7, no. 3-4 (2004), 167-183, [tps://doi-org.proxy.library.uu.nl/10.1300/J082v47n03_09](https://doi-org.proxy.library.uu.nl/10.1300/J082v47n03_09).

⁵³ Grebowicz, *Why Internet Porn Matters*, 40.

⁵⁴ Note: not all performers ‘sound gay’, and not all voices in gay male pornography are disruptive. Also, poppers have always been used outside of sexual contexts, and an increase in non-sexual recreational use among young people has been registered in different occasions.

⁵⁵ Mowlabocus, and Medhurst, “Six Propositions on the Sonics of Pornography,” 3-12.

sitting around planning a gangbang... You never actually hear the men talking to the point where you can acknowledge that they might sound a little bit gay.’⁵⁶

In this way – striving for a heterosexual, masculine fantasy – hearing a rather feminine voice can disrupt the sexual fantasy of the spectator and decrease masturbatory engagement.

Poppers Training: the ultimate, musical masturbatory trance

‘Poppers’ is a common term used to refer to recreational liquids that contain an active ingredient from the alkyl nitrite class - a group of chemical compounds. The drug has a strong scent, that is inhaled through the nostrils. Only seconds after inhaling, this scent may cause mild euphoria and a heightened state of sexual arousal that last for a few minutes, depending on dosage and user. Besides that, poppers have a relaxant effect on certain muscles including the (anal) sphincter and vagina, which is why poppers are most commonly used before or during penetrative sexual activity.⁵⁷

Poppers were originally intended to aid in the treatment of heart conditions, particularly angina, since inhaling the liquid’s fumes would cause blood vessels to expand and pain to subside. The term poppers first began being used for these drugs in the 1960s, when amyl nitrite was sold in capsules that were cracked, or ‘popped’, to release the chemical.⁵⁸ In the 1970s disco era and the late-1980s and early-1990s rave scene, the drug peaked in popularity. Used in clubs as much as in the bedroom, they have always provided a crossover between what feels good in a club and how great sex can be.⁵⁹ Dr. Lucy Robins, a history lecturer at Sussex University, once said in an interview with *The Independent*: ‘[...] If you trace the bottle of amyl [a type of alkyl nitrite] through late 20th-century history, you trace the legacies of gay culture on popular culture in the 20th century. [...] We wouldn’t have had rave, disco or club culture as we know it today without the gay community.’⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Morrison, “He Was Treating Me Like Trash, and I Was Loving It ...’ Perspectives on Gay Male Pornography,” 179-180.

⁵⁷ Daniel Demant, and Oscar Oviedo-Trespalacios, “Harmless? A Hierarchical Analysis of Poppers Use Correlates among Young Gay and Bisexual Men,” in *Drug and Alcohol Review* 38, no. 5 (2019): 465-72, doi:10.1111/dar.12958.

⁵⁸ Elizabeth Hartney, “Side Effects and Dangers of Using Poppers,” Verywell Mind, November 29, 2019, <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-are-poppers-22094>.

⁵⁹ Oscar Quine, “Poppers: How Gay Culture Bottled a Formula That Has Broken Down Boundaries,” *The Independent*, January 22, 2016, <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/poppers-how-gay-culture-bottled-a-formula-that-has-broken-down-boundaries-a6828466.html>.

⁶⁰ Elizabeth Hartney, “Side Effects and Dangers of Using Poppers,” Verywell Mind, November 29, 2019, <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-are-poppers-22094>.

While poppers are used by populations of all sexual identities, research has shown that gay and bisexual men are disproportionately more likely to use the drug. It is no coincidence that the drugs' peak popularity was within subcultures that owed much to the gay community (the 1970s disco era and the late-1980s and early-1990s rave scene). Nowadays, poppers are still widely used among gay men. In Australia and Europe, poppers products are the third most commonly used substance among gay and bisexual men, after alcohol and tobacco.⁶¹

Diving into the world of Poppers Training

Poppers trainers are online (instructional, montage) shows that guide viewers in the usage of poppers and at the same time immerse them into some sort of sexual trance. One can find these videos on sites as Xtube, Pornhub, and Redtube (previously also on Tumblr). They range from a few minutes in length to well over an hour with a common format that looks quite similar to that of a P90X workout video, where a mishmash of – in this case pornographic – material is combined with instructions to inhale one's poppers. Specific instructions may vary, but the overall core element is ternary: one has to hit, hold, and release (the poppers). This 'hit, hold, release' pattern increases in frequency and intensity as the video plays, with the intensity of the porn accompanying it increasing to match. Poppers trainers are there for beginners (shorter hits, shorter hold times) ranging up until master 'Popperbators'.⁶²

The diversity of poppers training is considerable: there are those that focus on specific fetishes (like big penises, bareback, urination, hairy men, etc.), those that target different brands (combining the usage of multiple, distinctive poppers), or those that include specific types of music. Also, I purposely did not mention this before, poppers trainers are not exclusively made for gay men. One can find many that include sexual interaction between women and men and work with the exact same 'hit, hold, release' mechanism. However, in this thesis I focus on male-to-male poppers trainers, since they not only historically form the basis of the genre, but also seem to be more intertwined with a certain defined, (musically) distinguished community: the so-called 'popperbators'.

Especially interesting is the role of music (and sounds) within online poppers training. Why is it that music has such a prominent position in this form of pornography? What kind of music is often used within poppers training? And how do music, sounds and moving image

⁶¹ Demant, and Oviedo-Trespalacios, "Harmless? A Hierarchical Analysis of Poppers Use Correlates among Young Gay and Bisexual Men," 465-72.

⁶² According to the Urban Dictionary, to 'popperbate' is to 'goon out on poppers while in an intense jack off session'. Link: <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=popperbate>

relate to each other in creating a masturbatory trance? To answer these questions, I analyze a leading male-to-male poppers trainer: ‘POPPERS TRAINER - MEGA POPPERBATOR’.

Case Study: ‘POPPERS TRAINER - MEGA POPPERBATOR’

‘POPPERS TRAINER - MEGA POPPERBATOR’ has currently had about 1,322,000 views (and counting). It is the most viewed poppers trainer on Pornhub, a popular pornography website.⁶³ The video was made by ‘punkypanda’ and displays sixteen minutes and four seconds of uncensored male-to-male pornography. Starting with footage of muscular men in shorts, and erect penises in underwear, soon we see men kissing, masturbating, blowing, licking, penetrating - sometimes solo, but also in duo or even group formation. Let us dive into its workings.

In the opening credits, a black background with white words reads: ‘popper trainer’, ‘compilation’, ‘MEGAPOPPERBATOR’, and the number 01042016 (most likely indicating the date of uploading). The track ‘Four Gut’ by the Canadian electronic music group TR/ST starts playing, mixed with the sounds of heavy breathing. Images of male buttocks pass by, accompanied with different textual instructions: ‘Hello Bator’, ‘Prepare your lube, cockring and put the sound on high volume’. What follows is another black-and-white slide explaining the ‘hit, hold, release’ mechanism (see image 1), and an image of an ejaculating penis and the word ‘begin’ on both sides next to it, indicating the ‘official start’ of the video.

We continue our poppers trainer with eighteen seconds of rapid pornographic sequences (mostly white, muscular men showing off their body, kissing, or touching each other’s penises) before we get our first activating hint: ‘prepare for a hit’. A three-second countdown enters, and one is instructed to hit (inhale) a popper for seven seconds, hold ones breath for five seconds, and release (exhale) immediately after. Now, pornographic material gets more explicit and rougher, featuring hard nipples, dripping penises, squishing of genitals, leather jockstraps, and extensive making out. One and a half minute further, another ‘hit, hold, release’ set is suggested. This time we can clearly hear sounds of men groaning. A deep, seductive male voice enters: ‘Yeah, look at it. Cocksucker. Yeah, that’s it.’

⁶³ Punkypanda, “POPPERS TRAINER - MEGA POPPERBATOR”, uploaded in 2017, video on Pornhub, https://nl.pornhub.com/view_video.php?viewkey=ph56f3bec18516d.

Later in the video, hits get deeper (taking a good eleven seconds each time), two different TR/ST tracks enter ('Divine' and 'Bulbform'), and we start hearing even heavier sexual sounds. Close to the end of the video (at 14:02), there is a sync point that tells us that the time for ejaculating is there. The video now only shows ejaculating penises and after a while the music slowly fades out.



Figure 1. Openings instructions in 'POPPERS TRAINER - MEGA POPPERBATON', explaining the hit-hold-release mechanism.

Even deriving from the short description above, there is no doubt that this poppers trainer (and many others) tries to induce some kind of masturbatory trance. As a matter of fact, most poppers trainers on Pornhub – including this one – are tagged as 'hypno' or 'hypno gay'. I even found a poppers trainer that uses a black and white spinning hypnosis circle as a graphic layer on its pornographic footage.⁶⁴ However, the *kind of trancing* and the role music and sounds have in the poppers instruction video seems to be different from the ones I described earlier. On the one hand, we covered William's theory, saying that, if music is absent, the sounds of sex involve intensity that draws spectators into a different kind of proximity. This is what I call the 'proximity trance'. On the other hand, I cited Gorbman about how narrative cinema immerses its spectator into trance. I call this the 'cinematic trance'. Yet, where can we position the 'masturbatory trance' that poppers training induce?

If we look at Herbert's model and her four broad trancing categories, there is no doubt that the masturbatory trance (that this poppers trainer tries to create) is a case of *multilayered*

⁶⁴ Hypnoticbatefuel, "PISS AND POPPERS TRAINING", uploaded in 2019, video on Pornhub, https://nl.pornhub.com/view_video.php?viewkey=ph5c543142950cd.

involvement, including external and internal absorption. The combination of drugs, music, sounds, and pornographic imagery creates a multisensory experience that covers almost all of Herbert's phenomenological criteria of the different trancing categories. Experiencing the poppers training triggers (sexual) imaginative involvement, sharpened awareness (alertness, arousal), relaxation of critical faculties (even physical), and a narrowed awareness span. However, I do not think this is unique within the genre of poppers training videos. Most pornography can be labelled as a multilayered involvement. What makes this poppers trainer different from other forms of pornography is not only the important role of music, but also the fact that the viewer is constantly encouraged to increase their masturbatory excitement by stretching it. And by stretching the masturbatory trance, Morris and Paasonen write, one can enhance the quality of the trance.⁶⁵

This stretching happens on multiple levels in 'POPPERS TRAINER - MEGA POPPERBATOR'. It already starts at the first slide, that says to grab your lube and cockring, making sure the viewer is equipped with the right material to lengthen and deepen their immersion. Lube to make sure the penis never gets dry or uncomfortable, and a cockring to secure the penis remains filled with enough blood for it to be masturbatable. Communicating this to an audience indicates that this video is not meant as a hurried sexual experience, but rather as a more extended involvement - a training.

Besides that, the mild euphoria and the heightened state of sexual arousal that poppers create, commonly last only for a few minutes. This means that, in order to stay affected and involved in trance, the process of inhaling needs to be regularly repeated. With frequent instructions directly addressing the viewer to hit, hold and release - the video interactively makes sure the poppers' effect stays active for a longer period. For example, at 12:00 minutes, a slide is shown saying: 'Prepare for a deep hit. Don't cum yet'. The trance must be stretched.

It is no coincidence that the first slide tells the viewer to put sound on high volume - music here is indispensable. The music sutures all these elements together, making sure there is never a gap in the immersive power of the video. It can function as a strong mediator between internal and external activities, giving meaning to and blending elements that would otherwise be separated. In Herbert's words: 'A substantial number of episodes show a more managed and precise interaction with activity (e.g. writing a novel) where carefully chosen, familiar tracks act to reduce critical awareness, induce an inward focus, specify mood, setting and character,

⁶⁵ Morris, and Paasonen, "Coming to Mind: Pornography and the Mediation of Intensity," 8.

as well as adding momentum to the creative process.’⁶⁶ If carefully chosen, music can deepen the trance.

In ‘POPPERS TRAINER - MEGA POPPERBATOR’, the music accompanying the video is a set of three consecutive songs by the Canadian dark electronic music project TR/ST, a collaboration between frontman Robert Alfons and musician and producer Maya Postepski. Alfons’s music – often with suggestive track titles, like ‘Gloryhole’, ‘Destroyer’, ‘Control Me’, and ‘This Ready Flesh’ – is characterised by low and rhythmic synthesisers, gasping vocals, a steady and danceable beat (around 120 beats per minute), as well as mysterious, unintelligible lyrics. His tracks ‘Four Gut’ (2014), ‘Divine’ (2012), and ‘Bulbform’ (2011) form the musical foundation of this poppers trainer and provide rhythm and tempo to support the motions of masturbation and trancing. By sufficiently fading out and fading in, these tracks smoothly transition into each other. The choice of this music is no coincidence, since it is well-suited to induce trance. Let me briefly explain this by quoting Kathryn Becker-Blease - she writes in her article ‘Dissociative States Through New Age and Electronic Trance Music’ about two types of trance-inducing music: First, there is quiet, meditative *New Age music* (also known as ambient music). Collectively known as ‘music for fast times’, this music ‘promotes a psychological movement inward and is itself capable of being a vehicle, energy-form and magic force for spiritual self-absorption’.⁶⁷ The second type she describes is *trance music*: ‘a type of trance-inducing music that is loud, rhythmic and repetitive - the opposite of the slow, ambient, New Age music. Trance music is usually electronically produced and features repetitive rhythms.’⁶⁸ The three TR/ST tracks used in ‘POPPERS TRAINER - MEGA POPPERBATOR’ have exactly these intense, rhythmic, and highly repetitive elements, making them a clear example of trance music. With the tracks’ repetitive loops, they shift away the spectator’s attention from the music to a ‘dissociated thought plane’, causing an attention focused on inner thought rather than on surroundings.⁶⁹ Or, in Herbert’s words: a reduction in density of thought or internal dialogue.⁷⁰ It is interesting that Becker-Blease also links trance music to the usage of drugs (and rave culture). She states that drugs, like MDMA (Ecstasy), are often used at rave parties since these drugs further enhance a trance-like feeling that dancers are seeking.⁷¹ This might also clarify why TR/ST’s trance-inducing music is used in a pornographic genre that is

⁶⁶ Herbert, *Everyday Music Listening: Absorption, Dissociation and Trancing*, 147.

⁶⁷ A. Kathryn Becker-Blease, “Dissociative States through New Age and Electronic Trance Music,” in *Journal of Trauma & Dissociation* 5, no. 2 (2004), 93, https://doi-org.proxy.library.uu.nl/10.1300/J229v05n02_05.93.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 91.

⁷⁰ Herbert, *Everyday Music Listening: Absorption, Dissociation and Trancing*, 109.

⁷¹ Ibid, 96.

centralised around the usage of drugs. Trance music and drugs are culturally connected to each other.

Nonetheless, there is more going on with the music in ‘POPPERS TRAINER - MEGA POPPERBATOR’. Mowlabocus and Medhurst write that the type of music used in gay male pornography can be linked to other experiences within gay male culture, as consumers of gay pornography might consume similar genres of music during other leisure practices - particularly within the commercial spaces of the urban gay scene.⁷² J. Patrick Williams confirms this, writing that ‘there is a dialectic relationship between music and identity, wherein music is seen as consequential in the creation of subcultures as well as a consequence of them. Through the musical experience—both making and listening to music— individuals are able to locate themselves in specific subcultural formations.’⁷³ The music of Alfons’ TR/ST is a perfect example of this. Alfons’ music is often associated with sexuality, and more specific with male-to-male pornography, triggering a process of identification on its audience (most likely men who are attracted to other men). Even Alfons himself described his music as ‘sexual’ and ‘gazing’.⁷⁴ In April 2019, Atwood Magazine wrote a review on his album *The Destroyer - 1*:

While it’s undeniable that certain circles associate TR/ST with sweaty, drug-fueled, sexually promiscuous dancefloors, there is also an undeniable allure to the formula that has a universal translation regardless of the targeted demographic. For all his seemingly hedonistic sensibilities there seems to be something of substance and depth aching to break through that veneer of seediness.⁷⁵

On public social media, for example YouTube, the relationship between his music and male-to-male pornography is also present. I took a glance at the YouTube comments posted below the three tracks in our poppers trainer: ‘Four Gut’, ‘Divine’, and ‘Bulbform’. These comments tell us multiple things. First, they show that TR/ST’s music is often found within the context of gay pornography. As ‘murdock wormwood’ and ‘TheJake25r1’ write:

⁷² Mowlabocus, and Medhurst, “Six Propositions on the Sonics of Pornography,” 3-12.

⁷³ J. Patrick Williams, “Authentic Identities: Straightedge Subculture, Music, and the Internet,” in *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 35, no. 2 (2006), 174, <https://doi-org.proxy.library.uu.nl/10.1177/0891241605285100>.

⁷⁴ Isabelle, “This Interview With Robert Alfons of TR/ST Will Make You Really Like TR/ST,” IHEARTCOMIX, September 23, 2014, <http://iheartcomix.com/robert-alfons-trst-makes-us-trust/>.

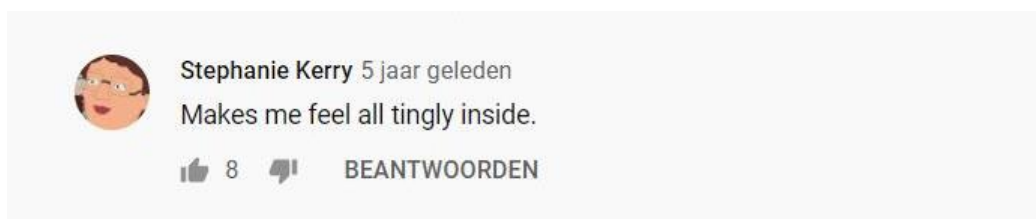
⁷⁵ Kareem Ghezawi, “Our Take: Robert Alfons Bares His Soul On TR/ST’s ‘The Destroyer – 1’”, Atwood Magazine, April 19, 2019, <https://atwoodmagazine.com/dstry-trst-the-destroyer-album-review/>.



Other reactions even directly address the classic poppers training hit-hold-release mechanism. For example, Tuomas's comment:




Secondly, some shine light on the physical impact the music might inflict. Stephanie Kerry, for example, writes about the carnal reaction the music triggers on her:






Lastly, the sexual character and corresponding associations are outlined:



 Sarah Ingram 5 jaar geleden
So sexy.

 20  BEANTWOORDEN

 Kaleigh Gold 6 jaar geleden
rimjobs for free xoxo support
#rimjobamerica #helpfindthecure

 1  BEANTWOORDEN

 ilikelikereheads 7 jaar geleden
This song helped stop my masturbation habit. Now I just put this on and lay back until I jizz.

 18  BEANTWOORDEN

It is undeniable that there is a connection between TR/ST's music and male-to-male pornography. However, this connection does not mean that TR/ST's tracks always directly reflect certain genres of gay male pornography, types of bodies or performances - as described by Mowlabocus and Medhurst. Yes, someone familiar with poppers training might recognise TR/ST's music and associate it with this specific type of pornography. However, these associations depend on the background knowledge and experiences of the consumer. Put differently: using TR/ST's tracks in male-to-male pornography is a clear case of affiliating music, since it has no clear, collective association (and therefore a demarcated meaning) but rather triggers personal, subjective associations on its (presumably male and gay) audience. Perhaps people associate TR/ST's music with the sweaty, drug-fuelled, sexually promiscuous dancefloors – others might link it to the usage of poppers or something completely different. Take for example the YouTube comment by 'Extremely Rude Librarian' on TR/ST's track 'Four Gut':

 Extremely Rude Librarian 10 maanden geleden
what in gods name is a four gut... knowing tr/st's lyrically history something kinky i would imagine.

  BEANTWOORDEN

 [Antwoord bekijken](#)

In this case, it is clear that this person's background knowledge influences the identification and associations with TR/ST's music. Of course, these associations can differ from person to person, but the connection with gay culture and male-to-male pornography is there, layering our poppers trainer with extra cultural meaning.

Lastly, let me briefly map out the sexual sounds, voices and dialogue that are present within 'POPPERS TRAINER - MEGA POPPERBATOR' and relate them to the masturbatory trance. The pornographic material within this poppers trainer is clearly derived from many different sources (production companies like Bel Ami or C1R) and times (1980's, 1990's, and further). This means that the recordings of sexual sounds strongly differ in quality. Retaining original sounds in the montage video will not only direct attention towards spatiality, but also inevitably create auditory discontinuities that might distract from trance. This is most likely why, during the process of production, all original collected pornographic material was stripped down to only the visual and combined with non-original sexual sounds. Even though the result is that these sexual sounds are out-of-sync with the pornographic imagery, this post-dubbing is often used in order to seek an effect of closeness and intimacy, rather than a sense of spatial clarity.⁷⁶ For example, starting from 01:58 minutes, a moaning male voice enters. Though sometimes backgrounded and other times foregrounded, it is this same voice that covers a whole range of pornographic imagery (featuring different men and sexual activities). These post-dubbed sexual, vocal sounds here form a continuously proximate element that stretches and underscores the intensity of the visual experience and imaginative involvement, without distracting from trance.

Besides that, one can also sporadically hear a man performing sexual dialogue. At 02:27 minutes, this male voice says the following words: 'Yeah, look at it. Cocksucker. Yeah, that's it.' Later, at 03:39 minutes, the sexual talking becomes multilayered and more reverbed, and one can hear words like 'fucking good', 'making that connection', 'sweat', and 'zoom it right in' aurally overlapping each other. It creates an auditory experience that perhaps is most similar to the traditional 'hypnotic voice', with its calm, soothing and comfortable character.⁷⁷ Remarkable is that it seems to be the same low, older male voice throughout the whole poppers trainer that is doing the 'dirty talking'. This is no coincidence. As Mowlabocus and Medhurst mentioned, voices may be dubbed in the same language to make sure the overall vocal

⁷⁶ Bruce Johnson, "Introduction," in *Earogenous Zones: Sound, Sexuality and Cinema*, ed. Bruce Johnson (London: Equinox Publishing Ltd, 2010), 159.

⁷⁷ Michael D. Yapko, *Trancework: An Introduction to the Practice of Clinical Hypnosis* (London: Routledge, 2012), 294.

performance is (perceived as) masculine and – to combine this with Baudrillard’s theory about porn being the ultimate medium of masculinity – therefore more pornographically persuasive. This poppers trainer with its muscled all-male performers, rough and sexual actions, and all-male sexual sound and voices is a clear example of this seductive hypermasculinity. Hearing a feminine, *gay voice* would disrupt this illusion of masculinity, subsequently mismatch with the generic pleasures and identifications of the presumed spectator, and therefore most likely decrease masturbatory engagement. In the end it is masculine dialogue that supports its audience’s imaginative involvement and identification with this poppers trainer.

Conclusion

By analyzing ‘POPPERS TRAINER - MEGA POPPERBATOR’, this thesis has shown how music, sounds, and pornographic imagery can be used in creating a masturbatory trance within online poppers training.

The industry of pornography has become one with great influence and is therefore important to reflect on academically. Over the last decades, academic interest in the field of pornography has gradually increased. Pornography itself has drastically changed as well, and shifted from magazines, VHS, and DVD, to a predominantly online medium. Digital production tools and online networks have led to a drastic increase in the general visibility, accessibility, and diversity of pornography. Access to porn is easier than ever, as it can be accessed for free, anonymously, and in a seemingly endless range of niches, styles, subcategories, languages, and formats. However, since pornography is still seen as a dominantly visual genre that relies on ‘witnessing’ sex and creating a real presence of sexuality, the role of music and sounds within pornography remains academically underexposed. Music is said to undermine the claim of realness and authenticity, and removing it would intensify the sounds, the sense of proximity, and immediacy. It would bring the viewer ‘close’.

By analysing poppers training, I put forward that, depending on the type of pornography, music (and sounds) *can* play a significant role in the experience of pornography - especially in inducing masturbatory trancing. I used Ruth Herbert’s trancing categories and corresponding phenomenological criteria to clarify what characterises this masturbatory trance. While aligning this in my theoretical framework, I discovered that the concept of trance is not only used in porn studies, but also within film studies, and in particular referring Gorbman’s description of narrative cinema. Both fields, however, seemed to oppose each other in its interpretation of trance. Whereas music within online pornography is said to *distract* from the depth of trance

by drawing the consumer into narrative, within narrative cinema, music is said to *induce* trance by doing the exact same. That is why I had to take them apart and introduce a ternary division: the proximity trance, (narrative) cinematic trance, and masturbatory trance - in which the masturbatory trance is an overarching concept that includes many other forms of trance that are related to masturbation and online pornography, including, for example, the proximity trance. I am aware that this ternary division is a rather simplistic theoretical construction, implicating that only three kinds of trancing exist. I would like to see it as a start, since I believe that many more kinds of trancing exist within online pornography, narrative cinema, and other forms of media. Further research needs to be done to expose and define these other types of (masturbatory) trancing and how they relate to each other. What are their characteristics? How can different media and music play a role in inducing these types of trancing? How are proximity and trancing related to each other within other types of pornography?

Furthermore, I can conclude that TR/ST's music plays a significant role in inducing and stretching masturbatory trancing within 'POPPERS TRAINER - MEGA POPPERBATOR'. Not only does it provide a stable and repetitive rhythm for the motions of masturbation, but it also sutures all imagery together, shifts away the spectator's attention inwards (absorption) rather than on surroundings (dissociation), and triggers an affiliating process of identification on its presumable (male, gay) audience that enhances imaginative involvement. Of course, extensive diversification of online pornography inevitably brought us (sub)genres – including a diverse range of poppers training – in which these results can alter. Therefore, many questions still remain unanswered. For example, in what way does male-to-woman poppers training differ from its male-to-male equivalent, for example? Or how are music, sounds, and images related within other music-oriented pornographic genres, like Porn Music Videos (PMV's)?

Another note that I would like to add, is that I mainly focused on the role of music in relation to the masturbatory trance, leaving both the physical and psychological effects of poppers as well as the influence of sounds and imagery (in inducing trance) a bit more in the background. However, the interrelation between these elements is important to analyse further, especially with the knowledge that the masturbatory trance is a complex, multilayered involvement. Additionally, whereas in my analysis I directly linked music to trancing, I decided to take a little side path by adding the element of masculinity while writing about sounds, voices, and dialogue within poppers training. With the use of Baudrillard's words (saying that pornography is the ultimate medium of masculinity), I introduced the notion that masculinity is generally more pornographically powerful, seductive, and intense (than femininity) and that

sounds, voices, and dialogue contribute in establishing this masculinity within male-to-male poppers training. Here again, this notion of masculinity enhances imaginative involvement and identification on its presumed audience and therefore increase masturbatory trancing engagement. Nonetheless, it is important to note that this theory on masculinity is still in its infancy and should be further theorised. Does masculinity create a more intense, hyperreal masturbatory trancing experience within different pornographic contexts? In what other ways are music and sounds able to establish (the illusion of) masculinity and increase masturbatory trancing?

Lastly, while writing on sexual sounds, voices and dialogue, I looked back at a quote I used from Linda Williams that mentioned ‘the smooch of a kiss, slurp of fellatio, and the whoosh of penetration’. I realized that these examples were all non-vocal bodily sounds and asked myself the question: when exactly is something considered to be a ‘sexual sound’ within pornography? Does moaning fall within the category of sexual sounds or is it considered to be a voice? Or perhaps both? The same applies to the relationship between voices and dialogue in pornography. When are vocal sounds considered to be dialogue? In other words, the auditory categories that I derived from Mowlabocus’ and Medhurst’s propositions are not as demarcated as I thought them to be, and might overlap each other. I therefore also suggest further research needs to be done that explores the (ontological) relationship between those six propositions in order fully to understand the auditory components of pornography.

I should like to end with encouraging other scholars to also step outside of the taboo, write about different types of pornography and analyse their relationship with music, sounds, and trancing. The range of pornographic genres seems to be infinite and is constantly changing. They are waiting to be discovered.

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