Chapter 10 "Queering Pornography"

The author, Zeb J. Tortorici, describes his experiences as a consumer and actor in gay pornography. Tortorici has used his experience, interestingly enough, as fodder for intellectual debate. He adds an important voice to the political and academic discourses on pornography, as his pieces are written from the point of view of and with the experience of a pornographic actor. Due to his position, he is able to include anecdotes from his experiences and acquaintances, often sites and actors concerning gay pornography. Although the title of the essay suggests that Tortorici’s focuses is how to queer pornography, he does not offer any specific ways of doing this. Instead, the essay focuses more on the argument that gay pornography is not inherently queer. Tortorici points out the surprisingly heteronormative nature of gay porn when he describes being told to perform in one of his scenes as a straight male. The director of this scene scolded him for kissing another male actor as he wanted his video to portray straight seeming men rather than overtly gay ones. The director claimed, strikingly enough, that gay actors performing as straight was what gay consumers desired and that it was imperative (however counterintuitive it seems in a logically theoretical sense) to accent the actors’ "straightness"—they even watched straight porn within the scene.

This experience pushed Tortorici to question what porn does and what it can do especially as it relates to queerness. One good thing that porn can do is create a community and bring many different people together over a common cause. Unfortunately, Tortorici points out that the gay porn community is overwhelmingly focused on the young, white body. The young, white male is so considered the norm that race only exists in gay porn in the context of the non-white body and that people of color are relegated to fetishes or kinks. By juxtaposing these two things it does work to make apparent the proformative nature of race in pornography. Although this means pornographic performers of color may perpetuate dominant sexual narratives, Tortorici believes it also gives them the power to subvert them. Tortorici goes on to explain how politics can also be a source of fetishization. The site Veg Porn, which Tortorici is now featured on, is a pornographic site that also has a strong emphasis on veganism and political activism. Tortorici suggests the incorporation of these other communities into a pornographic site works to erotize political and social activism. He uses his tattoo that says "vegan" on his right wrist as an example of a literal political fetish object. However, he does not make it clear if by doing all this Veg Porn has successfully queered pornography, nor if he considers his tattoo—a lifelong reminder of a single intended pornographic action—worth being printed on his body for the rest of his life, to be on display in settings both pornographic and not.

Although Tortorici just bringing pornography into an academic setting is new and exciting his essay still has many weaknesses. As states before, he hints that it would be nice to incorporate queer things into gay porn, but he doesn’t really have concrete suggestions for how to do such a thing, not identifying how gay porn has has been or can be successfully queered. Beyond his “vegan” tattoo he didn’t offer anyways that he had personally interacted with queer pornography. The audience’s recognizing and reading into Tortorici’s tattoo may not be a realistic thing to expect pornography consumers to do. He seems to confuse his political activism on VegPorn.com with whatever effect his activism may have on his audience—failing to keep in mind that almost no pedestrian consumers of pornography see porn as a political forum of any sort. He admitted that his being a performer perpetuated the young, white male stereotype in gay porn and then relied too heavily on the audience to see past this. He hinted that his doing solo scenes and especially auto-fellatio may have been queer notions but then wrote them off because in his mind these kinds of performances have become too popular and mainstream. It seemed that Tortorici may have been equating queer with sexual and social niches like BDSM, and veganism, though this wasn’t definitively stated in the essay.

In his article, Zeb Tortorici makes an attempt to explain how he sees himself as queering the genre of gay pornography through the lens of a performer. He shows that through bringing his pornography to the academic world and through politicizing his adult movies, he is able to queer gay pornography in some sense.

Zeb provides a couple striking example of his movement to queer the gay porn industry. The first example that he presents is about his performance of auto-fellatio. He claims that these videos really challenge the binaries already in place for the gay industry as he ejaculated into his own mouth in these scenes. Not only does it challenge mainstream gay porn by only providing one acto, but it also challenges the scare surrounding safe sex as people don’t know how to talk about pleasing ones self in the realm of safety and sexually transmitted diseases. The example that zen presents as challenging the norms of the porn industry is through his vegan activist pornography. By posing for a vegan porn aside and tattooing his political beliefs on his wrist for all his viewers to see, Zeb feels as if he is hating the porn industry by allowing them to see more than a sexuality or sexual image in the performance. Escaping the normal framework surrounding porn, he claims that he queers it and defies standards.