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Abstract

The article undertakes a theoretical discussion of the online sociability of men who have sex with men. The main objectives of this theoretical exploration are to investigate the links between the ways that bodies are publicized/advertised on online profiles and the concept of sex as a regulatory category; the connections we can make between images/descriptions of certain parts of bodies shown online and the concept of face as an assemblage; and finally, the possibility of resistance against the regulation of the “heterosexual matrix” within so-called same sex desire. Drawing on a set of empirical data gathered through online participant observation on a cruising-for-sex website for men, this analysis hopes to foster our theoretical and political understandings of the ways Internet users are experiencing their bodies in relation to technology, providing new conceptual approaches regarding sexuality on the online cruising for sexual partners.

Key words body, Internet, post-structuralism, sexuality

Face Assemblages & Sex Machines: A Theoretical Exploration of Online Sociability of Men who Have Sex with Men

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The spectres of discontinuity and incoherence, themselves thinkable only in relation to existing norms of continuity and coherence, are constantly prohibited and produced by the very laws that seek to establish casual or expressive lines of connection among biological sex, culturally constructed genders, and the “expression” of “effect” of both in the manifestation of sexual desire through sexual practice.[15 p23]

It is not the subject who chooses faces (...), the faces choose their subjects. (...) Face is politics.[11 p208]

Introduction

This article seeks to engage readers in a post-structuralist understanding of a new body politics emerging out of social interactions of men who have sex with men who use the Internet as a space to (re)produce and experiment with sexualities. Based on participant observation of social interactions on a (cyber) network for sex and on encounters among men who have sex with men, it raises important issues related to how users experience their own bodies and how bodies play a crucial role in the ways that the Internet is currently used as a social network. The following theoretical discussion regarding this emerging body politics attempts to establish links between Deleuzo-Guattarian conceptualizations of face, assemblage, and machines, and Butler’s insights on sex as a regulatory category.

This paper is divided into five distinct but interrelated sections in which we provide an explanation of online social interactions and a brief description of the website settings. We also situate the Internet as a space of social interaction in

the broader context of other meeting spaces that are used by men in order to arrange sexual encounters with other men, arguing that the Internet should be analyzed as a space that provides a particular spatial politics. Moreover, we introduce the concepts of face, assemblages, sex, and machines, in order to underline the importance of the body within these specific (cyber) settings. We also explore both the theoretical and political implications of the emerging body politics we observed through these online interactions, especially regarding the ways that users are presently embodying technology and sexuality. Finally we propose a conceptual perspective that may enable a critical understanding of the emerging body politics found in this social network.

Log on and get off: online social interactions and website architecture

At present, one can find several websites that have been developed specifically to function as spaces for cruising and for erotic/sexual encounters. They offer a variety of tools and services that enable Internet users to meet online and are geared toward promoting online interactions between men who have sex with men. The number of websites available demonstrates the relevance of these spaces—at least three of them are internationally known and one of them announces that it has more than 6 million users from 140 countries around the world (Data available on www.gaydar.co.uk, accessed on March 15th, 2012). The specific gay social-networking site on which this participant observation study took place posts on its homepage that in a regular day it can have more than 57,000 members online throughout the world (Data available on www.manhunt.net, accessed on March 15th, 2012).

Whether these social networks are free or charge for their services, they offer a mix of possibilities for online text descriptions and images through which users can create their profiles and advertise themselves. This “public dimension” of a profile is important to online connections since “public texts” and “public photos” increase the chances of being seen by others. Once a profile is created, it appears on an online directory that displays profiles of all users available to chat, and users can engage in an online conversation or arrange offline encounters.

Using nicknames for their online presence, users fill in the required information on body characteristics like height, weight, eye/hair color, ethnicity, as well as age, city, and neighborhood where the users live. Usually provided as well are descriptions of their personalities, nationalities/ethnicities, families, friends, jobs, etc. A few (rarely) may substitute

images of landscapes, for example, for photos of their bodies and some profiles have neither written text nor pictures. Most of these gay “cruising” networks make it possible to describe what the users are looking for (relationship, sex, friendship, networking, etc.), and they allow men to reveal both their relationship status (single, married, open relationship, etc.) and HIV status (negative, positive, unknown).

It is important to underline that both the written texts and the images are chosen by the participants themselves. Despite the purported autonomy to choose the images through which users want to be seen, these images are regulated and their use depends on consenting to guidelines launched by the website administration. Images uploaded by users are related to their identity within this space and become the very presence of their bodies online, but they are actually constrained by the conditions mentioned above. The guidelines establish the rules, rights, and obligations both for the website and for the users in order to publicize their images. The same administration also imposes a waiting period and requires that all images uploaded by users be approved. Therefore, in order to take part in online interactions, users must agree with external and anonymous control over the information they advertise on their profiles, control that filters the uploaded images and allows (or not) their online publication.

Spatial politics and bodies in the Internet-as-a-space

Understanding the emerging body politics from the interactions of men who have sex with men on online social networks demands the examination of ‘the social and historical processes through which certain locations come to be favored as sites for sexual encounters, as well as the social and historical consequences of certain sites being designated as sexualized locations,’ [1 p3]. The Internet should be understood as a space, rather than a place: ‘Space emerges when practices are imposed on a place, when forms of human activity impose meanings on a given certain location,’ considering that both space and place ‘are not static arrangements, but topics continually being constructed, negotiated and contested’.[1 p7] In this sense, we say that the Internet is a space exactly because its different and heterogeneous forms of inhabitation are an unstoppable flux that somehow leads subjects to use those websites in the ways we currently find them using them.

For this reason, part of the emerging body politics of online interactions of men who have sex with men is directly related to a correspondent ‘spatial politics’.[2 p4] In other words, the different ways that subjects use the Internet as a space

where they can experience their own bodies and sexualities raise 'complex intersections of these themes as they unfold in the lives of men-who-have-sex-with-men and as they shape the participants' claims to sexual experience and gendered identities'. [1 p4] This is the main reason we use the expression "men who have sex with men" throughout the text, since the characterization of these online interactions as "gay" would probably lead to a misunderstanding about the relations that the users themselves sustain between their sex (male), gender (masculinity), and their sexuality. As we shall argue in what follows, it is the exact relationship among these three terms that this article seeks to analyze from a critical perspective. However, we preserve the identification of the websites under study here as "gay social networks" because they advertise online as being "gay."

In the last decades, several authors have explored relations between place-space and the experience of sexuality. Especially significant are the works of Bell and Valentine [3] and Ingram, Bouthillette and Retter [2]. Both of these books have enabled us 'to think about the ways in which the spatial and the sexual constitute one another'. [3 p2] The central argument in Ingram, Bouthillette and Retter's [2] edited collection, *Queers in Space*,

maintains that studying and understanding the perceptions, ideas and priorities that characterize each community and its relationship to its environment are necessary prerequisites to building "effective affinities" which in turn can lead to new alliances between lesbians, gay men, bisexual, transsexuals, and other groups of "sexual minorities" perceived by some to threaten the heteronormative status quo. [2 p4]

At that time that they were writing, none of the foregoing authors knew the enormous impact the Internet on the lives of many men in subsequent years. Jean-Urlick Désert [4] mentioned in his article *Queer Space* that *Cybermind* was an electronic forum for discussion of the philosophical and psychological implications of subjectivity in cyberspace. In its increasingly queer spaces, many new framings of issues have emerged, including the psychology of intimacy, the role of gender in the experience of electronic space, the phenomenology of the terminal screen, neurosis and paranoia on the Internet, the relationship of lag to community and communication, sex/gender/sexual orientation theory and electronic subjectivity, the role of the symbolic or the imaginary in computer communication, the implications of symbolic extensions of the human external memory and the 'psychoanalysis of lurking', all of which attest to the interest in reflecting on the relations between the experience of sexuality and so-called cyberspace since the inception of

that space.

Nonetheless, this argument remains useful as a means to analyze the perceptions, ideas, and priorities of men who use the *Internet-as-a-space* for social interactions and to examine what "affinities" are enabled or not among them. At a political level, it can also be used to examine the ways that the heteronormative status quo can be threatened or empowered by the specific uses that subjects make of the possibilities afforded by the Internet. In this sense, it is important to comprehend that the politics of the body that has arisen within these interactions is inseparable from a spatial politics that organizes and constrains certain practices in this very same space.

Therefore, when analyzing the texts and the images shown on online profiles, we need to understand that those very ways of self-description are somehow produced by specific architectures of the Internet and of the website, that they are more than just the result of users' free will. We should also keep in mind that the *Internet-as-a-space* is itself an assemblage, as we are going to argue in the following pages: *Internet-as-a-space* assembles bodies with computers, smartphones, webcams, digital cameras, cables, and keyboards, creating a whole new space—that is, the dimension of the spatial politics we emphasize here.

It is no coincidence that Sherry Turkle [5] chose to entitle her famous book *Life on the Screen*, for it highlights the important dimension of her argument that makes visible the underlying connections Internet users make between their bodies and the technological devices necessary to inhabit and continuously create that space. In other words, in our approach to the *Internet-as-a-space*, the connections and links that users make that enable them to be part of online interactions are crucial to 'the relationship between spatial processes and social process'. [6 p2] We are thus led to 're-conceptualize the spatial realm in ecological and relational terms'. [6 p2] We will explore the forms of these 'relational terms' and how Internet users live their 'life on the screen,' producing this space as a location for experiencing their sexuality. We will then examine the body politics emerging within this context for its aspects of 'effective affinities,' as Ingram, Bouthillette, and Retter suggest. [2] What types of body assemblages do we find on the online gay cruising sex website? What role do they play within the body politics that we seek to comprehend? What are the implications of the 'effective affinities' that this space can produce among its users?

Face trouble and possible assemblages

'Defined through the assemblages they make with others, bodies become subjects able to interact with the social world'.[7 p254] In this sense, we understand assemblages, in a Deleuzo-Guattarian perspective, as 'preliminary connections ... connections that can be multiple and intense ... [and] that lie at the core of desire ...[or] collections of desires'[7 p254] that actually lead objects, subjects, bodies, animated and inanimate things to get together, to link, to connect in order to produce a new unprecedented sort of existence. 'The bodies enjoy forming assemblages with others, whether persons or things, in order to allow desire to flow in different directions, producing new potentials (becomings) and therefore new subjectivities'.[7 p254]

All life is a process of connection and interaction. Any body or thing is the outcome of a process of connections. A human body is an assemblage of genetic material, ideas, powers of acting and a relation to other bodies. [...] There's no finality, end or order that would govern the assemblage as a whole; the law of any assemblage is created from its connections.[8 pxx]

The *Internet-as-a-space* is itself an assemblage that forges the Internet as a space of social interactions, an important assemblage found within the online community of men who have sex with men and one that is established between bodies and technology. When a user types a description of himself and uploads a picture of his body on his online profile, more and more assemblages are made. There are assemblages between the body and the digital camera he uses to take the picture; between the body and the keyboard he uses to type his description; between the body and the screen in which he sees images and reads texts; and between the body and the cables that connect him to the Internet: electronic devices such as computers, notebooks, netbooks, tablets, and mobile phones with Internet access, and the digital technology of the Internet are actually connected to users' bodies, thus creating a complex assemblage.

Therefore, an image of a user's body publicized on his online profile has been enabled and constrained by previous conditions: political, historical, cultural, spatial, technological, and financial. We thus can say that any and all images of bodies that users display on their profile can be understood as an 'outcome of a process of connections' and a 'political surface,' and as long as the bodies shown on these images are 'situated along a vector of meaning that is in flux,'[7 p253] these images fully express the vectors and meaning(s) that constitute these bodies. It is important to underline that the *Internet-as-a-space* and all technology that

makes it possible leads the subjects not only to an isolation or separation of the social and political world but it also actually creates a whole new politics within this space that should be analyzed without any fear or excitement related to the obsolescence of the material body[9] or to contemporaneous individualism[10].

Once the body is conceptualized in these terms, we can assert that 'face is politics'.[11 p209] The face is not simply 'the front part of the head,' but neither does it belong to the body. It actually is the very opposite: the body belongs to a face--or to multiple faces. As a politics and as a map, the face captures and moves throughout the body, signifying it along 'a vector of meaning that is in flux.' In other words, face is a 'black hole' where signification, meaning, [and] identity exist as static sediments.[11 p207] From this perspective, it is easy to understand the enormous moral and aesthetic evaluation that Western societies invest in the face or, more precisely, in 'the front part of the head.' Levinas[12] and Sontag[13], among others, have analyzed the important role that 'the front part of the head' plays in the construction of our identity and its implications for our social and political recognition. 'The front part of our heads' is directly connected to the conception of who we are; it is associated with the imagined 'inner self' that supposedly exists as an essence inside of us. This 'inner self' is apparently seen and expressed from the inside to the outside world through 'the front part of our heads. However,

the head belongs to the body, but not the face. Face is a surface: traces, lines, face wrinkles, long face, squared, triangular; face is a map. [...] Face does not function here as individual, it is the individuation that results from the necessity of an existing face.[11 p208]

Deleuze and Guattari draw on a new conception of face, where it is not 'the front part of the head,' but 'a map, a politics' that signifies the body. For this reason, they assert that it is not that subjects choose their faces, but that faces choose their subjects, and that individuation actually results from the necessity of an existing face. We only have a face after we are (maybe not comfortably) situated within a 'map' that signifies and produces the self. Articulated within a Foucauldian perspective, the 'politics' of the face functions through discourses and politics of truth that produce subjectivity.[14]

Therefore, face is itself an assemblage: face connects discourses to bodies and links bodies to identities, assemblage spaces, and technologies. Only after the foregoing conceptualization is understood are we capable of comprehending the ways gay cruising website users publicize their bodies through

images and describe themselves through texts on the Internet. Seldom is 'the front part of their head' shown: it is common, though, to see/read descriptions and images of chests, arms, thighs, legs, abdomens, and, less frequently, penises. Both in images and texts, users create new faces to signify themselves on the online site. As already mentioned, the face moves over the surface of the users' bodies: an abdomen can be a face, as well as a chest, a hand, or even particular parts of 'the front part of the head' such as eyes and mouths. All of these become the users' face, in the sense that the images become the users' identity, which means that a single body can have multiple faces.

Nonetheless, all bodies shown and described are still captured by a more powerful discursive apparatus that stratifies them. Even if it is true that all parts of the body can become faces, and even if it is possible that a single body has multiple faces, these multiple faces are still fixed in a more rooted 'black hole.'

Sex trouble and machines of capture

We can say that all bodies shown and described on online profiles have multiple faces, but to the extent that all of them are *male* bodies, and *want badly* to be recognized as male/masculine bodies--clearly separating them from all female/feminine characteristics--we can also say that each and every single face has a '*machine abstraite de visag  t  *,' a machine that operates in the process of producing a face or, in this case, a male face; it is the 'process of *visag  fication*' (capturing subjects) within what we call here a 'sex machine.' Each and every single face has its codification and recodification; 'the head and its elements are not going to become faces unless the whole body can also be, or is brought to be, in an inevitable process'.[11 p208-9]

It is precisely because the face depends on a machine *abstraite* that it will not be satisfied in recovering the head, but it will affect other parts of the body and also with objects without resemblance. The question from now on is to know in what circumstances this machine is launched, which produces the face and *visag  fication*. [11 p208]

As many faces as a body may have within this very specific cyber setting, there is still a unique "*machine abstraite de visag  t  *" operating on its surface: the machine is 'an assemblage that has been given the attribute of consistency or fixity--an assemblage that has been nailed down and forced to remain the same'. [11 p255] The sex machine is, then, an assemblage ossified by the definition of sex, reinforced by the inscription of sex on bodies.

Self-descriptions on users' profiles often underline their masculine characteristics, clearly mentioning that despite the fact that they are men who have sex with other men, they keep on being *male*. In a sense, users contend that their body sex (meaning, in this particular case, not physical intercourse but the definition of maleness inscribed on one's body) is not corrupted or diminished because they have sex (meaning physical intercourse) with other men.

This kind of statement leads us to examine the connections between sex-gender-sexuality that are involved in such affirmation: somehow, the feeling of betraying one's male sex by having sex with another same-sex person--the phantom of interrupting a crucial coherence in the sex-gender-sexuality--makes the subjects reaffirm their sex as if this was a way of reestablishing a continuity that was supposedly lost. However, this feeling of betrayal, this phantom of interruption, this coherence, and this continuity are directly connected to 'the idea that sexual practice has the power to destabilize gender', [15 pxi] which means, as quoted earlier, that incoherence and discontinuity are only thinkable in relation to corresponding norms that regulate and impose coherence and continuity to sex, gender, and sexuality. In Butler's words, we should try to 'understand some of the terror and anxiety that some people suffer in "becoming gay," the fear of losing one's place in gender or of not knowing who one will be if one sleeps with someone of the ostensibly "same" gender'. [15 pxi]

In Butler's argument, the coherence between sex-gender-sexuality is called 'the heterosexual matrix'. [15,16] By theorizing sex and gender as effects of institutions, discourses, power relations, and practices, Butler claims that one's gender is actually something that is performed. [15 p33] Being a man or being a woman is something that is enacted and re-enacted during life, and this enactment is highly constrained by regulatory practices within the heterosexual matrix that exhorts subjects to sustain the coherence and continuity of sex-gender-sexuality.

By criticizing the classification of "woman," widely used by feminism as the main object of political thought and action, Butler refuses the idea that 'woman' can be a common category or a universal identity. She argues that the split between sex and gender within the feminist framework, where gender is considered to be culturally constructed, suggests that sex is then still conceptualized as a biological pre-existent category that remains out of history, politics, or discourse¹⁵. Radically situating sex as part of the 'apparatus of gender construction', [15 p11] she states that,

... there will be no way to understand "gender" as a cultural construct which is imposed on the surface of matter, understood either as "the body" or its given sex. Rather, once "sex" itself is understood in its normativity, the materiality of the body will not be thinkable apart from the materialization of that regulatory norm. "Sex" is, thus, not simply what one has, or a static description of what one is; it will be one of the norms by which "one" becomes viable at all, that which qualifies a body for life within the domain of cultural intelligibility.[16 p2]

Therefore, sex is not apart from culture and political struggle: it is actually one product of the cultural construction of body, and we might even argue that sex is, if not the first, probably one of the strongest reiterated norms that materialize bodies as viable matters. The very same explanation should make it appropriate to think of 'man' as a culturally constructed gender. In a certain sense, a sexed body, a male body, would be the politically 'neutral' surface on which masculinity would be constructed. However, the exact assumption that describes the body as male is already marking it with its 'true sex,' supposedly defined by its biological characteristics. Thus, the 'male sex' is already a regulatory category produced by the heterosexual matrix in order to sustain coherence and continuity in that matter--that matter that matters--a convincingly sexed male body of man.

The image of an erect penis used by some users to identify themselves on their profiles may be one of the multiple faces they have on the online site, in the same way that images of chests, abdomen, arms, and legs can also become their faces. Nonetheless, by showing their penises, these users are actually displaying the 'hard core' of their sex--the very stratified and fixed part of their bodies that is captured by the 'sex machine.' When the penis becomes the face of one's body, we can say that the 'sex machine' is recovering all of the body, pulling it into the 'black hole' of the heterosexual matrix that produces the binary sexes, genders, and one single 'natural' sexuality.

As a regulatory system, sexuality primarily operates by investing bodies with the sex category, producing bodies as basis of an identity principle. Affirming that bodies have one or the other sex seems to be merely a descriptive affirmation. However, this statement is itself the legislation and the production of bodies, a discursive demand, as it were, that bodies become produced according to the principles of heterosexualizing coherence and integrity, unequivocally as male or female. Where sex is taken as a principle of identity, it is always positioned in a field of two mutually excluding and fully exhausting identities: one is male or female, never both at the same time and never none of them.[17 p99]

Therefore, claiming to be men in suitable male bodies,

the users of the online gay cruising sites--men who have sex with men--get stuck in the 'sex machine' that captures and signifies them. Self-descriptions written on profiles that underline their masculinity and that try to keep their distance from the 'effeminate men,' or images shown on profiles that display erect penises or other parts of so-called male bodies--all these are stratification lines of the 'sex machine.' Even naked, the bodies shown on online profiles are fully dressed with their sex. Moreover, these stratification lines of the 'sex machine,' thought of as part of the 'apparatus of gender construction' performed within the heterosexual matrix, also need to be understood as an important part of the body politics emerging within the online community of men who have sex with men.

Profiles that matter: On the limits of men who have sex with men's online interactions

All the spatial conditions of the *Internet-as-a-space* lead users to expose themselves and to connect with other users of social networks; this is a very important aspect of the spatial politics raised by the idea of social interactions on the Internet. The technological possibilities of the equipment (cameras, webcams, mobiles with cameras, high-speed data transmission devices, photographs, videos) used on the Internet can create a radical visibility and connectivity for those who share its premises. However, users are somewhat fearful of showing 'the front part of their heads,' because, as we have already argued, 'the front part of one's head' is not just one's face but is one part of the body that is directly related to one's identity. Users of the online site of men who have sex with men walk a thin line in showing themselves as they are through images, texts, cameras, videos and, at the same time, hiding themselves as men who feel desire for the 'same sex.'

That allows us to claim that the old metaphor of the closet remains a paradigm for the way gay men and men who have sex with men live their lives, as Sedgwick[18] has discussed, and it may still be an important component of the emerging body politics we find online. The *Internet-as-a-space* may be the new closet for these men, but it is made of glass; because bodies are exhibited in thousands of images and an overwhelming discursive production of bodily descriptions takes place in online profiles, exposure becomes an urgent demand. Yet, the experience of having sex with another 'same sex' person is still something that users of online social interactions want to hide or, at least, they feel that this experience must be discreet. Echoes of the 'deviant experience of sodomy' are still present, indicating

that the heterosexual matrix remains a hegemonic influence, even in a space that is supposedly free of constraints. Users claim to be male but at the same time they fear the 'spectres of gender incoherence' by being men who have sex with men. As Butler[15] suggests, sexual practices seem to have the power to destabilize coherence and truth of gender and sex. The new challenge for users of online cruising websites is to actually deal with this pressing demand for exposure. Although they are men who have sex with other men, they want to preserve their sex and gender as a coherent continuity. Even the most discreet gay man seems to have to balance the desire to demonstrate that he is gay to other users with the simultaneous need to prove that he remains a man. This task can be difficult, maybe even irreconcilable, since users' bodies, masculinity, and sexual desire are themselves being constructed within the heterosexual matrix--the very same matrix that produces 'same sex' desire as 'deviant.'

Most of the bodies shown on the online site are 'lean, young and muscular,' but even those with 'fat, old and flaccid' bodies claim to be male bodies. Beyond the 'body fascism of fitness'[19] remains the 'microfascism'[20] of the 'sex machine' that captures and covers all bodies with its 'true and single male sex.' This notion excludes any possibility of identification with its opposite and correspondent 'true and single female sex,' prohibiting any experimentation that is not somehow situated within this binary field of the sexed/gendered body intelligibility. The profiles that matter are those in which the users claim to be male and are able to display the 'hard core' of maleness to others.

While multiple faces may float on the surfaces of bodies, a very particular 'sex machine' interrupts any movement toward a new creativity: the body politics raised within the gay cruising websites does not defy the apparatus of the 'sex machine,' which captures bodies within its stratification lines and does not challenge the 'heterosexual matrix' that creates and governs it. Bodies always return to this 'black hole' that signifies them as male, since the 'fascism' of 'same sex' desire operates by supposing, if not implying and demanding, that sexed bodies be completely filled with the so-called truth of sex. In other words, 'same sex desire' only exists because the 'sex machine' apparatus stratifies bodies and divides them into male and female. The struggle thus lies in the potential for experimentation--to materialize bodies not only in opposition to this 'sex machine' (it is an ontological and political challenge to attempt to materialize a body that can escape from the 'heterosexual matrix'), but in ways in which its sex does not matter that much, as well as to create a thinkable 'desire' that can overcome and surpass

the category of 'sex' as its 'hard core.'

Final Remarks

To conclude, we believe that it is possible to think of a politics of friendship as an alternative escape from the "microfascism" of 'same sex' desire, critiquing the myth of men who have sex with men as hypersexualized subjects. This is not a moralistic statement, since casual sex practices and anonymous sexual encounters play an important role in experimenting with new forms of pleasure that do not borrow from the monogamous heteronormative experience of sexuality. However, these practices and encounters can lead its practitioners to some sort of friendship, without excluding the possibility that friends might have sex. We stress the importance of a friendship politics as an alternative to the 'microfascism' of same sex desire because we understand that men who have sex with men can actually be part of a cyber community not only (but also) to look for sexual partners. Some of them, or maybe most of them, can have online profiles that describe themselves through texts and images in order to connect with and to get to know other users whom they otherwise would never have met. It is not that sexual practices are not important, or that they should be bypassed in the name of a 'clean' friendship in which sexual desire has no place. It is actually the very opposite: we indicate that all the technological possibilities launched by the *Internet-as-a-space* enable a productive connectivity that can be used to increase relations among its users. One of the components of 'effective affinities' enabled by this kind of connectivity is sexual desire, but we also contend that sexual desire must be thought about in addition to other kinds of relations that may be possible online. Therefore, in stressing the importance of a friendship politics in this emerging body politics of online interactions of men who have sex with men, we call attention to the importance of living and experiencing sexuality in connection with other relationships that exceed same sex desire and that do not depend exclusively on it to exist.

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