

I have ascended into a company of great minds. I have my guts to explore the rules of their minds. Will they come down, will they crack on occasion and come into mine?

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Introduction

INTRODUCTION

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It is with great pleasure that I present *Libi_doc*, the book of sex art journeys written by Libidot and Dr. Jacobs. They are my colleagues in the emerging field of sex art studies and I would like to elaborate on their contribution to this area of research. Libidot, whose real name is unknown to me, appeared in my life several years ago, when she approached me to collaborate on a study on the widening orbits of 'sex art' and 'indie porn' cultures in the age of digital media. I had no idea what to think about this proposal and was busy with other intellectual engagements, so I suggested that she contact Dr. Jacobs. I told her about the work of Dr. Jacobs, a well-respected theorist in the field of digital media studies, and reassured her that he would probably be the best person to engage with her study. After a few days of silence, Libidot finally replied in a very short email that said: "Ok, I will do it with Dr. Jacobs." I then approached Dr. Jacobs, who responded immediately that he would have to see some of the installments of the research before actually making a commitment. I put him in touch with Libidot. And so the project started its unusual collaborative authorship and slowly came into the world.

Over the years 2001-2004, Libidot initiated her field trips to different cultures and sent her primary materials to Dr. Jacobs, who followed up on her journeys through theoretical contemplations sent to her by email. At first it seemed that he was not impressed by her work, as he wrote me one day that he would only be able to carry out this project with minimal involvement. I was able to read their correspondences and internal affairs and often thought that the project would be a huge catastrophe. But I became their confidante and

regularly corresponded with both of them and now will take a moment to clarify their different backgrounds and the cultural histories surrounding *Libi_doc*.

The formal educational and ethnic background of Libidot is unknown to me. In my early correspondences with her, she was elusive about her family background and educational training or artistic work, yet she was charming and very personable and immediately let me in on some kind of 'work crisis' she was dealing with. Since her problems seemed quite palpable, I decided to hear her out about them. Libidot acted like she was a woman on the verge of a breakdown, but she could not articulate her exact state of discomfort. She said that she thought her work motivation was shattered and that she would need to take a leave of absence from her job. She refused to tell me where exactly she worked and why she was having such a crisis. I asked Libidot to explain more exactly what she was feeling. Then came a series of lengthy explanations, in which she indirectly informed me about her unusual personality, her hyper-sensual ways of entering the material world, fueled by delusional fantasies. I decided not to share this information with Dr. Jacobs, whom I know knew would react badly to a fragile woman-artist exploring dark and fantasy-based psychic states. I wanted to give Libidot a chance to work with him and present her insights to him, so I kept mediating their collaboration.

But let me try to summarize what I remember from Libidot's early delusional episodes, because it is important to understand the psychic impetus of her journeys, her unusual research methods, her obsessive-compulsive search for sex artists, her tendency to be overly empathic or to get totally carried away, her inevitable clash with Dr. Jacobs. When I asked Libidot why she wanted to do this research, she told me that she thought she was being possessed by some force or invisible entity, her 'ghostie' as she called it. I encouraged her to tell me more about her ghostie. She said that she could feel her ghostie move around inside her body.

She wrote me that she believed that she was actually possessed by this force, even though she could not believe in such a thing. She had no idea whom or what had demonized her that way, and she was not sure of this kind of terminology was even correct. I asked her if the force was male or female, small or big. She answered: "huge, strong, and smooth." The ghostie also turned out to be her lover. He often played with and joined her on her office couch, cradling her when she was totally mad or exhausted, kissing her gently and kneading her inner thighs with his fingers. He made her laugh. But then the next moment, he would pull a trick on her again. One day he brought her a cup of coffee at her desk, then suddenly grabbed her by her feet and suspended her upside down in front of the window: "Look there," he said, "Drop all your work and pack your bags and move your cunt eastwards. Lets' go!" I asked her what he looked like. He had a shaved head and wore regular black clothes. He was handsome and his mind was powerful. He stroked and slapped her

buttocks and made her come. He fucked her on her desk and laughed hysterically when she was out of breath.

She thought she knew when exactly he had entered her. It was the day of the annual Christmas party at work. She had had a couple of glasses of red wine when she knew her ghostie wanted her to visit the toilet on the second floor. She excused herself from the party and ran to the toilet. She almost peed on the floor before reaching the toilet. When she rolled down her pants, he grabbed her by her feet again and slowly kissed her and pressed his stiff cock inside her. When she was past her second pee, she felt like she was two beings in one, one bigger than herself. She stood up and somebody was black leather shoes taking her hand and walking her small feet, and, an armor of expensive clothes, with one big fuming feeding her thousand of ideas mouth to for alshut upl the enemies. She was going to smash them to pieces, she said. I asked her if she was actually trying to tell me that she was having an affair with a colleague who made her pregnant, but she reassured that she was menstruating on that exact day when they had fucked on the toilet. Thank god it's just a fantasy, I thought.

Libidot was happily making love to her ghostie. She also left the office on that very same day. She sent me a copy of the memorandum, which she sent to through interoffice mail to all her colleagues, in which she described her reasons for departure from the 'small' and 'suffocating' space where she was trying to make a career. What she did not write on the memorandum was the following: The handsome ghostie had totally fucked with-invaded her soulbrain, forcing her to drop her life and everyday routine duties, visit places unknown to her and last but not least, make a comprehensive and unprecedented study on sex art. She packed her laptop computer, a few other belongings and made arrangements to go to Amsterdam. "Why Amsterdam?" I asked her. Libidot had been there before and had already met a few people involved in the sex art scenes. I still did not understand what exactly was going on with Libidot, but I assumed that it must have been a nervous breakdown. Even though I suggested to her to go seek counseling, I also wanted to support her in her desire to visit Amsterdam. This could have been a dangerous suggestion to make, but I do believe in the therapeutic qualities of art, research and travel. I asked her to tell me a bit more about her research project. It read as follows: "I want to meet all the great sex artists of the world. I want to record the commotions of my special journey meeting theirs. I do not mean this to be a solo-journey, a trek into the desert or meditation retreat, but rather the opposite, a journey into abundant lives and bodies. I vow to share all my information with Dr. Jacobs and will also post my ongoing journals on the world wide web."

I played along with Libidot's fantasy of the grand voyage and hoped that she would find herself again doing research into sex art. I contacted Dr. Jacobs and warned him that I did not know Libidot very well, that he would have to see for himself about her actual abilities

as a scholar. Dr. Jacobs would be her most suitable supervisor, I thought. He is an older left-leaning scholar in the field of media studies, who had become a name in the field of sex art and pornography. He had published several major articles about the return of sexually exuberant primates in digital media networks. I knew Dr. Jacobs as a solid figure whose theoretical knowledge and astute feedback was widely appreciated. He would be the kind of person able to consult his book collections and maintain scholarly integrity while Libidot would visit the artists, the 'sex art species' as he came to call them. (I once reminded him that this term could be considered inappropriate or even offensive, but he reassured me that he had good reasons for using this term it.)

Let me give you a little glimpse of the mind and appearance of Dr. Jacobs. He is an erudite and self-conscious figure who tends to dress in plain American clothes, occasionally wearing a vintage suit. This is his way of making a fashion statement, this loner type of U.S. East-coast intellectual who loves to explore the digital networks and who never leaves his office. A classical introvert He is a follower of contemporary schools of theory and political activism, but would feel alienated from research as actual encounters with people. Moreover, I also found out in indirect ways that Dr. Jacobs is gay, that he has his affairs with younger men and may feel a natural discomfort with the 'feminine' ways of approaching the body of sex artists. It is interesting for us to know this information about him, since his actual theories are predicting the return of the bonobo, the female-run of primate species who engages in extensive love games/rituals as and queer types of sexual activity.

When I asked him later if it had been interesting for him to work with Libidot, he answered that he wanted to use her data to test his thesis on the bonobo. He would use the work of primatologist Frans de Waal and biologist Bruce Bagemihl to write about the qualities of sexual inclinations in digital media networks. If de Waal had observed in chimpanzees hierarchical and violent methods of sharing power, he had observed a different display of gender and power dynamics in the much rarer species of the bonobos. Dr. Jacobs believed that Libidot's data could point to a global surfacing of a bonobo-like species. I asked him how it could even be possible to study all these different artists within a narrow biological-evolutionary framework and thus classify them as a 'species', but he seemed unperturbed by my critical remark and did not reply. Dr. Jacobs worked with Libidot to refine his thesis on the bonobo in digital media networks. He wanted to prove that the networked bonobo worked with biological-evolutionary instincts in seeking out sexual partners and pornographic communication. He wanted to show that these artists, cross-culturally and regardless of gender and sexual orientation, were mimicking each other's heightened sexual instincts as artistic 'talents' and distributed aesthetics. Now, don't imagine Dr. Jacobs himself to be anything like a bonobo himself. I believe that he needed Libidot to be his partner in even shaking hands with the species.

Libidot visited artists influenced by different cultural traditions, religious beliefs, social norms and sexual subcultures, but they all seemed to respond to her call for a social network structure and climate of exuberance. She traveled and searched diligently for sex artists – in Tokyo, Ljubljana, Amsterdam, Istanbul, Boston, Chicago, Sydney, Melbourne, and so on. The sex artists clearly wanted to participate in her project. They did not belong to a school of sexual difference, did not adhere to an artistic credo and made art with all kinds of objectives and media – their bodies, sweat, lips, blood, needles, live performances on the stage, in public spaces, sketches and fragments in journals, paint, photography, video, web-based works. Their artworks and conversational wisdoms were often blunt or contradictory, yet astute and honest investigations of 21st century bodies, media and sexuality. Libidot was very deeply and proudly immersed in the network, their emotional-physical intelligence, their peculiar moods and visions, their lived and unlived fantasies, their daily life habits and sexual engines. All these talents, their works, their evocations of the sex force, really affected her, more thoroughly than she ever could have imagined. It took me much patience to mediate between the hot approach of Libidot and the cold attitude of Dr. Jacobs. Dr. Jacobs kept wanting to withdraw from the project on several occasions. But in the end, he did give me permission to publish his commentaries, which he had sent to Libidot while she was traveling. I thus decided to structure the book around Libidot's bulky travel journals and interviews with artists, and Dr. Jacobs's sparse commentaries.

The journeys encapsulate the death of the academic researcher, i.e., the crisis of progressive academia culture in dealing with sex art phenomena. The journeys also happened against a backdrop of political turmoil and conflict; first and foremost, ongoing fits of belligerence by crusty and well well-behaved academia; secondly, the general scorn and hardening censorship of this work by political authorities and art establishments. The journeys witnessed a tide of brutal repression of vitalistic bodies in art and academia. Libidot and Dr. Jacobs started the project a couple of months before the collapse of the World Trade Center on 9/11, the moment branded in history as the catalyst of new waves of political repression and rule of Southern 'bubba'. The G.W. Bush's administration fortified its 'emergency' mechanisms of surveillance of a wide range of people and activities called 'terrorism'. What came along was a subtle war on the 'Id-Evil', a simultaneous pushing and punishing of radical art as pleasure, imposing patriotic obsessions and values on pleasure, causing a severe deregulation of sexual fantasies in relation to otherness. The Id-Evil, as defined by Slavoj Žižek, is Evil structured and motivated by the most elementary imbalance between the Ego and jouissance (bliss) and ruled by the tension between pleasure and foreign bodies.¹

¹ Slavoj Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute: Or, Why is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?* (London: Verso, 2000), p.8

The book aims to show that we have been experiencing this deregulation in our treatment of sex art, even though we are swamped with elaborate and multifold types of sex talk and countless waves of fetish bodiesism and pornography. But even though we are more than ever surrounded by the products of porn empires and indieporn media, sex art as public manifestation of the body often results in audience discomfort, rather than empathy. The many instances of censorship witnessed by Libidot and Dr. Jacobs indicate that our institutional venues of art and academia can hardly be freed of the habitual modes of performance and perception. For instance, during the *Porn Ar(t)ound the World* festival (2002) in Mechelen, Belgium, Yoshie Suzuki (Japan-USA) and Adam Zaretsky's (USA) showed an experimental video piece *Squart*, which shows digitally altered footage of Yoshie sitting on the toilet and releasing excrements. When this art work was officially condemned and removed from the exhibit by the Belgian vice-squad, the artists issued an official grievance statement in a letter to the police. The statement argued that the excremental body could be a valuable site of knowledge for the contemporary artist, and ended in the following punch line: "Every society shits every day, including yours." The artists wanted to make a public statement about their sexual fantasies and use of artistic media, but the public institutions hosting their work were unable to provide a supportive environment.

And one can read in chapter four, 'Belgium: Black Magic and The Holy Media,' as Libidot witnesses many other artworks being removed by the Belgian police. Or you can read her interview with the Taiwanese sex activist, professor Josephine Ho, who almost was sentenced to jail over her sex activist website and her arduous fight against an alliance of fourteen Christian organizations. Are these truly dark times to be a sex artist? The finale of *Libi_doc* coincided with evidence of the mediated torture and sexual abuse of Iraqi prisoners by the American military, as a new kind of 'web pornography.' It thus became even harder to see the trees through the forest of pleasure and sexual representation, to distinguish fictional or fantasy-based pornography from the daily lure of political repression and war crimes. Fortunately, this totally obscene culture cultural climate in the U.S. has started to be addressed by scholars, as in Coco Fusco's 2005 College Art Association panel on the effects of the Patriot Act on American art, which seeks to look at censored work, such as "translations that have been criminalized because the texts come from 'enemy states', arts professionals whose ability to travel to and from the US has been restricted or curtailed, arts professionals whose work intersects with Middle Eastern Studies who have come under scrutiny, etc."

As it turns out, the list of submissions to such a panel could simply be enormous, if one would include the reactions from everyday control authorities and fearful individuals and social-intellectual circles to sex art. The U.S. is living in the era of fear and self-censoring intellectuals and artists. Libidot and Dr. Jacobs thus came to agree on the following

insight: the sex art species is under attack by governments and corporations and needs to be protected. It took them a while to wake up to the fact that academic circles and inner voices were constantly thwarting the work. So, I tried to push their work despite these difficulties. I hope that this book will reach readers who can relate deeply to the pleasures and pains of making these kinds of journeys and a very unusual book.

By Katrien Jacobs