



DIGITAL FUTURES

selfploitation

CAN THE AGE OF CELEBRITY SATURATION SURVIVE THE UBIQUITY OF THE SHARED PIXEL? BAMBOO DROPS IN AND RIDES THE WAVE OF THE FUTURE...



Once upon a time, only the rich, famous, supremely talented or beautiful basked in the hallowed media spotlight. From a great distance, we mere mortals read about their achievements and mishaps, passions and opinions; looked at their flawless photographs and watched them gracing our TV screens. The celebrities may have come and gone, but the media structure that would make or break them remained defiantly the same, decade after decade. Technology may have refined the quality of print, sound or moving image over time – and the internet opened up a huge new channel of media consumption – but the hierarchy did not change.

Reality TV has started to challenge this status quo, but production companies retain control so the number of ordinary people appearing on television is still relatively low. Then came Web 2.0. IT geeks have been using the term for a while, but most people

have no idea what it means. Nevertheless, we're surrounded by its success stories: MySpace, YouTube, Wikipedia, blogging. Web 2.0 is the growing number of websites that enable users to easily upload their own text, images, music or video. The concept is simple, but the consequences are huge: in an age where the internet is the second most popular form of media after television, every one of the world's billion-plus net users now has the means to broadcast themselves. Andy Warhol's prophecy that "In the future, everyone will be famous for 15 minutes" has never been so pertinent.

WE, THE CREATORS

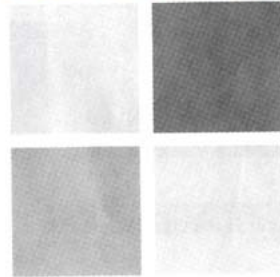
Hailed as the democratisation of media, Web 2.0 breaks down the age-old hierarchy and offers access for all – 'egocasting' rather than broadcasting. "Anyone can be the author of their own celebrity," points out author and Silicon Valley entrepreneur Andrew Keen. Just look at 'myslebs' like Tila Tequila, who became famous for having

one
Seven Lives Exposed
 Reality bytes...
 Tuesdays in July & August @ 12.25am
 Playboy One is available on Sky channel 912. To find out more visit www.playboyone.co.uk





“SITES LIKE ISHOTMYSELF.COM ARE VENUES FOR WOMEN TO PRESENT THEMSELVES ON THEIR OWN TERMS. THEY SATIRISE THE INTERNET TRAFFICKING OF THE FEMALE NUDE...”



over 1.5 million friends on MySpace. Or Jennifer Ringley, whose famed 'JenniCam' broadcast her life, live and unedited, over the web for seven years, generating over 100 million hits a week. As one blogger commented when Jennifer finally turned her cameras off: "This is an age of success for the clearly ordinary person."

Digital technology, however, means we can make ourselves feel extraordinary. We can control our own image and identity in a way that is impossible in the real world and use it to make friends, lovers or influence people. "Have you noticed there are no ugly people on MySpace?" says Richard Lawrence, creator of ishotmyself.com Digital technology has become a mirror for a generation increasingly obsessed with themselves. Some call it self-expression; for others, it's pure narcissism.

DIGITAL DOODLING

Whatever the motivation, it's hardly surprising that the arrival of digital cameras also opened up a new platform for self-published eroticism, spurred on by the thrill of voyeurism. In the late '90s, around the time that Jennifer Ringley was broadcasting her day-to-day life (without the sex – she prudishly turned the cameras away when her boyfriend came round), another young American, Natacha Merritt, took thousands of photographs of herself in bed, in the shower, having sex with her friend, masturbating with and without sex toys, from every imaginable angle. She then

posted some of her most intimate moments on the internet. Adult entertainment would never be the same again. Merritt's photographs reflect the daring and exciting nature of intimacy, sexual exploration and self-perception in the digital age, which is also championed by the website ishotmyself.com (ISM) – an "erotic, web-based self-portraiture project."

SHOOTING YOURSELF

Set up by Richard Lawrence in July 2003, ISM invites its users to "pickle yourself in the adrenaline rush of public nudity" and publishes erotic portfolios of photographs that normal women – not models – submit from around the world (over 2,330 to date). "We offer a refreshing alternative to mainstream porn," says Lawrence, who provides ample critical thought on the site to argue this, as well as a \$250 monthly 'Art Prize'. Lawrence coined the term 'selfploitation' to reflect the "bold statement [that the contributors – or 'artists' – make] about nudity, fame and the internet."

While the camera lens has traditionally been used as a tool for objectifying women, ISM reclaims it as a way of empowering them. "ISM has become a venue for women to present themselves on their own terms... We satirise the internet trafficking of the female nude," Lawrence declares. Or as one member comments: "It's not just a voyeur's delight, but an honest glimpse into the psyche of young women in today's world; women who are increasingly free of constraints and stereotypes... free to be themselves." Long live the revolution.

FURTHER READING...

Andrew Keen's book **The Cult Of The Amateur: How Today's Internet Is Killing Our Culture And Assaulting Our Economy** published by Nicholas Brealey

Natacha Merritt's book **Digital Diaries** is published by Taschen

Check out images of our favourite *Playboy* girls playboymodel.co.uk

Photos courtesy of ishotmyself.com

