


Eroticism

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Eroticism (from the Greek ἔρως, *eros*—"desire") is a quality that causes sexual feelings,^[1] as well as a philosophical contemplation concerning the aesthetics of sexual desire, sensuality and romantic love. That quality may be found in any form of artwork, including painting, sculpture, photography, drama, film, music or literature. It may also be found in advertising. The term may also refer to a state of sexual arousal^[1] or anticipation of such – an insistent sexual impulse, desire, or pattern of thoughts.

	Look up <i>eroticism</i> in Wiktionary, the free dictionary.
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As French novelist Honoré de Balzac stated, eroticism is dependent not just upon an individual's sexual morality, but also the culture and time in which an individual resides.^{[2][3][4]}

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Definitions

Because the nature of what is erotic is fluid,^[5] early definitions of the term attempted to conceive eroticism as some form of sensual or romantic love or as the human sex drive (libido); for example, the *Encyclopédie* of 1755 states that the erotic "is an epithet which is applied to everything with a connection to the love of the sexes; one employs it particularly to characterize...a dissoluteness, an excess".^[6] However, because eroticism is wholly dependent on the viewer's culture and personal tastes pertaining to what, exactly, defines the erotic,^{[7][8]} critics have often confused eroticism with pornography, Andrea Dworkin going so far as to say: "[Eroticism] is simply high-class pornography; better produced, better conceived, better executed, better packaged, designed for a better class of consumer."^[9] This confusion, as Lynn Hunt writes, "demonstrate the difficulty of drawing...a clear generic demarcation between the erotic and the pornographic": indeed arguably "the history of the separation of pornography from eroticism...remains to be written".^[10]

Biological Evolution

Whereas traditionally eroticism has been dealt with in relation to culture and its pornographic outcomes, current evolutionary psychology shows how eroticism has shaped the evolution of human nature.^[11] Eroticism is defined as the way humans transform sexuality into a mental activity that results in pleasure for its own sake.^[12] The ability to envision sexual arousal as a medium of introspection about feelings and thoughts that transcends mere procreative animal sexuality seems unique to humans. It is thus that the transformation of the sexual impulse into erotic creativity can be considered a central factor in the process of human mental evolution.^[13]

Psychoanalytical approach



An erotic scene from *Fanny Hill* by French illustrator Édouard-Henri Avril

For a psychoanalytical definition, as early as Freud^[14] psychotherapists have turned to the ancient Greek philosophy's "overturning of mythology" as a definition to understanding of the heightened aesthetic.^[15] For Plato, Eros takes an almost transcendent manifestation when the subject seeks to go beyond itself and form a communion with the objectival other: "the true order of going...to the things of love, is to use the beauties of earth as steps...to all fair forms, and from fair forms to fair actions, and from fair actions to fair notions, until from fair notions he arrives at the notion of absolute beauty".^[16]

French philosophy

Modern French conceptions of eroticism can be traced to The Enlightenment,^[17] when "in the eighteenth century, dictionaries defined the erotic as that which concerned love...eroticism was the intrusion into the public sphere of something that was at base private".^[18] This theme of intrusion or transgression was taken up in the twentieth century by the French philosopher Georges Bataille, who argued that eroticism performs a function of

dissolving boundaries between human subjectivity and humanity, a transgression that dissolves the rational world but is always temporary,^[19] as well as that, "Desire in eroticism is the desire that triumphs over the taboo. It presupposes man in conflict with himself".^[20] For Bataille, as well as many French theorists, "Eroticism, unlike simple sexual activity, is a psychological quest...eroticism is assenting to life even in death".^[21]

Non-heterosexual

Queer theory and LGBT studies consider the concept from a non-heterosexual perspective, viewing psychoanalytical and modernist views of eroticism as both archaic^[22] and heterosexist,^[23] written primarily by and for a "handful of elite, heterosexual, bourgeois men"^[24] who "mistook their own repressed sexual proclivities"^[25] as the norm.^[26]

Theorists like Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick,^[27] Gayle S. Rubin^[28] and Marilyn Frye^[29] all write extensively about eroticism from a heterosexual, lesbian and separatist point of view, respectively, seeing Eroticism as both a political force^[30] and cultural critique^[31] for marginalized groups, or as Mario Vargas Llosa summarized: "Eroticism has its own moral justification because it says that pleasure is enough for me; it is a statement of the individual's sovereignty".^[32]

Audre Lorde, a Caribbean-American writer and out-spoken feminist talks of the erotic being a type of power being specific to females. "There are many kinds of power [...] The erotic is a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feelings".^[33] In "The Uses of the Erotic" within *Sister Outsider*, she discusses how erotic comes from sharing, but if we suppress the erotic rather than recognize its presence, it takes on a different form. Rather than enjoying and sharing with one another, it is objectifying, which she says translates into abuse as we attempt to hide and suppress our experiences.^[34]



Symbolic dance by Jan Ciągliński, late 19th-century subtle lesbian erotica (National Museum in Warsaw).

See also

- Eros
- Erotic art
- Erotica
- History of erotic depictions
- Homoeroticism
- Limit-experience
- Pin-up girl
- Romance

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