

The Phenomenology of Condoms

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Orienting the Mind

The illumination of a particular presence or surrounding gives shape amidst the dark expanse of infinity. A particular revelation or surrounding amidst this expanse scintillates with particular characters or spirits, and is dominated by one particular character or spirit. Turning towards our particular surroundings by means of reflection unites humanity with the quality of spirit or character that permeates everything within the horizon of our surroundings. Inasmuch as we turn towards our surroundings by means of reflection, the human kind of being calls to attention the quality of our lifeworld. Because the quality of our surroundings permeates everything within our horizons, turning towards it, restores to us our sense of unity with the one-ness of our particular presence of being.

Our particular presence of being, our particular illumination or constellation amidst the dark expanse is characterologically dominated by the subject-object split (Descartes, 1637), by a mechanized interpretation of being (Newton, 1726), a godless, pluralistic cultural attitude (Nietzsche, 1866), technology and the unification with man, the man-machine, (Romanyshyn, 1989; *The Week*, 2011), the configuration of an empty-self (Cushman, 1990), a corporate capitalistic economy (Marx, 1867; United States, 1886), the medical model (Laing, 1971), among other things. The expression of this character as it informs our human sense of being will be highlighted in the artifact of the Durex Condom.

Durex Condoms

Each sealed within a foil wrapper, three individual condoms are packaged together within a small cardboard box. The box sits on a shelf alongside many other packages offering like commodities. The commodities are different in shape, size, weight, construction, texture, materials and color. This shelf is one of eight shelves on a large rack. There are two racks side-by-side offering many varieties of condoms, among many other racks selling other items in a similar fashion making up entire aisles in the store. These two racks are situated in the last aisle in the back of the store

behind which is the pharmacy. (Why are the condoms in the back while the cigarettes, gum, and candy are in the front by the cash register?). Large white fluorescent bulbs overhead light the store minimizing the cast of shadows. The name of the commodity is Durex Condoms. Let us turn our attention to the specific commodity at hand.

Let us begin with the word. Condoms (the etymology of the word is not known with certainty) are defined as a “barrier method” (Durex pack) used “to reduce the risk of Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) transmission to or from the head of the penis” (Durex pack) and to help prevent unwanted pregnancy. Condoms are barriers to decrease the spread of disease and to prevent unwanted pregnancy. Condoms are latex barriers

The name Durex reminds us of durable, paired with sex or latex or X (Dur-ex, DurX). Durable comes from the latin “durabilis” meaning “lasting” and “permanent.” Durable also comes from “Durare” meaning “to last” and “to harden.” The Proto-Indo-European (PIE) root of the word is “deru” which means “be firm” and “solid.” Durex reminds us of that which lasts and is hard, that which is firm and solid. Durex evokes the idea of the hard and ever-lasting which endures amidst any surroundings. As Durex condoms will act durably, the ever-lasting barrier in the face of hard, ever-lasting sex, so too ought my penis be a hard ever-lasting erection. My erection will be happily sheathed in the equality of the condom. The reflection of Durex as my penis, is the hard, firm, solid ever-lasting penis enduring any surrounding, permanently. What kind of thing is a permanent erection? A dildo, a fake penis. In other words, a machine made penis. We seek the man-machine, an ideology which propagates the idea that if we merge with the machine, we will be permanent and indestructible in the face of any surrounding. We will be as machine-god and my penis will be hard and ever-lasting and durable in hard pounding sex.

All of this is quite peculiar given the black-and-white computer font, printed on the side of the colorful package. It marks the expiration date: “2015-01”. In the face of bright swirling colors, and multiple font styles and sizes, the black-and-white facts, printed in plain capital typeface, is obscured. An analysis of the typeface is beyond the scope of this paper, but it is sufficient to suggest that the font expresses the opposite qualities to the font on the rest of the pack. In contrast, it is boring, and thus easily overlooked. We do not want boring sex, and so we overlook the warning. The idea of Durex Condoms is that they will not fail, that is break, in the face of hot, hard sex. Durex Condoms will be tough enough to handle the

job, until “January 2015”, or if “exposed to excessive heat”...excessive heat-a strange warning in the face of steaming hot sex.

The name reinforces this idea of a permanent erection by conjoining the prefix dur- with the suffix -ex. However, I do not think, despite the unique pairing of letters, this is significant. As ex- is a prefix, and the word contains -ex as a suffix. I claim that, in addition to “sex” and “latex”, the -ex suffix is in fact also an expression of the letter “X”. If we amplify this “X” we arrive at triple-X, “XXX”, or X-rated, as in the pornography industry. We come up with X-marks-the-spot, as in the marker for the place where a secret lies beneath, perhaps a treasure, perhaps just some old dusty bones.

We come to the X-factor, the very unknown quality that magically makes us powerful, superior, or rather specially equipped to handle the problem at hand. We also come to X-rays and the ever popular short-hand notation for a prescription: Rx.

We come to Generation-X, a term nominated for the current age, in other words, generation unnamable, indefinable. We are defined by our indefinability, by our uniqueness. We are all the same uniqueness. We come to X-Box, Xfinity, and X-games, and finally for our purposes here Durex (DurX). The stamp of X on Durex reinforces all of the above: the uniformity of the hard-on penis, the uniformity of penis sizes fitting properly the Durex Condoms, we are all the same hard penis, with our own unique penises, a paradox. The X points to something beyond, something powerful: these condoms will sheath your hard penis in the face of hard pounding sex. Further, we are seeing in the world the stamp of X so to cover up the bitterness of reality- that your penis is not a permanent hard-on, and this covering up lures us in its direction with a promise that this secret power lies beyond, and that attaining this power, in this case, brings us closer to the presence of the permanent hard-on. However, our erections are not permanent hard-ons. (Does this call to mind embarrassment in the face of castration?) Further, the idea of the hard pounding sex is no better demonstrated than in the world of triple-X pornography. The Rx of condoms helps to prevent disease. Condoms, disease and unwanted pregnancy are commingled. (This calls to mind shame.)

In addition to the stamp of the “X”, Durex suggests the conjunction of Durable and Sex. The suggestion here is that these condoms are durable during sex, or perhaps sex is hard, ever-lasting and permanent, and Durex will insure protection from diseases or unwanted pregnancy in the face of this kind of sex. Dominating our medical and psychological fields is the

medical model, which aims to reduce symptoms, in contrast to a holistic, systemic approach. Accordingly, our modern response to the prevention of STIs and unwanted pregnancy is the condom- to prevent the spread of disease. Condoms are, according to the information in the package, 98% effective in reducing pregnancy and STIs (that transmit through skin contact on the parts of the body that the condom covers, or more specifically, the “head” of the penis, and for STIs that transmit through ejaculation). We have isolated the cause of transmission and placed a latex sheath to act as barrier. The historical development of condoms has its current expression in the Durex Condoms. The Durex Condom is a brand of the best condom product modern persons have in the entire evolution of condoms to combat nature's destructive presence of STIs, and to control unwanted pregnancy.

Likewise, Durex suggests the conjunction of Durable and Latex. Latex is a kind of rubber. The feel of the rub of rubber, combined with the inherent qualities of its elasticity and durability make it the best choice to act as a barrier in the face of sex for modern persons.

Condom As Commodity

This store which sells these commodities sits alongside other stores that differ in shape, size, weight, construction, texture, materials and color. These stores together make up what is called a “strip”. All of these exact stores erected in many locations make up what is called a “chain” . The replication of the strips containing stores from different chains expresses the dominant presence of the system of corporate capitalism. The quality of our surroundings is dominated by the character of the corporate capitalistic system. One goes to a strip and enters a store in order to purchase commodities from a seller of a disembodied maker.

Like all of the other commodities in this store, my purchase is a commodity without the presence of the maker. The package informs me that the maker is located somewhere in India. Presumably, because the pack doesn't say so explicitly, if I would like to contact him/her/it the package points me to the following web address: www.durex.com. The web address acts as a starting point on my way towards contacting the maker. I can access this address by logging onto a computer. The hardware of the computer contains software which enables me to connect to the internet. The address on the internet connects me to the web site. If I want

to contact the maker by means of the web site, I can select “company info” from which the following message appears on my computer screen:

This website no longer exists as SSL International is now part of Reckitt Benckiser (RB). For more information on RB and an overview of RB’s brands like Durex, Finish, Air Wick, Vanish, Dettol, Scholl, Nurofen and Veet click [here](#).

I move my “pointer” with my “mouse” over to the “[here](#).” Clicking on this directs me to a new website, www.rb.com. Reckitt Benckiser (RB) is in England. I am not sure how they are connected to the maker in India. If I select “Contact” under the heading “Investors and Media”, I am brought to a page, which displays:

Sorry, page not found.

If you were looking for:

Careers Seekers, [click here](#)

Global contact details, [click here](#)

Investor Information, [click here](#)

Sustainability Information, [click here](#)

Latest News, [click here](#)

Our brands Product Images, [click here](#)

If I go back to Durex.com and select “contact” then I am directed to a screen that allows me to send an email to Consumer Products in Norcross, GA. There is no mention of the maker in India.

By means of the internet, I am unable to connect with the maker whose product is being sold to me. The internet is defined as “an electronic communications network that connects computer networks and organizational computer facilities around the world” (Merriam-Webster, 2011). In other words, the internet connects us to each other by means of a global network. The internet is a “network” that connects “networks” and as such, there is no central authority. The “authority” if you can even call it that, is simply another network. A fundamental characteristic of the internet is that no one person, authority, or entity controls it. The Author as universal agent of control ceases to exist in the reality of the virtual. It is rather a web, a network of interconnectedness. In a post-

modern, relativistic era, when god is dead (the ultimate authority), when information is controlled by none and all, so too is no one responsible for the reality of the internet or the virtual. No one holds responsibility for the reality of the virtual. As such, in this case of a commodity of corporate capitalism (capital is defined as “head” or “chief”, the corporate capitalistic system has displaced its “head” into its “body”- the definition of corporate. Corporate capitalism is the merger of the head into the body whereby the blow of responsibility can be absorbed into the presence of the body). Connecting to the internet to find the one responsible for making the condoms is very difficult. If no one is in charge and if the entire body is in charge, with whom ought I speak? No-one and every-body. The internet intends to connect us, but in our case here, I cannot connect with the maker of my condoms. Concealed in the definition of a global connection, is also the frustration, the castration, of disconnectedness. The internet acts as castrator. You Will Not Connect! The internet claims to connect, but also it disconnects. It has claimed to connect me to the maker, but has prevented me from so doing by connecting me to every-body and no-one. This is a confusing castration. It draws me in by claiming to connect me to the world, but I cannot even connect to the maker of a condom, a commodity that involves one of the most intimate experiences of human relations. I cannot connect to the person/entity who affects my sexual experience.

The seller in the US whose name is CVS sells the commodities of the Indian maker owned by Reckitt Benckiser of England. CVS cannot be held accountable for the quality of the condoms since CVS is not the maker nor the owner. However, the maker or owner who is also a seller to other sellers, accounted for this, and placed the following quality control article on the package:

*Durex is so confident that you'll be satisfied with this product that they'll refund the purchase price if you're not. Return the unused product and original receipt with name, return address and reason to DUREX SATISFACTION GAURANTEED, Consumer Affairs Depts., P.O. Box 921485, Norcross, GA 30010. Limit one per household.

This info is stupid and confusing. How will I know if I am satisfied with the product if I have not used it? And if I use it and I am not satisfied,

then I cannot return it, because here it is stipulated that “they” will only accept “unused” condoms. So only if the package is damaged on the inside will I send it to Consumer Affairs Depts. located in a PO Box in Norcross GA, which has nothing to do with my satisfaction of the product itself. Further, the article addresses the reader as if this particular writing were not in fact written by the maker who is located somewhere in India or the owner who is located in England, but rather, it is written by a third party designated as “Consumer Affairs Depts.” located in a PO Box somewhere in Norcross, GA 30010. This is indicated by the “they’ll” in “Durex is so confident that you’ll be satisfied with this product that *they’ll* refund the purchase price if you’re not” (italics mine). This is another deflection of responsibility- “they’ll” instead of “we’ll”. Here too there is no address that points to a person. Who is in charge here? Who is the author, who the authority? Who? Again, in the system of corporate (body) capitalism (head), body and head have merged. Therein the authority (head) has merged into the body (incorporated), and as a result the buyer connects to no-one and to every-body. The authority has deflected responsibility to the system itself which is every-body and no-one. However, in the reality of the virtual, every-body is disembodied so we meet with the visual representatives. We meet no-one and every-body’s representative. Lastly, why is it limited to one per household? I thought my “satisfaction is guarantee[d]”? What if another member of my household also finds this product to be unsatisfactory without ever using it yet somehow knowing that it was unsatisfactory? What is the relationship between a household and multiple complaints about Durex Condoms? What benefit does this message have to the maker in India, to the owner in England, to the Consumer Affairs Depts. in a P.O. Box in Norcross, Georgia, or to the CVS in Ardmore, Pennsylvania?

CVS, once a buyer, transforms into a seller after purchasing commodities from the maker or owner in order to sell it to another buyer, in this case, me. Finally, the seller sells the commodity of a maker to the buyer, without the presence of the maker. The maker and buyer are drawn into a relationship on account of CVS and an exchange occurs: “That will be \$4.99, please.” The exchange value of the commodity informs the buyer that s/he has purchased a commodity of a certain value. The commodity has a low exchange-value but a high use-value. In other words, condoms do not cost a lot and they are used a lot, like bottled water. These condoms are worth \$4.99 (approximately \$1.66, per condom) to sheath your penis

from contacting the skin of another. You entrust \$1.66 and “over 80 years” of service to a headless disembodied-body, who (which?) acts as a maker in India, as an owner in England, as a Complaint Department in a PO Box in the US, and as mediated by CVS in Ardmore PA, towards preventing STDs and unwanted pregnancy by sheathing the head of the body of your penis in one of the most intimate scenes of bodies. What happened to our balls?

Dynamic Between Product and Buyer

My partner and I agree to have sex. I hope to get lucky tonight. Either way, with some amount of responsibility, I enter the store to begin a modern ritual of sex, first by purchasing condoms so as to prevent disease and unwanted pregnancy. At least this is what I am told. I walk down the aisle, and to the rack in the back, under the bright white lights, and there sits an array of condoms. I choose Durex. The package indicates that inside is “pleasure” and that these “assorted condoms” will “put some adventure in your love life.” So here I am engaged in a certain dynamic, the power of which lies with the maker or owner, who has been replaced by a seller and cannot account for the quality of the commodity. The condoms inform me that pleasure is on the inside of the pack, and that my love life lacks adventure, but fortunately, the pack will give that to me.

In the modern configuration of the empty self (Cushman, 1990), I am fortunate to fill this emptiness of my adventureless sex life with the adventurousness and pleasure of the Durex Condoms. Thank God for Durex! The pack is bursting with lines and colors much like would be my love life with these condoms, the package seems to imply. These condoms will give me a colorful explosion of love making.

Durex Condoms are not just selling condoms, but an idea of a sexual experience, and I ought to Enjoy! this kind of sexual experience I use an exclamation to emphasize the concealed super-ego command to Enjoy! which is ever presently propagated in the ideology of our modern world. I dare you to not enjoy! (Zizek, 2007) if I use them. Psychologically, as we fail to attain the idea of sex the condom puts forth the perfect, hard, throbbing, pumping, ever-lasting penis, the erection as a man-machine-god, by which we inevitably fall sort -- feeling guilty, shameful and ripe with neurosis. If my penis isn't durable as the condoms are, something is wrong with me. In other words, the user has been castrated. We want sex,

but what we get is this idea of sex. And the idea of the permanent hard-on in the face of any surrounding, is an impossibility. I am left shriveled in impotence. I am human. The castration caused from this inability to achieve the man-machine godful-ness of the permanent rock-hard hard-on, the durable hard-on good enough to be sheathed by Durex Condoms, eventuates in neurosis and anxiety.

Further, we cannot Enjoy! sex as defined by Durex Condoms because it is precisely the intimacy of the skin-on-skin contact which gives sex its pleasure. Sex, or coitus, by definition is “a coming together, uniting.” Condoms by definition are a “barrier”, a barrier that surrounds the penis. Condoms are a barrier between two humans trying to come together in the most intimate fashion. Eros or sex is intimate love, or as demonstrated in Platonic writing as bodies preying on other bodies (Zaslavsky, 1981). The pleasure of sex, the pleasure of bodies preying on other bodies in the attempt to merge or unite, the pleasure of erotic love comes to be the sensual experience, or the beauty, of merging physical bodies. Condoms are strapped between two bodies preventing a unification. Condoms castrate Eros. The symptom of the castration of Eros is deep neurosis. The point is, if you strap on a condom and you cannot keep it up, it is not your fault, despite the deep feelings of neurosis brought up on account of it. And it is not your partner’s fault for failing to maintain your arousal. Concealed in the gift of condoms is a punishment of castration.

Concluding Remarks

While condoms allow us to have safer sex, and reduce the risk of sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancy, ought we have so much willy-nilly sex? The question arises in the face of the commodification of the condom which is so easily produced and purchased as if sex were so easily produced and purchased, or had, as in “I got some”, or “I got laid”, or “I had sex”, or “Another notch on my belt,” as if it were something owned or possessed and quantified. “How many women have you had sex with?” The more you’ve had, the more of a “man” you are.

When the seat belt was invented car accidents increased dramatically (Streff, F.M., Geller, E.S. 1988; Janssen, W. 1994). The analogy indicates that as we are convinced that we are more protected against disease, we tend to act more recklessly in the face of disease. Do condoms de-spiritualize the union of love and help to reinforce the idea that sex is a man-machine

pounding, commodification, to be had, gotten, and counted, like notches on a belt, in the x-treme face of disease?

Idolatry, as expressed in modern form that we are man-machines who will be god-like and live forever, is strictly prohibited in many of the world religions. However, in this age characterized by godlessness, where the dominant ideology of our post-modern era is pluralism or relativism, where God is dead, we run the risk of blindly erecting new, false Gods, of erecting a pluralism of Gods. We run the risk of propagating the language of the idea of possessing godliness. In so much as we do that, we must also keep in mind what Freud (1961) showed us about our Gods: our Gods are a kind of superego, and we develop a special covenant with them, which cultivates our narcissism, a narcissism which tricks us into thinking we possess some of these god-like qualities.

This covenant is created by means of the language of the masculine injunction. God commands rules by means of giving language to reality. If in the beginning was the word, then the word violently shaped reality by imposing limitations and rules. These rules both act as revealer and concealer. The dictum of our age- if god is dead then all is permitted, also contains within it: if god is dead, then all is prohibited, including, in this case, sex! We desire sex, but instead our gods give us a smelly, oiled piece of latex made in India to sheath our penises and to create a barrier in an intimate scene between two bodies. In an attempt to simulate the sensation of sex, the quality of the condom also reflects our idea about the quality of the orifice into which one puts one's penis. Is it as oil and latex? The stamp of X in the case of our Durex condoms propagates the hard, everlasting penis in smelly, oil-latex-sensed orifices. This simulacrum of natural skin-to-skin sex, denies the reality of skin-to-skin sex by means of a concealed prohibition (You Cannot Have Sex!), which is the very thing we want, the very desire that brought us into the store in the first place.

This desire coupled with our modern technological ideology of the man-machine god, is incongruent and is doomed to fail. My penis cannot be hard in any given surrounding. And Durex Condoms will not put adventure and pleasure into my love life, just the opposite.

Condoms will act as a barrier between you and your love, to Eros, which can lead to deep neurosis. In the end, one may feel shame and embarrassment and perhaps even danger. Sex as castration, neurosis, hard pounding hard-on permanence, empowerment, disease, unwanted pregnancy and impotence all scintillate in the constellation of the condom.

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