

Daniel IFTENE

## Sexual monstrosity in contemporary cult TV series: the case of the *American Horror Story*

**Abstract.** Abundant and vivid sex scenes have become a distinct feature of some of the most popular TV series, the phenomena transgressing producers and genres (Benioff and Weiss's fantasy series *Game of Thrones*; Michael Hirst's historical romance *The Tudors* and Tom Kapino's comedy *Californication*; Nick Pizzolato's crime series *True Detective* and Jake Manos Jr's *Dexter*, Lena Dunham's comedy *Girls* or Alan Ball's vampire fantasy *True Blood*). Because usually these scenes show no significant impact on the story or the characters' development, viewers often identified them as nearing soft-core pornography meant to (re)ignite the consumers' interest in the series, by conveying various yet standardized representations of sexual activities.

In 2011, *American Horror Story (AHS)* producers added to this the risky re-writing of well-known horror film subgenres, using for their five seasons to the day most of the genre's strategies, from body and psychological horror to slasher and splatter. Aside from this manifest revisiting of familiar themes and motifs of horror movies, the series fired at their spectators shocking and deliberately scandalous depictions of sexual practices, ranging from the ever-going innuendo and sex scenes rather common in an erotic thriller to a paraphilic panopticon that entraps transvestites, voyeurs, frotteurists, sadists, masochists, rapists, somnophiliacs, pedophiles, incestuous characters, acrotomophiliacs, necrophiliacs and zoophiles.

However, in terms of defining key-elements of contemporary television series, one could easily link *AHS* to the aggressive use of para-cinematic techniques (exploitation of sex, sensational elements, gore, kitsch) for the construction of a cult-sensed product out of hypersexualized second-hand horrific imagery and narratives, most frequently chosen for their memetic potential (the Rubber Man, the young witch's man-killing vagina, the incestuous mother, the demonic nun, the Three-breasted woman, the macrophallic villain).

**Keywords:** horror series, *AHS*, re-writing, memes, hypersexualization, cult television

**Daniel IFTENE**

Babes-Bolyai University  
email: daniel.iftene@ubbcluj.ro

EKPHRISIS, 1/2016  
EXTREME STORYTELLING  
pp. 37-47

### Introduction

Everyone seems to be interested in bringing sex and sexuality to the TV screen, depicting it for relevant character or plot designs, or just for a touch of nonconformist or potentially scandalous decorative feature. Showtime Networks did it in *Shameless*, *Californication*,

or *Dexter*, and the more recent Round Two Productions series *Masters of Sex*, HBO did it in *Girls*, *True Blood* and *True Detective*. And these are just a few titles that come off the top of one's head. For example, an avid fan of the HBO's *Game of Thrones* fantasy series has certainly lost count of the number of nudity and intercourse scenes, or sex-related lines he has watched and heard during the past six years. The Westeros Kama Sutra of seasons one to five, as the sixth has a more nature, offers straight sex, gay sex, group sex, bisexual sex, masturbation, sodomy, incest, sadism.

A study on the images and language associated with sex and violence published in 2001 revealed that in mainstream TV series (from non-erotic genres of subgenres) there is an average of 8.27 sex-related scenes and 6.7 violent scenes on each episode (Deggans, "Less sex, violence on TV..."). The general tendency showed a drop in the amount of sex and violence in TV series, but, like in cinema, a qualitative transition towards more explicit depictions of these features. In fact, the number of explicit sex and violent scenes increased, said the authors of the study. Another survey conducted by the Parents Television Council found that by 2006-07 the amount of violence on TV increased by 52.4% while depiction of sexual content was up by 22.1% (Puzzanghera, "Sex, violence cram TV's 'family hour'...")

Consequently, the critics and audience members tend to associate and describe these shows with an almost pornographic approach at sex and sexuality, possibly influenced by the constant raise of pornography consumption across the world. There are almost 7 million searches for porn on internet every day, only in the U.S., and the words *sex* and *porn* are the fourth, respectively the sixth most searched terms online by kids and teenagers. It seems like everyone is doing it, or at least fantasizing about doing it.

And not only that it is doing it, but it is doing it with a twist. The rebranding of fetishism and sexual behaviors formerly known as perversions as one individual's "sexual wellness" culminated with a mainstreaming of sexual perversion, as specialists try to imply, on account of observing the "communities" of what society used to call perverted individuals. The 30<sup>th</sup> edition of Folsom Street Fair had almost 400,000 fetishists or fetish-curious visitors in San Francisco in 2013. In 2007, an American woman married the 986 feet tall Eiffel Tower, and meanwhile, three Dutch pedophiles created the Party for Neighborly Love, Freedom and Diversity, trying to lower the age of consent to 12. The party disappeared in 2010 due to the harsh reaction of Dutch voters, but it is a well-known fact that the consumption of child pornography has increased in the past years, indiscriminate of the education of financial status of the viewer. Moreover, children have seen increasing amounts of child pornography (15% of boys and 9% of girls), bestiality (32% of boys and 18% of girls), sexual bondage (39% of boys and 23% of girls), and group sex (83% of boys and 59% of girls), and same-sex intercourse (69% of boys and 55% of girls) ("Pornography Statistics: Annual Report 2015"). Thus, contemporary TV series just seem to follow the general trends of a hyper-stimulated consumption of sex and sex-related images

and language. But what is left for the creators to build the shock-factor and set-off scandals, especially in shows that tend to be identified with such potentialities?

Are we living the “mainstreaming of sex” and the “sexualization of culture”, as Feona Attwood put it in her overview of the presentation and re-presentation of sex in Western Culture where pornography and erotica had traveled “from obscene to on-scene” (xiii-xxiv)?

[t]he result is not only have the two ideas – erotica and pornography – became blurred in the public’s mind, but that pornography has become further defined into acceptability. Now that mainstream media, from R-rated movies to HBO television shows, regularly depict erotica that used to be considered pornography, those seeking to adopt porn are pushed further to the limits of what they may have once considered acceptable. (Paul, 124)

Moreover, the “pornified” culture, as Paul puts it from the title of her work, could be identified as a major trait of contemporary capitalist societies that have “become obsessed with sex” (McNair, 170) transforming it into a easily tradable commodity, but also a sign of sexual liberation that seems to define contemporary societies. Coming to the use of sex scenes and images on television, it can be easily stated that “representations of sex (...) facilitate a sharing of experience and cultural expectation”. (Glynn, Anston, Johnson, xxi).

### The cult of *AHS*

Scholars have long tried to find out what makes a cult (novel, movie, series, etc.) agreeing that it is quite improbable if not impossible to find those traits that cover all that has been, at some point, defined as cult. Except for the audience appeal and the politics of fandom, there have always been debates whether a cult film has to have quality, social impact, and complex narratives or to be linked with popular culture. For Roberta Pearson, some of the defining elements of cult television are:

1. Cult television programmes are plentiful and ubiquitous. This plenitude and ubiquity extends to the copyright holders’ production of ancillary texts.
2. Cult television narratives’ seriality and non-linearity create a potentially infinitely large metatext with multiple time frames and settings.
3. Cult television fans take great pleasure in the imaginative challenges of this potentially infinite metatext, with regard to the interpretation of the original texts and to the production of their own ancillary texts. (6)

Apart from these, for TV series like *American Horror Story* (*AHS*) strong content is one of the main cult features and it is firmly inscribed in both the genre specificity and the voluntary following of a certain cult aesthetics that the producers have envisaged from the first episodes to the last, by choosing as starting point the techniques of revisiting other famous horror productions, and, thus, by addressing not only the large audience, but also a smaller, but significant, category of horror connoisseurs and their specific cultural background. The list of horror movies to which the creators pay

homage throughout the four seasons so far includes genre reference masterpieces like *The Shining*, *Halloween*, *Rosemary's Baby*, *Poltergeist*, *The Amityville Horror*, *The Exorcist*, *The Blair Witch Project*, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *Freaks*, *Frankenstein*, *A Nightmare on the Elm Street*, *Psycho*, *The Sixth Sense*, *The Silence of the Lambs* or *The Omen*, as well as other famous movies like *Kill Bill*, *The Dark Knight*, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, *A Clockwork Orange*, *Eraserhead*, *Taxi Driver*, etc. This is why the series carry around a sense of second-hand pop art universe returning to an uncontrollable tendency to mix multiple ready-mades in a larger plot that drives through the *AHS* complex universe, like celebrating Umberto Eco's diagnosis that "[a] cult movie is the proof that, as literature comes from literature, cinema comes from cinema" (4).

Another trait of the cult identity of *AHS* dwells in its strategy for developing a strong adherence to a fixed assemble cast, given that each actor changes his or her character over the seasons, while they do not necessarily producing shocking breaks in their personas. Evolving around the central sardonic and fierce characters embodied by famous Jessica Lange, who has later been replaced by pop icon Lady Gaga, the producers created an appealing cast of same-age or younger actresses like Frances Conroy, Kathy Bates, Angela Basset, Sarah Paulson, Lily Rabe, Emma Roberts, Taissa Farmiga, Gabourey Sidibe, and Jamie Brewer, who appear in every or most of the seasons. Except for young Evan Peters and the well-known Dennis O'Hare, the male cast is more momentary, and some lead and supporting actors are used for one or two seasons. Also, recasting the same actors in cameo appearances in one or two episodes where they have not been cast as leads or supporting is a fan-oriented strategy. Like other TV series, the show benefits from the limited cast of other famous actors or pop-icons like Chloe Sevigny in the role of the nymphomaniac and Adam Levine (Maroon5) as a sex-crazed honeymooner, Joseph Fiennes as a twisted monsignor, James Cromwell in the role of a sadistic Mengele-like doctor, etc.

But most of the cult nature of the series strongly relies on its camp features, the perpetual fetishizing of shock and excess. An excess of characters, plots, sub-plots, references, homages, visual styles, costumes, themes, and, not the least, sex and violence. Week by week, the producers seem compelled to raise the stakes. The series shocked with the main male moon-struck character sobbing and masturbating in a room, while a tall dark latex suited stranger was pleasing his wife in the bedroom (*Season 1*), and ended up with a ventriloquist with a female-puppet attachment deflowering the conjoined twins towards the end of the fourth season. An accumulation of horrors and curiosities that defies the recurring *rien va plus* assumption. An excess of horrific bodies and sexual practices that leads to a broad breviary of monstrous sexuality that could be scandalous if not for their artificiality and frivolity.

With all the sex and violence it depicts, *AHS* faced several dismissals as pornography trafficked to the TV audience in the guise of horror, but the repetitive anti-hedonist discourse it contains and the disturbing mixing of pleasure and disgust and insecurity strongly contradicts this approach. Sex and sex industry is trauma driven and

provoking, as showed in maybe the boldest show scenes: making a snuff film in pre-War Germany. The place is lurking with sexual perversions, from pregnancy to bestiality fetishism, while the main female character engages in explicit BDSM practices.

### The monstrous sexualities in *AHS*

The presence of monster figures is a defining trait of the horror genre, indifferent to the medium of representation (from cave drawings to video games or multimedia artistic projects), to the historical or socio-political contexts that surround specific artistic products. One cannot conceive the genre without the manifestations of an evil or abnormal presence, be it of physical or psychological nature. Throughout history, mankind has devised a complex assemblage of monstrous natures, from the first depictions of Herodotus and subsequently of Pliny in his *Natural History* (*cynocephali* – dog-headed creatures, *sciapodae* – one-legged humans or *astomi* - mouthless beings), to contemporary robotized or digitalized monstrosities (invasive and malevolent small or large mechanism or even apps or operating systems). The breviary of abominations is extremely large and almost infinite in the re-visited combinations of some large categories like: **the natural monsters** (close to or related to animals – usually created by nature); **the human monstrosities** (aberrations of the human body or mind); **the artificial monsters** (created by man or other civilizations); **the supernatural monsters** (demons, ghosts, undead, etc.); and **any other type of hybridization** of the above.

By defining it as an effort of constantly revisiting the specific and spectacular horror elements, *American Horror Story* producers have tried to build their own status as a monstrous second-hand panopticon opened for the curious and perverse gaze of mass-audience members. Thus, each season devises its own evil places that engage the most common horrific figures and plot devices associated with them over the ages. Each of these spaces is a place of confinement, designed to keep the abnormal away from society, as a precautionary punitive or protective measure. Those who die in the *Murder House* (season 1) cannot leave it, becoming its prisoners for-eternity-minus-Halloween. The monastically *Asylum* (season 2) bears its traditional role of reconversion of the abnormal and of reconquering the divine human nature. In contrast, both the witches' *Coven* (season 3) and the *Freak Show* (season 4) reverse their protective nature, by giving shelter to repressed communities from the vicious actions of the outside.

As said before, each of these spaces operates as an enclosed playhouse for specifically cut-out popular horrific beings and their connected categories. An almost complete breviary of the *AHS* series horror and sexual triggers so far would terrify Will H. Hays:

*AHS: Murder House* (2011)

*Supernatural*: Ghosts – prying twin boys; deceptively sexualized house-maid; vengeful lover; mass-murderers; mad doctors; abnormal children and teen; un-motherly mother; women selling their virtues for certain benefits;

*Human*: adulterous husbands; abnormal genetic conditions (Dawn syndrome children); sado-masochists; extremely endowed men; rapists; mad doctors; mass murderers; leonine facies deformed figures; voyeurs; whores

*Artificial*: re-composed baby in a Frankensteinian intervention

*Abnormal behavior*: self-mutilation; seduction; adultery; same-sex relationships and intercourse; male and female masturbation; sado-masochism and bondage; hysteria and sexual deprivation; fantasizing about sexual intercourse.

*AHS: Asylum* (2012-2013)

*Supernatural*: demons, the angel of death, aliens;

*Human*: sex-crazed nuns, nymphomaniac, lesbians; fetishists; necrophiles; chronic masturbators; sadics, masochists; rapists; impotent men; frotteurs; agalmatophilic (sexual attraction to statues); mothers lacking motherhood; pedophiles; microphallic men

*Artificial*: robotic tracking device; surgically engineered humans for nuclear survival;

*Abnormal behavior*: morbid erotomania; sex-games; interracial sexual intercourse; incest, rape; frotteurism; fetishes;

*AHS: Coven* (2013-2014)

*Supernatural*: minotaur; witches; ghosts

*Human*: witches, vagina-killer woman; rapists; women that rape men; fetishists; sexually abusive parent; pedophiles; adulterers;

*Artificial*: re-composed perfect man;

*Sexual behavior*: interracial sexual intercourse; oral stimulations; gang-rape; amateur filming of rape or sexual intercourse; frotteurism; fetishism; incest, threesome; dirty language

*AHS: Freak Show* (2014-2015)

*Supernatural*: ghosts

*Human*: three-breasted hermaphrodite; Siamese sisters; bearded woman; microcephaly; midgits and giants; seal-men; macrophallic men; obese; impotent men; fetishists, gays and lesbians; phocomelia; ectrodactyly; slaves and masters; dominatrix

*Artificial*: –

*Sexual behavior*: prostitution; group sex; same-sex intercourse; masturbation; voyeurism; recording sexual intercourse; inbreeding; sexual torture; amputations; bondage; sado-masochism.

*AHS: Hotel* (2015-2016)

*Supernatural*: ghosts, vampires, addiction daemon, undead baby,

*Human*: irresponsible father, sadistics, serial killers

*Artificial*: -

*Sexual behavior*: group sex, rape, voyeurism, sexual torture, drug sex, same-sex intercourse

### a. The body of the sexual “monster”

Even a summative overview like the one above can account for the hypersexualized nature of *AHS* series, frequently sub-genred accurately as *erotic thriller*. Many of the key-characters and their actions are driven by sexual impulses and defined by their sexual traits, in constant tension to a two-way historically constructed definition of sexual normality: towards the specific norms of the historical time and place depicted and towards the so-called sexual taboos of contemporary society. Moreover, of all the large categories of monstrosities we’ve seen on screen so far, the series sticks to the famed limitative tagline “All monsters are human” that tends to exclude non-human abnormal occurrences. That is why, excepting the alien sub-plot of the second season, all monstrosity has or had human form.

So what have the monstrous human or humanized beings *AHS* offered the viewer during the four seasons? *AHS: Murder House* season revolves around two strongly sexualized major characters: the rapist male figure in a BDSM black latex suit and Moira, a deceivingly young/old maid that has the ability to change her appearance to the praying eye of men. Both present characteristics of sexual threat and impurity, and embody the interstitial and contradictory categories of monstrosity described by Noel Carroll in *Philosophy of Horror* (31-58). They are dead but acting in the world of the living, they possess two distinctive bodies – one of stimulating desire, the other associated with threat and disgust, and they feed on the corruption of the others.

The breviary or abnormal bodies of the second season count the possessed sex-crazed nun that seduces, humiliates and rapes the strong male characters, the Monsignor Timothy Howard and a Mengele-like doctor Arthur Arden, and the masked mass-murderer Bloody Face, that targets women, skin them and turn them into lamps and house decorations, after raping their bodies. Human in nature, both characters show historically distinct approaches on sex-crime triggers: the Christian take on possession and the psychoanalytic oedipal complex. The third season opens to the classic horrific myth of *vagina dentata*, or the fatal vagina, and also employs ancient figures like the Minotaur or the re-assembled body of the perfect man, while the fourth is a constant display of abnormal physical traits that become strongly sexualized, from the three-breasted hermaphrodite, to morbidly overweight woman, the conjoined twins or the lobster-boy’s double-penetrating deformed hands that introduce orgasm to the American perfect housewives.

Hence, the sexual abnormalities of the body in *AHS* address various categories:

- a. augmentation or depreciation of the sexual organs and other body parts associated with pleasure and sexual stimulation (breasts, toned muscles, buttocks);
- b. contradictions between threat and security, disgust and pleasure or impurity and purity;
- c. displacing the role of non-sexual body parts to a fetishistic commodity.

### b. Monstrous sexuality and sexual practices

If the ready-mades strategy and “All monsters are human” tagline restricted the creation of shocking new horrific sexualized bodies, the series aimed at very graphic

and sometimes corny portrayal of what we could call “monstrous sexuality” and the “abnormal” sexual practices. In reviewing the chamber of curious sexual intercourse and sexuality exhibited throughout the series, it is clear that it frequently opposes the idea of normal romantic happily-ever-after heterosexual relationship, just to come to bizarre faux-feminist resolution.

By the frequent depiction of women’s desire and liberating sexual practices *AHS* was seen by some as a feminist take on the subject of female sexual freedom. Throughout the series, several female characters are depicted by their conviction to satisfying their sexual needs and fantasies. In and outside the *Murder House* women characters are adventuring towards the sexual fulfillment of their needs, but they never attain it: older Constance is involved in a sexually-rewarding relationship with a younger man, but she’s always tormented by the insecurities of the age difference; liberated by the presence of her adulterous husband, Vivian Harmon indulges in a graphic scene of self-pleasuring, only to be interrupted by the memory of recent physical, imaginary or symbolical rapes she has been subjected in the past; the hedonist Moira is embittered by the guilt of destroying families; trying to obtain a simulacrum of beauty and pleasure, the mongoloid Addie is killed. In *AHS*, sex leads not to pleasure, and more clearly not to happiness.

It is not uncommon for the psychiatric asylums to contain so-called sexual deviants, much more if it is associated with a monastery’s space, so the second season of *AHS* becomes an excess of paraphilia. The most prominent figure of the whole season is most certainly the nymphomaniac, depicted by male or masculinized characters as morbid erotomania, and lack of godly attributes. But this liberty at following this potentially liberating hedonist path is soon and violently sanctioned, by destroying the appeal-factor of the woman and converting her into one of the most hideous monster on the series. From the very start of the third seasons the fact that the trinomial relation between sex, pleasure and happiness/fulfillment it’s still at its doom, as a teenage witch’s first sexual attempt becomes a bloodbath caused by her monstrous vagina. Throughout the *Coven* season, all intercourse is disturbing, banned or carries a sense of tragedy and desperation. The main character, Fiona Goode finds love as the cancer consume her last days and breaths, her daughter’s sexual endeavors are just desperate attempts to impregnate and fill a barren womb, the Romeo-and-Juliet like of a teenage witch and her zombie boyfriend have to juggle around a tiresome threesome, etc.

The *Freak Show* surfaces two types of women apparently separated by the amount of prior sexual experiences and freakish forms of attractiveness: the virginal conjoined twins and the hypersexualized Desiree, the three-breasted hermaphrodite. Both characters are on an apparent quest for love that, eventually, becomes a quest for sex and pleasure, and thus self-fulfillment, but their prize is not independence, but the re-absorbtion into the model of conventional happily-ever-after housewives.

If the often ambiguous portrayal of women pleasure and desires does not always stand true to the feminist approach, the representations of male in the series are more

standardized. There are various types of men that can easily be melted in a singular freak masculinity: the deceiving, sexually frustrated and infantilized male that tries to re-possess the women by several forms of aggression.

Maybe the most by the book and in-your-face character is Bloody Face, the masked women aggressor of the *Asylum* season, and his perpetual oedipal quest for colostrum and motherly sex initiation, followed in the strict convention of horror series by whole new generations of male aggressors. But he is denied the sexual domination of woman, because she does not desire and seek the company of men.

If women are cautioned against the risks of losing themselves in the realm of senses, the men seem they don't stand any chance. Chronic masturbators caught up in boyish penis wars, always revolving around sexual fantasies that never come true. It's the apocalypse of phallogocentric thinking. No matter the size of that cock, that hole is not to be fully filled. There is always a more endowed man around the corner [you see it every day in online ads or spam mail] that can shadow your masculinity. In *AHS* heterosexual male are plagued by impotence, infertility and lack of control over their penis or are the shamed possessors of micro phalluses.

### Capacitating memetic response on the audience

One of the essential features of cult phenomena is the strong bond such products (books, comics, movies, TV shows, music) form with a segment of the larger category of art consumers that identify themselves also by the consumption of the respective items. As Roberta Pearson states "[t]he mode of reception, rather than the mode of production or textual characteristics, seems best to define cult film" (Pearson 2003).

In fact, though the means of community creation and interaction differ from the mid 80's, Eco's outline of the response to cult have not changed considerably:

The work must be loved, obviously, but it's not enough. It must provide a completely furnished world so that its fans can quote characters and episodes as they were aspects of the fan's private sectarian world, a world which one can make up quizzes and play trivia games so that the adepts of the sect recognize through each other a shared expertise. Naturally all these elements (characters and episodes) must have some archetypal appeal (...) [they] become catalyzers of collective memories. (3)

Like most of contemporary TV series, *AHS* quickly sparked the interest of online communities of viewers, from fan-fiction writers to YouTube or Podcast interpreters, and meme creators. In the line of understanding how sex and violence exploitation throughout the series helped the *cult*-ist approach to the series one must ask what the residuals are of all these freak shows the *AHS* creators made a display of in the past years. A quick search for the series title on the 700 million visitor a month user-generated platform 9gag returns over 300 memes related to *AHS*, and some hundreds more on the fan-based Facebook channel *AHS* memes; of those, approximately 25% contain references to sex or sexuality, while only 10% address directly the horrific

experience of watching the show. Of the total number, more than a half use parodic references to lines of dialogue, characters or scenes, and try to connect features of the series with other cultural products or real scenes or events.

Of all the abnormal creatures or occurrences from the show, the most fascinating to the meme creators are Moira – the hypersexualized deceiving old/young maid from *AHS: Murder House*, Zoe Benson – the possessor of a murderous vagina in *AHS: Coven* and Tate Langdon – the rapist and mass-murderer Romeo of *AHS: Murder House*. Of the humoristic approaches to the sexual practices in the series one mock-postcard with old Moira's face on it, reading "Cleaning is hard, bur your husband is harder" stands out from the crowd. Visual sexual triggers as well as verbal puns and explicit content in the dialogue have been some of the series strategies.

Like all horror cult classics, *AHS* still lives on its online-hosted fandom. Excepting 9gag, there are more than 1,200 posts on fanfiction.net that revolve around show characters, tens of Facebook pages target the series fans, and all major user-generated sites have *AHS* related posts.

If counting the 9gag users' creations could be dismissed on the account of the platform's humoristic purpose, other press or fan-generated articles and commentaries reveal the most shocking moments of the series. The most striking scenes for their sexual content, as remembered and online propagated by viewers are: Moira seducing Ben Harmon by herself or through a titillating three-some proposition together with the infamous Black Dahlia, and Moira in a sex swing, Ben masturbating while crying, Vivian Harmon pleasing herself and Vivian Harmon raped by the Rubber Man in *AHS: Murder House*, sex in bondage in an abandoned psychiatric institution, demonized Mary Eunice in red lingerie in *AHS: Asylum*, Cordelia Goode and her husband having sex inside a pentagram with serpents lurking around, the incestuous mother, Queenie masturbating in front of the minotaur in *AHS: Coven*, Jimmy Darling hand-pleasing some housewives, Elsa Mars' snuff video in *AHS: Freak Show*.

The IMDb Parent Guide page, also user generated, shows an increased concern with the shows exploitation of sex and nudity (8/10 for the first and the third season, 9/10 for the other two). For all the seasons, the sex content is considered to be rather strong, though not explicit, but the sexual innuendos frequently turn out to be very direct. For almost every episode, the ratings for sexual content are larger even than the gore and violence ones.

### Conclusions

Hypersexualization is definitely one of the most prominent storytelling strategies of contemporary TV series, and usually is easily dismissed as a conspicuous manner of viewer attraction and engagement. But for TV show like *American Horror Story* specially-built from the residuals and ready-mades of the named genre and aiming at a *cult*-ist audience the use of numerous, diversified and intensified sexual imagery is more than just a marketing catch, like with other nowadays series. The depiction of

sexual practices through images and/or dialogue that would get the wind up William H. Hays is inscribed in the genre and the traditional appeal to exploitation of cult films, as well as in creating extreme stories about sexuality and sexual behavior. Through its strategies, the series stands as an example for what Roberta Pearson has been already called “the mainstreaming of cult television” (in Abbot, 9).

Looking at the online responses to the series substantiated by viewers’ communities there is a clear outline of how these images are addressed by contemporary audiences, through the memetic capacities of these extreme rearrangements of well-known horror tropes in contemporary popular culture. Like all horror fans, *AHS* audience enjoys the consumption of violence and sex and also define themselves by the pleasure they take into this, becoming active participants in disseminating these features online. Thus, all the extreme monstrosity and disturbing sexuality extend the limits of what can be said, heard, and watched on TV.

### References

1. ABBOTT, Stacey (ed.). *The Cult TV Book*. New York: I.B. Tauris. 2010. Print.
2. ATTWOOD, Feona (ed.). *Mainstreaming sex. The Sexualization of Western Culture*. New York: I.B. Tauris. 2009. Print.
3. CARROLL, Noël. *The Philosophy of Horror or Paradoxes of the Heart*. New York: Routledge. 1990. Print.
4. ECO, Umberto. “Casablanca. Cult Movies and Intertextual Collage”. *SubStance*. Vol. 14, No. 2, Issue 47. University of Wisconsin Press. 1985.
5. GLYNN, Basil, James Aston, Beth Johnson. *Television, sex and society. Analyzing contemporary representations*. New York: Continuum Books. 2012. Print.
6. McNAIR, Brian. *Mediated sex: Pornography and postmodern culture*. New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press. 1996. Print.
7. PAUL, Pamela. *Pornified: How Pornography is Damaging Our Lives, Our Relationships, and Our Families*. New York: Owl Books. 2006. Print.
8. PEARSON, Roberta. *Kings of Infinite Space: Cult Television Characters and Narrative Possibilities*. Web. <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/scope/documents/2003/november-2003/pearson.pdf>.

### Online resources:

9. “Pornography Statistics: Annual Report 2015”. *CovenantEyes.com*. March, 21, 2016. Web.
10. DEGGANS, Eric. “Less sex, violence on TV, study says”. *St. Petersburg Times*. March, 22, 2002. Web.
11. PUZZANGHERA, Jim. “Sex, violence cram TV’s ‘family hour,’ study says”. *Los Angeles Times*. September, 06, 2007. Web.