

Profanations

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other light than the opaque one that radiates from the testimony of this absence.

But this is precisely why the author also marks the limit beyond which no interpretation can proceed. Reading must come to an end at the place where the reading of what has been poetized encounters in some way the empty place of what was lived. It is just as illegitimate to attempt to construct the personality of the author by means of the work as it is to turn his gesture into the secret cipher of reading.

Perhaps Foucault's aporia becomes less enigmatic at this point. The subject — like the author, like the life of the infamous man — is not something that can be directly attained as a substantial reality present in some place; on the contrary, it is what results from the encounter and from the hand-to-hand confrontation with the apparatuses in which it has been put — and has put itself — into play. For writing (any writing, not only the writing of the chancellors of the archive of infamy) is an apparatus too, and the history of human beings is perhaps nothing other than the hand-to-hand confrontation with the apparatuses they have produced — above all with language. And just as the author must remain unexpressed in the work while still attesting, in precisely this way, to his own irreducible presence, so must subjectivity show itself and increase its resistance at the point where its apparatuses capture it and put it into play. A subjectivity is produced where the living being, encountering language and putting itself into play in language without reserve, exhibits in a gesture the impossibility of its being reduced to this gesture. All the rest is psychology, and nowhere in psychology do we encounter anything like an ethical subject, a form of life.

In Praise of Profanation

The Roman jurists knew perfectly well what it meant to "profane." Sacred or religious were the things that in some way belonged to the gods. As such, they were removed from the free use and commerce of men; they could be neither sold nor held in lien, neither given for usufruct nor burdened by servitude. Any act that violated or transgressed this special unavailability, which reserved these things exclusively for the celestial gods (in which case they were properly called "sacred") or for the gods of the underworld (in which case they were simply called "religious"), was sacrilegious. And if "to consecrate" (*sacrare*) was the term that indicated the removal of things from the sphere of human law, "to profane" meant, conversely, to return them to the free use of men. The great jurist Trebatius thus wrote, "In the strict sense, profane is the term for something that was once sacred or religious and is returned to the use and property of men." And "pure" was the place that was no longer allotted to the gods of the dead and was now "neither sacred, nor holy, nor religious, freed from all names of this sort."¹

The thing that is returned to the common use of men is pure, profane, free of sacred names. But use does not appear here as something natural: rather, one arrives at it only by

means of profanation. There seems to be a peculiar relationship between "using" and "profaning" that we must clarify.

Religion can be defined as that which removes things, places, animals, or people from common use and transfers them to a separate sphere. Not only is there no religion without separation, but every separation also contains or preserves within itself a genuinely religious core. The apparatus that effects and regulates the separation is sacrifice: through a series of meticulous rituals, which differ in various cultures and which Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss have patiently inventoried, sacrifice always sanctions the passage of something from the profane to the sacred, from the human sphere to the divine.² What is essential is the caesura that divides the two spheres, the threshold that the victim must cross, no matter in which direction. That which has been ritually separated can be returned from the rite to the profane sphere. Thus one of the simplest forms of profanation occurs through contact (*contagione*) during the same sacrifice that effects and regulates the passage of the victim from the human to the divine sphere. One part of the victim (the entrails, or *exta*: the liver, heart, gallbladder, lungs) is reserved for the gods, while the rest can be consumed by men. The participants in the rite need only touch these organs for them to become profane and edible. There is a profane contagion, a touch that disenchants and returns to use what the sacred had separated and petrified.

The term *religio* does not derive, as an insipid and incorrect etymology would have it, from *religare* (that which binds and unites the human and the divine). It comes instead from *relegere*, which indicates the stance of scrupulousness and at-

tention that must be adopted in relations with the gods, the uneasy hesitation (the "rereading [*rileggere*]") before forms — and formulae — that must be observed in order to respect the separation between the sacred and the profane. *Religio* is not what unites men and gods but what ensures they remain distinct. It is not disbelief and indifference toward the divine, therefore, that stand in opposition to religion, but "negligence," that is, a behavior that is free and "distracted" (that is to say, released from the *religio* of norms) before things and their use, before forms of separation and their meaning. To profane means to open the possibility of a special form of negligence, which ignores separation or, rather, puts it to a particular use.

The passage from the sacred to the profane can, in fact, also come about by means of an entirely inappropriate use (or, rather, reuse) of the sacred: namely, play. It is well known that the spheres of play and the sacred are closely connected. Most of the games with which we are familiar derive from ancient sacred ceremonies, from divinatory practices and rituals that once belonged, broadly speaking, to the religious sphere. The *girotondo* was originally a marriage rite; playing with a ball reproduces the struggle of the gods for possession of the sun; games of chance derive from oracular practices; the spinning top and the chessboard were instruments of divination. In analyzing the relationship between games and rites, Emile Benveniste shows that play not only derives from the sphere of the sacred but also in some ways represents its overturning. The power of the sacred act, he writes, lies in the conjunction of the myth that tells the story and the rite that reproduces and stages it. Play breaks up this unity: as *ludus*, or physical play, it drops the myth and preserves the rite; as *iocus*, or wordplay, it

effaces the rite and allows the myth to survive. "If the sacred can be defined through the consubstantial unity of myth and rite, we can say that one has play when only half of the sacred operation is completed, translating only the myth into words or only the rite into actions."³

This means that play frees and distracts humanity from the sphere of the sacred, without simply abolishing it. The use to which the sacred is returned is a special one that does not coincide with utilitarian consumption. In fact, the "profanation" of play does not solely concern the religious sphere. Children, who play with whatever old thing falls into their hands, make toys out of things that also belong to the spheres of economics, war, law, and other activities that we are used to thinking of as serious. All of a sudden, a car, a firearm, or a legal contract becomes a toy. What is common to these cases and the profanation of the sacred is the passage from a *religio* that is now felt to be false or oppressive to negligence as *vera religio*. This, however, does not mean neglect (no kind of attention can compare to that of a child at play) but a new dimension of use, which children and philosophers give to humanity. It is the sort of use that Benjamin must have had in mind when he wrote of Kafka's *The New Attorney* that the law that is no longer applied but only studied is the gate to justice.⁴ Just as the *religio* that is played with but no longer observed opens the gate to use, so the powers [*potenze*] of economics, law, and politics, deactivated in play, can become the gateways to a new happiness.

Play as an organ of profanation is in decline everywhere. Modern man proves he no longer knows how to play precisely through the vertiginous proliferation of new and old games. Indeed, at parties, in dances, and at play, he desperately and

stubbornly seeks exactly the opposite of what he could find there: the possibility of reentering the lost feast, returning to the sacred and its rites, even in the form of the inane ceremonies of the new spectacular religion or a tango lesson in a provincial dance hall. In this sense, televised game shows are part of a new liturgy; they secularize an unconsciously religious intention. To return to play its purely profane vocation is a political task.

In this sense, we must distinguish between secularization and profanation. Secularization is a form of repression. It leaves intact the forces it deals with by simply moving them from one place to another. Thus the political secularization of theological concepts (the transcendence of God as a paradigm of sovereign power) does nothing but displace the heavenly monarchy onto an earthly monarchy, leaving its power intact.

Profanation, however, neutralizes what it profanes. Once profaned, that which was unavailable and separate loses its aura and is returned to use. Both are political operations: the first guarantees the exercise of power by carrying it back to a sacred model; the second deactivates the apparatuses of power and returns to common use the spaces that power had seized.

Philologists never cease to be surprised by the double, contradictory meaning that the verb *profanare* seems to have in Latin: it means, on the one hand, to render profane and, on the other (in only a few cases) to sacrifice. It is an ambiguity that seems inherent in the vocabulary of the sacred as such: the adjective *sacer* means both "august, consecrated to the gods," and (as Freud noted) "cursed, excluded from the community." The ambiguity at issue here does not arise solely out of a misunderstanding but is, so to speak, constitutive of the profanatory

operation — or, inversely, of the consecratory one. Insofar as these operations refer to a single object that must pass from the profane to the sacred and from the sacred to the profane, they must every time reckon with something like a residue of profanity in every consecrated thing and a remnant of sacredness in every profaned object.

The same is true of the term *sacer*. It indicates that which, through the solemn act of *sacratio* or *devotio* (when a commander consecrates his life to the gods of the underworld in order to ensure victory), has been given over to the gods and belongs exclusively to them. And yet, in the expression *homo sacer*, the adjective seems to indicate an individual who, having been excluded from the community, can be killed with impunity but cannot be sacrificed to the gods. What exactly has occurred here? A sacred man, one who belongs to the gods, has survived the rite that separated him from other men and continues to lead an apparently profane existence among them. Although he lives in the profane world, there inheres in his body an irreducible residue of sacredness. This removes him from normal commerce with his kind and exposes him to the possibility of violent death, which returns him to the gods to whom he truly belongs. As for his fate in the divine sphere, he cannot be sacrificed and is excluded from the cult because his life is already the property of the gods, and yet, insofar as it survives itself, so to speak, it introduces an incongruous remnant of profanity into the domain of the sacred. That is to say, in the machine of sacrifice, sacred and profane represent the two poles of a system in which a floating signifier travels from one domain to the other without ceasing to refer to the same object. This is precisely how the machine ensures the distribution of use among humans and divine beings and can eventu-

ally return what had been consecrated to the gods to men. Hence the mingling of the two operations in Roman sacrifice, in which one part of the same consecrated victim is profaned by contagion and consumed by men, while another is assigned to the gods.

From this perspective, it becomes easier to understand why, in the Christian religion, theologians, pontiffs, and emperors had to show such obsessive care and implacable seriousness in ensuring, as far as possible, the coherence and intelligibility of the notions of transubstantiation in the sacrifice of the mass and incarnation and *homousia* in the dogma of the trinity. What was at stake here was nothing less than the survival of a religious system that had involved God himself as the victim of the sacrifice and, in this way, introduced in him that separation which in paganism concerned only human things. That is to say, the idea of the simultaneous presence of two natures in a single person or victim was an effort to cope with confusion between divine and human that threatened to paralyze the sacrificial machine of Christianity. The doctrine of incarnation guaranteed that divine and human nature were both present without ambiguity in the same person, just as transubstantiation ensured that the species of bread and wine were transformed without remainder into the body of Christ. Nevertheless, in Christianity, with the entrance of God as the victim of sacrifice and with the strong presence of messianic tendencies that put the distinction between sacred and profane into crisis, the religious machine seems to reach a limit point or zone of undecidability, where the divine sphere is always in the process of collapsing into the human sphere and man always already passes over into the divine.

"Capitalism as Religion" is the title of one of Benjamin's most penetrating posthumous fragments. According to Benjamin, capitalism is not solely a secularization of the Protestant faith, as it is for Max Weber, but is itself essentially a religious phenomenon, which develops parasitically from Christianity. As the religion of modernity, it is defined by three characteristics: first, it is a cultic religion, perhaps the most extreme and absolute one that has ever existed. In it, everything has meaning only in reference to the fulfillment of a cult, not in relation to a dogma or an idea. Second, this cult is permanent; it is "the celebration of a cult *sans trêve et sans merci*."⁵ Here it is not possible to distinguish between workdays and holidays; rather, there is a single, uninterrupted holiday, in which work coincides with the celebration of the cult. Third, the capitalist cult is not directed toward redemption from or atonement for guilt, but toward guilt itself. "Capitalism is probably the first instance of a cult that creates guilt, not atonement.... A monstrous sense of guilt that knows no redemption becomes the cult, not to atone for this guilt but to make it universal... and to once and for all include God in this guilt.... [God] is not dead; he has been incorporated into the destiny of man."⁶

Precisely because it strives with all its might not toward redemption but toward guilt, not toward hope but toward despair, capitalism as religion does not aim at the transformation of the world but at its destruction. And in our time its dominion is so complete that, according to Benjamin, even the three great prophets of modernity (Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud) conspire with it; they are, in some way, on the side of the religion of despair. "This passage of the planet 'Man' through the house of despair in the absolute loneliness of his path is the ethos that

Nietzsche defined. This man is the superman, the first to recognize the religion of capitalism and begin to bring it to fulfillment."⁷ Freudian theory, too, belongs to the priesthood of the capitalist cult: "What has been repressed, the idea of sin, is capital itself, which pays interest on the hell of the unconscious."⁸ And for Marx, capitalism "becomes socialism by means of the simple and compound interest that are functions of *Schuld* [guilt/debt]."⁹

Let us try to carry on Benjamin's reflections from the perspective that interests us here. We could say that capitalism, in pushing to the extreme a tendency already present in Christianity, generalizes in every domain the structure of separation that defines religion. Where sacrifice once marked the passage from the profane to the sacred and from the sacred to the profane, there is now a single, multiform, ceaseless process of separation that assails every thing, every place, every human activity in order to divide it from itself. This process is entirely indifferent to the caesura between sacred and profane, between divine and human. In its extreme form, the capitalist religion realizes the pure form of separation, to the point that there is nothing left to separate. An absolute profanation without remainder now coincides with an equally vacuous and total consecration. In the commodity, separation inheres in the very form of the object, which splits into use-value and exchange-value and is transformed into an ungraspable fetish. The same is true for everything that is done, produced, or experienced—even the human body, even sexuality, even language. They are now divided from themselves and placed in a separate sphere that no longer defines any substantial division and where all use becomes and remains impossible. This sphere is consumption.

If, as has been suggested, we use the term "spectacle" for the extreme phase of capitalism in which we are now living, in which everything is exhibited in its separation from itself, then spectacle and consumption are the two sides of a single impossibility of using. What cannot be used is, as such, given over to consumption or to spectacular exhibition. This means that it has become impossible to profane (or at least that it requires special procedures). If to profane means to return to common use that which has been removed to the sphere of the sacred, the capitalist religion in its extreme phase aims at creating something absolutely unprofanable.

The theological canon of consumption as the impossibility of use was established in the thirteenth century by the Roman Curia during its conflict with the Franciscan order. In their call for "highest poverty," the Franciscans asserted the possibility of a use entirely removed from the sphere of law [*diritto*], which, in order to distinguish it from usufruct and from every other right [*diritto*] to use, they called *usus facti*, de facto use (or use of fact). Against them, John XXII, an implacable adversary of the order, issued his bull *Ad Conditorem Canonum*. In things that are objects of consumption, such as food, clothing, and so on, there cannot exist, he argues, a use distinct from property, because this use coincides entirely with the act of their consumption, that is, their destruction (*abusus*). Consumption, which necessarily destroys the thing, is nothing but the impossibility or the negation of use, which presupposes that the substance of the thing remains intact (*salva rei substantia*). That is not all: a simple de facto use, distinct from property, does not exist in nature; it is in no way something that one can "have." "The act of use itself exists in nature neither

before being exercised nor while being exercised nor after having been exercised. In fact, consumption, even in the act in which it is exercised, is always in the past or the future and, as such, cannot be said to exist in nature, but only in memory or anticipation. Therefore, it cannot be had but in the instant of its disappearance."¹⁰

In this way, with an unwitting prophecy, John XXII provided the paradigm of an impossibility of using that has reached its fulfillment many centuries later in consumer society. This obstinate denial of use, however, captures the nature of use more radically than could any definition put forth by the Franciscan order. For pure use appears, in the Pope's account, not so much as something inexistent — indeed, it exists for an instant in the act of consumption — but rather as something that one could never have, that one could never possess as property (*dominium*). That is to say, use is always a relationship with something that cannot be appropriated; it refers to things insofar as they cannot become objects of possession. But in this way use also lays bare the true nature of property, which is nothing but the device that moves the free use of men into a separate sphere, where it is converted into a right. If, today, consumers in mass society are unhappy, it is not only because they consume objects that have incorporated within themselves their own inability to be used. It is also, and above all, because they believe they are exercising their right to property on these objects, because they have become incapable of profaning them.

The impossibility of using has its emblematic place in the Museum. The museification of the world is today an accomplished fact. One by one, the spiritual potentialities that

defined the people's lives — art, religion, philosophy, the idea of nature, even politics — have docilely withdrawn into the Museum. "Museum" here is not a given physical space or place but the separate dimension to which what was once — but is no longer — felt as true and decisive has moved. In this sense, the Museum can coincide with an entire city (such as Evora and Venice, which were declared World Heritage sites), a region (when it is declared a park or nature preserve), and even a group of individuals (insofar as they represent a form of life that has disappeared). But more generally, everything today can become a Museum, because this term simply designates the exhibition of an impossibility of using, of dwelling, of experiencing.

Thus, in the Museum, the analogy between capitalism and religion becomes clear. The Museum occupies exactly the space and function once reserved for the Temple as the place of sacrifice. To the faithful in the Temple — the pilgrims who would travel across the earth from temple to temple, from sanctuary to sanctuary — correspond today the tourists who restlessly travel in a world that has been abstracted into a Museum. But while the faithful and the pilgrims ultimately participated in a sacrifice that reestablished the right relationships between the divine and the human by moving the victim into the sacred sphere, the tourists celebrate on themselves a sacrificial act that consists in the anguishing experience of the destruction of all possible use. If the Christians were "pilgrims," that is, strangers on the earth, because their homeland was in heaven, the adepts of the new capitalist cult have no homeland because they dwell in the pure form of separation. Wherever they go, they find pushed to the extreme the same impossibility of dwelling that they knew in their houses and their cities, the same inability to use that they experienced in supermarkets, in malls, and on

television shows. For this reason, insofar as it represents the cult and central altar of the capitalist religion, tourism is the primary industry in the world, involving more than six hundred and fifty million people each year. Nothing is so astonishing as the fact that millions of ordinary people are able to carry out on their own flesh what is perhaps the most desperate experience that one can have: the irrevocable loss of all use, the absolute impossibility of profaning.

It is, however, possible that the unprofanable, on which the capitalist religion is founded, is not truly such, and that today there are still effective forms of profanation. For this reason, we must recall that profanation does not simply restore something like a natural use that existed before being separated into the religious, economic, or juridical sphere. As the example of play clearly shows, this operation is more cunning and complex than that and is not limited to abolishing the form of separation in order to regain an uncontaminated use that lies either beyond or before it. Even in nature there are profanations. The cat who plays with a ball of yarn as if it were a mouse — just as the child plays with ancient religious symbols or objects that once belonged to the economic sphere — knowingly uses the characteristic behaviors of predatory activity (or, in the case of the child, of the religious cult or the world of work) in vain. These behaviors are not effaced, but, thanks to the substitution of the yarn for the mouse (or the toy for the sacred object), deactivated and thus opened up to a new, possible use.

But what sort of use? For the cat, what is the possible use for the ball of yarn? It consists in freeing a behavior from its genetic inscription within a given sphere (predatory activity, hunting). The freed behavior still reproduces and mimics the

forms of the activity from which it has been emancipated, but, in emptying them of their sense and of any obligatory relationship to an end, it opens them and makes them available for a new use. The game with the yarn liberates the mouse from being prey and the predatory activity from being necessarily directed toward the capture and death of the mouse. And yet, this play stages the very same behaviors that define hunting. The activity that results from this thus becomes a pure means, that is, a praxis that, while firmly maintaining its nature as a means, is emancipated from its relationship to an end; it has joyously forgotten its goal and can now show itself as such, as a means without an end. The creation of a new use is possible only by deactivating an old use, rendering it inoperative.

Separation is also and above all exercised in the sphere of the body, as the repression and separation of certain physiological functions. One of these is defecation, which, in our society, is isolated and hidden by means of a series of devices and prohibitions that concern both behavior and language. What could it mean to "profane defecation"? Certainly not to regain a supposed naturalness, or simply to enjoy it as a perverse transgression (which is still better than nothing). Rather, it is a matter of archaeologically arriving at defecation as a field of polar tensions between nature and culture, private and public, singular and common. That is: to learn a new use for feces, just as babies tried to do in their way, before repression and separation intervened. The forms of this common use can only be invented collectively. As Italo Calvino once noted, feces are a human production just like any other, only there has never been a history of them.¹¹ This is why every individual attempt to profane them can have only a parodic value, as in the scene

where the dinner party defecates around a dining table in the film by Luis Buñuel.¹²

Feces — it is clear — are here only as a symbol of what has been separated and can be returned to common use. But is a society without separation possible? The question is perhaps poorly formulated. For to profane means not simply to abolish and erase separations but to learn to put them to a new use, to play with them. The classless society is not a society that has abolished and lost all memory of class differences but a society that has learned to deactivate the apparatuses of those differences in order to make a new use possible, in order to transform them into pure means.

Nothing, however, is as fragile and precarious as the sphere of pure means. Play, in our society, also has an episodic character, after which normal life must once again continue on its course (and the cat must continue its hunt). No one knows better than children how terrible and disquieting a toy can be once the game it forms a part of is over. The instrument of liberation turns into an awkward piece of wood; the doll on which the little girl has showered her love becomes a cold, shameful wax puppet that an evil magician can capture and bewitch and use against us.

This evil magician is the high priest of the capitalist religion. If the apparatuses of the capitalist cult are so effective, it is not so much because they act on primary behaviors, but because they act on pure means, that is, on behaviors that have been separated from themselves and thus detached from any relationship to an end. In its extreme phase, capitalism is nothing but a gigantic apparatus for capturing pure means, that is, profanatory behaviors. Pure means, which represent the deactivation

and rupture of all separation, are in turn separated into a special sphere. Language is one example. To be sure, power has always sought to secure control of social communication, using language as a means for diffusing its own ideology and inducing voluntary obedience. But today this instrumental function — which is still effective at the margins of the system, when situations of danger or exception arise — has ceded its place to a different procedure of control, which, in separating language into the spectacular sphere, assails it in its idling, that is, in its possible profanatory potential. More essential than the function of propaganda, which views language as an instrument directed toward an end, is the capture and neutralization of the pure means par excellence, that is, language that has emancipated itself from its communicative ends and thus makes itself available for a new use.

The apparatuses of the media aim precisely at neutralizing this profanatory power of language as pure means, at preventing language from disclosing the possibility of a new use, a new experience of the word. Already the church, after the first two centuries of hoping and waiting, conceived of its function as essentially one of neutralizing the new experience of the word that Paul, placing it at the center of the messianic announcement, had called *pistis*, faith. The same thing occurs in the system of the spectacular religion, where the pure means, suspended and exhibited in the sphere of the media, shows its own emptiness, speaks only its own nothingness, as if no new use were possible, as if no other experience of the word were possible.

This nullification of pure means is most clear in the apparatus that, more than any other, appears to have realized the capital-

ist dream of producing an unprofanable: pornography. Those who have some familiarity with the history of erotic photography know that in its beginnings the models put on a romantic, almost dreamy expression, as if the camera had caught them in the intimacy of their *boudoirs*. Sometimes, lazily stretched on *canapés*, they pretend to sleep or even read, as in certain nudes by Bruno Braquehais and Louis-Camille d'Olivier. Other times, it seems that the indiscreet photographer has caught them all alone, looking at themselves in the mirror (this is the scene preferred by Auguste Belloc). Quite soon, however, in step with the capitalist absolutization of the commodity and exchange-value, their expressions changed and became more brazen; the poses more complicated and animated, as if the models were intentionally exaggerating their indecency, thus showing their awareness of being exposed to the lens. But it is only in our time that this process arrives at its extreme stage. Film historians record as a disconcerting novelty the sequence in *Summer with Monika* (1952) when the protagonist, Harriet Andersson, suddenly fixes her gaze for a few seconds on the camera ("Here for the first time in the history of cinema," the director Ingmar Bergman commented, "there is established a shameless and direct contact with the spectator"). Since then, pornography has rendered this procedure banal: in the very act of executing their most intimate caresses, porn stars now look resolutely into the camera, showing that they are more interested in the spectator than in their partners.

Thus is fully realized the principle that Benjamin articulated in 1936 while writing "Eduard Fuchs: Collector and Historian." "If there is anything sexually arousing here," he writes, "it is more the idea that a naked body is being exhibited before the camera than the sight of nakedness itself."¹³ One year earlier,

Benjamin had created the concept of “exhibition-value” (*Ausstellungswert*) to characterize the transformation that the work of art undergoes in the era of its technological reproducibility. Nothing better characterizes the new condition of objects and even of the human body in the era of fulfilled capitalism. Into the Marxian opposition between use-value and exchange-value, exhibition-value introduces a third term, which cannot be reduced to the first two. It is not use-value, because what is exhibited is, as such, removed from the sphere of use; it is not exchange-value, because it in no way measures any labor power.

But it is perhaps only in the sphere of the human face that the mechanism of exhibition-value finds its proper place. It is a common experience that the face of a woman who feels she is being looked at becomes inexpressive. That is, the awareness of being exposed to the gaze creates a vacuum in consciousness and powerfully disrupts the expressive processes that usually animate the face. It is this brazen-faced indifference that fashion models, porn stars, and others whose profession it is to show themselves must learn to acquire: they show nothing but the showing itself (that is, one’s own absolute mediality). In this way, the face is loaded until it bursts with exhibition-value. Yet, precisely through this nullification of expressivity, eroticism penetrates where it could have no place: the human face, which does not know nudity, for it is always already bare. Shown as a pure means beyond any concrete expressivity, it becomes available for a new use, a new form of erotic communication.

One porn star, who passes off her efforts as artistic performances, has recently pushed this procedure to the extreme. She has herself photographed in the act of performing or submitting to the most obscene acts, but always so that her face is

fully visible in the foreground. But instead of simulating pleasure, as dictated by the conventions of the genre, she affects and displays — like fashion models — the most absolute indifference, the most stoic ataraxy. To whom is Chloë des Lysses indifferent? To her partner, certainly. But also to the spectators, who are surprised to find that the star, although she is aware of being exposed to the gaze, hasn’t even the slightest complicity with them. Her impassive face breaks every connection between lived experience and the expressive sphere; it no longer expresses anything but shows itself as a place without a hint of expression, as a pure means.

It is this profanatory potential that the apparatus of pornography seeks to neutralize. What it captures is the human capacity to let erotic behaviors idle, to profane them, by detaching them from their immediate ends. But while these behaviors thus open themselves to a different possible use, which concerns not so much the pleasure of the partner as a new collective use of sexuality, pornography intervenes at this point to block and divert the profanatory intention. The solitary and desperate consumption of the pornographic image thus replaces the promise of a new use.

All apparatuses of power are always double: they arise, on the one hand, from an individual subjectivizing behavior and, on the other, from its capture in a separate sphere. There is often nothing reprehensible about the individual behavior in itself, and it can, indeed, express a liberatory intent; it is reprehensible only if the behavior — when it has not been constrained by circumstances or by force — lets itself be captured in the apparatus. Neither the brazen-faced gesture of the porn star nor the impassive face of the fashion model is, as such, to be blamed. Instead, what is disgraceful — both politically and

morally — are the apparatus of pornography and the apparatus of the fashion show, which have diverted them from their possible use.

The unprofanable of pornography — everything that is unprofanable — is founded on the arrest and diversion of an authentically profanatory intention. For this reason, we must always wrest from the apparatuses — from all apparatuses — the possibility of use that they have captured. The profanation of the unprofanable is the political task of the coming generation.

The Six Most Beautiful Minutes in the History of Cinema

Sancho Panza enters a cinema in a provincial city. He is looking for Don Quixote and finds him sitting off to the side, staring at the screen. The theater is almost full; the balcony — which is a sort of giant terrace — is packed with raucous children. After several unsuccessful attempts to reach Don Quixote, Sancho reluctantly sits down in one of the lower seats, next to a little girl (Dulcinea?), who offers him a lollipop. The screening has begun; it is a costume film: on the screen, knights in armor are riding along. Suddenly, a woman appears; she is in danger. Don Quixote abruptly rises, unsheaths his sword, rushes toward the screen, and, with several lunges, begins to shred the cloth. The woman and the knights are still visible on the screen, but the black slash opened by Don Quixote's sword grows ever larger, implacably devouring the images. In the end, nothing is left of the screen, and only the wooden structure supporting it remains visible. The outraged audience leaves the theater, but the children on the balcony continue their fanatical cheers for Don Quixote. Only the little girl down on the floor stares at him in disapproval.

What are we to do with our imaginations? Love them and believe in them to the point of having to destroy and falsify