

Word strips it of all appeal. It flattens it. The hermetics of mystery does not equal diabolism to be eliminated at all costs in favor of transparency. It creates symbolism—indeed, it represents a singular cultural technique—which generates depth (even if it may prove illusory).

transparency n/ medium of beauty  
creatively inherent n/ pornography

THE SOCIETY OF PORNOGRAPHY

Transparency is not the medium of the beautiful. According to Benjamin, beauty requires what conceals and what is concealed to be inextricably joined:

The beautiful is neither the veil nor the veiled object but rather the object in its veil. Unveiled, however, it would prove to be infinitely inconspicuous [*unscheinbar*]. . . . For that object, to which in the last instance the veil is essential, is not to be characterized otherwise. Since only the beautiful and outside it nothing—veiling or being veiled—can be essential, the divine ground of the being of beauty lies in the secret.<sup>1</sup>

Beauty cannot be revealed insofar as it is necessarily tied to veil and veiling. What is veiled remains self-identical only under the veil. Unveiling makes it disappear. Therefore, nothing like naked beauty exists: "in veiless nakedness the essentially beautiful has withdrawn, and in the naked body of the human being are attained a beauty beyond all beauty—the sublime—and a work beyond all beauty beyond all beauty—the sublime—*Gebilde* creations—that of the Creator."<sup>2</sup> Only a form or an object can be beautiful. In contrast, nakedness proves sublime—without a form or image—when secrecy, the defining trait of beauty, does not adhere to it. The sublime surpasses the beautiful. Creaturely nakedness, however, proves anything but pornographic. It is sublime

sublime  
Gebilde

[nude word & lack of appeal]

because it points to the work of the Creator. For Kant, too, an object is sublime when it exceeds representation, any effort to picture it. The sublime reaches beyond the imagination [*Einbildungskraft*].

In Christian tradition, nakedness is "inseparable from a theological signature."<sup>3</sup> Before the Fall, Adam and Eve did not stand naked because "clothing of grace," "clothing of light"<sup>4</sup> enveloped them. Sin deprived them of their divine vestment. Utterly exposed, they found themselves forced to cover themselves. Accordingly, nakedness signifies the loss of the clothing of grace. Agamben attempts to conceive of nudity without a theological framework. In the process, however, he extends the sublimity of the naked body, as Benjamin conceives it, into the pornographic. Apropos of a pornographically half-naked model he remarks:

The only thing that the beautiful face can say, exhibiting its nudity with a smile, is "You wanted to see my secret? You wanted to clarify my envelopment? Then look right at it, if you can. Look at this absolute, unforgivable absence of secrets!" . . . Yet it is precisely the disenchantment of beauty in the experience of nudity, this sublime but also miserable exhibition of appearance beyond all mystery and all meaning, that can somehow defuse the theological apparatus.<sup>5</sup>

To be sure, the naked body that stands exhibited pornographically is "miserable," but it is hardly "sublime." The sublime, against which Benjamin sets the beautiful appearance, lacks all exhibition value. It is precisely exhibition that destroys creaturely sublimity. The sublime generates cult value. The pornographically exhibited face that "flirts" with the consumer proves anything but sublime.<sup>6</sup>

Agamben's opposition between the dispositive and free nudity is undialectical. Violence involves more than the dispositive that forces a role—a mask, an expression—on a countenance; it is also formless, pornographic nudity. A body that becomes flesh is not sublime, but obscene. Pornographic nudity borders on the obscenity of the flesh that, as Agamben himself remarks, results from violence: "This is the reason why the sadist tries, in every possible

Sin as demerit of clothing of grace

Benjamin - porn's absence of secret

pornographic nudity - subtle - violence

grace falls to pornography nudity  
grace & the detour

way, to force the body of the Other into incongruous positions that reveal its obscenity, that is, its irreparable loss of all grace."<sup>7</sup>

Above all, grace [*Anmut*] falls victim to Agamben's pornographic nudity. Grace seems suspicious to him because of its theological origin, for it borders on mercy or favor [*Gnade*]. Agamben invokes Sartre's claim that the body owes its gracefulness to goal-oriented movement that makes it an instrument. Yet because of its fixation on purpose, no instrument ever yields gracefulness. After all, it pursues its objective directly and goes to work. In contrast, grace is inhabited by something that makes a turn or a detour. It presumes the free play of gestures and forms, which so to speak surround an action and escape the economy of purpose. Thus, grace occurs between object-oriented action and obscene nudity. This graceful in-between eludes Agamben. Putting oneself on display also makes grace disappear. The youth in Kleist's "On the Theater of Marionettes" loses his gracefulness at the very moment when he stands before the mirror and makes a show of his movements to himself. Here the mirror produces the same effect as the lens into which Agamben's porn actress looks saucily—a look that expresses nothing more than her being on display.<sup>8</sup>

Agamben maintains that exhibition affords a prime opportunity for a nudity to emerge that is free of the theological dispositive; now "profaned," it is supposed to prove accessible to a new use. The face exhibited in this way, without any secret, shows nothing but its showing-itself. It hides nothing and expresses nothing. It has become transparent, so to speak. Agamben sees here a singular appeal, a "particular allure," that derives from "pure exhibition value."<sup>9</sup> Exhibition empties the face into a site preceding expression. Agamben wants such practices of exhibition-that-empties to yield a new form of erotic communication:

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 the

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 mediocrity). 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. . . . Shown as a pure means beyond any concrete expressivity, it becomes available for a new use, a new form of erotic communication.<sup>10</sup>

Here, at the very latest, one must ask whether the face, loaded with exhibition value to the point of bursting, really proves capable of opening up a "new collective use of sexuality," a "new form of erotic communication." Agamben remarks that such nudity, anterior to expression and freed of any theological signature, harbors within itself a "profanatory potential," even if the "apparatus of pornography" neutralizes it. Yet counter to Agamben's assumption, pornography does not impede a new use of sexuality after the fact. The face that has become complicit with nudity is *already* pornographic; its only content consists of its exposure, namely, making a shameless show of awareness of the naked body standing on display. Simply reduced to the state of being exposed, the naked visage that has no secret and has become transparent proves obscene. The face loaded with exhibition value to the point of bursting is pornographic.

Agamben fails to recognize that exposure per se is pornographic. Capitalism heightens the pornographication of society by exhibiting everything as a commodity and handing it over to hypervisibility. It seeks the maximization of exhibition value. Capitalism knows no other use for sexuality. The "collective use of sexuality" that Agamben calls for achieves realization especially in pornographic advertisements. The "solitary consumption of the pornographic image" does not simply "replace" the promise of a new collective use of sexuality. Rather, individual and collective make the same use of pornographic images.

Capitalism heightens pornography by commodifying  
- maximizes exhibition value  
Fairbanks & women in internet - a video

erotic v haecce  
erotic n/ deictic

Above all, Agamben fails to recognize the essential difference between the erotic and the pornographic. Direct putting-on-display of nudity is not erotic. The erotic place of a body is located "where the garment-gapes," where skin "flashes between two edges"—for example, between a glove and a sleeve. Erotic tension does not arise from the permanent exhibition of nudity, but from "staging . . . appearance-as-disappearance."<sup>11</sup> The negativity of "intermittence" lends nudity its glow. The positivity of exhibiting nudity without a veil is pornographic. It lacks erotic luster. The pornographic body is smooth. Nothing interrupts it. Interruption produces ambivalence, ambiguity. This semantic fuzziness is erotic. Moreover, the erotic presumes the negativity of the secret and hiddenness. There is no eroticism of transparency. Precisely where the secret vanishes in favor of total exhibition and bareness, pornography begins. It is characterized by penetrating, intrusive positivity.

Agamben suspects a theological signature in every secret, which he seeks to "profane." Profanation is meant to bring forth a secretless beauty, nudity "beyond the prestige of grace and the chimeras of corrupt nature": "In the inexplicable envelopment . . . there is no secret; denuded, it manifests itself as pure appearance. . . . The matheme of nudity is, in this sense, simply this: *haecce!* 'there is nothing other than this.'"<sup>12</sup> However, no matheme of the erotic exists; the erotic eludes the *haecce!* The secretless evidence of "there is nothing other than this" proves pornographic. The erotic lacks the straightforwardness of the deictic. Erotic gestures do not qualify as deictic. According to Baudrillard, the erotic power of seduction plays with the "intuition of something in the other that remains forever secret for him, something that I can never know directly about him but which nevertheless exercises a fascination upon me from behind its veil of secrecy."<sup>13</sup> The pornographic neither allures nor alludes; instead, it infects and affects. It lacks the distance in which seduction could occur. Erotic attraction necessarily involves the negativity of withdrawal.

erotic  
'flashes'

smooth  
pornograph  
body

unveiled  
nudity  
body  
luster

erotic  
of  
Δ in porn

Barthes identifies two elements of photography. He calls the first *studium*. It concerns the extended field of information that is to receive notice: "that very wide field of unconcerned desire, of various interest, of inconsequential taste: *I like / I don't like*."<sup>14</sup> It belongs to the order of liking, not loving. Its form of judgment reads, "I like it / I don't like it." It lacks all force or passion. The second element, *punctum*, breaks through *studium*. It does not give rise to liking, but causes injury instead: emotion [*Ergriffenheit*] and concern [*Betroffenheit*]. Unary photographs have no *punctum*. They offer the object of *studium* alone:

News photographs are very often unary (the unary photograph is not necessarily tranquil). In these images, no *punctum*: a certain shock—the literal can traumatize—but no disturbance; the photograph can "shout," not wound. These journalistic photographs are received (all at once), perceived.<sup>15</sup>

The *punctum* interrupts the continuum of information. It expresses itself as a rift, a fracture. It constitutes a site of utmost intensity and density, inhabited by something indefinable. It lacks all transparency, the evidence that distinguishes *studium*: "The incapacity to name is a good symptom of disturbance. . . . The effect is certain but unlocatable, it does not find its sign, its name; it is sharp and yet lands in a vague zone of myself."<sup>16</sup>

Barthes also counts pornographic images among unary photographs. They are smooth and transparent, and they reveal no breaks, no ambiguity. However, rifts and inner rupture characterize the erotic, which is neither smooth nor transparent. The erotic photo is a "disturbed, fissured" image.<sup>17</sup> Pornographic images turn everything outward and expose it. Pornography has no interiority, hiddenness, or mystery: "Like a shop window which shows only one illuminated piece of jewelry, it is completely constituted by the presentation of only one thing: sex: no secondary, untimely object ever manages to half conceal, delay, or distract."<sup>18</sup> Transparency is obscene when it keeps nothing covered or hidden, but rather hands

press. of one thing  
[Taniaki - 'shop window' of city] [city of light]

it all over for viewing. Today all media images are more or less pornographic. Because of their obligingness, they lack any *punctum*, all *semiotic intensity*. They have nothing that might take hold and wound. At the very most, they provide an object to "like."

According to Barthes, cinematic images possess no *punctum*. The *punctum* connects with contemplative lingering: "in front of the screen, I am not free to shut my eyes; otherwise, opening them again, I would not discover the same image."<sup>19</sup> The *punctum* discloses itself only to gazing that lingers in contemplation. In contrast, a sequence of images forces the observer, as Barthes puts it, to "continuous voracity." The *punctum* eludes the consuming, ravenous gaze in which no "*pensiveness*"<sup>20</sup> dwells. Often it does not manifest itself right away, but only after the fact, in lingering recollection:

Nothing surprising, then, if sometimes, despite its clarity, the *punctum* should be revealed only after the fact, when the photograph is no longer in front of me and I think back on it. I may know better a photograph I remember than a photograph I am looking at. . . . I had just realized that however immediate and incisive it was, the *punctum* could accommodate a certain latency (but never any scrutiny).<sup>21</sup>

The "music" starts only when one's eyes are closed. Barthes quotes Kafka: "We photograph things in order to drive them out of our minds. My stories are a way of shutting my eyes."<sup>22</sup> The music sounds only at a contemplative distance from the picture. Conversely, it falls silent where unmediated contact short-circuits the eye and the image. Transparency plays no music. Moreover, Barthes observes, photography must be "silent." Only in "an effort of silence" does photography reveal its *punctum*. It represents a place of silence, which makes contemplative lingering possible. No lingering occurs with pornographic images. They are shrill and loud because they are exposed. They also lack temporal distance and do not admit recollection. They serve only the purpose of immediate arousal and satisfaction.

porn v. 'lingering' & recollection - porn v. recollection

all media images are pornographic - no semiotic intensity

Barthes  
[Kafka]

*Studium* involves reading:

It is by *studium* that I am interested in so many photographs, whether I receive them as political testimony or enjoy them as good historical scenes: for it is culturally (this connotation is present in *studium*) that I participate in the figures, the faces, the gestures, the settings, the actions.<sup>23</sup>

If culture consisted of particular figures, miens, gestures, narratives, and actions, then the pornographication of the visual today would take place as deculturalization. Pornographic, deculturalized images offer nothing to read. They function like advertisements—by direct, tactile, and infectious means. They are posthermeneutic. They do not afford the distance in which *studium* becomes possible. Their mode of operation does not involve reading but infection and abreaction. Nor does a *punctum* dwell within them. They empty out into spectacle. The society of pornography is a society of the spectacle.

Society of the spectacle

## THE SOCIETY OF ACCELERATION

According to Sartre, the body becomes obscene when it is reduced to the mere facticity of the flesh. A body without reference is obscene—when it has no direction and does not perform an action or inhabit a situation. Supernumerary and surplus bodily movements are obscene. Sartre's theory of obscenity also applies to the social body, its processes and movements. They become obscene when they are stripped of narrativity, direction, and sense. Then their surplus and excessiveness find expression in obesity, de-individualization, and rank growth. They teem and proliferate without aim or form. Therein lies their obscenity. Hyperactivity, hyperproduction, and hypercommunication are obscene; they accelerate beyond purpose. Such hyperacceleration is obscene; it no longer really moves [*bewegen*] anything or anywhere, and it does not really bring anything about [*zuwege*]. In its excessiveness, it spills out over its goal [*Wohin*]. This pure movement is obscene; it accelerates just for its own sake: "Movement does not disappear as much into immobility as into speed and acceleration—into the more mobile than movement, so to speak, which pushes it to the limit while stripping it of sense."<sup>1</sup>

Addition is more transparent than narration. Only a process that is *additive* and not *narrative* admits acceleration. Only the