

THE TRANSPARENCY SOCIETY

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PREFACE

Today the word “transparency” is haunting all spheres of life—not just politics but economics, too. More democracy, more freedom of information, and more efficiency are expected of transparency. Transparency creates trust, the new dogma affirms. What is forgotten thereby is that such insistence on transparency is occurring in a society where the meaning of “trust” has been massively compromised.

Wherever information is very easy to obtain, as is the case today, the social system switches from trust to control. The society of transparency is not a society of trust, but a society of control.

If everything becomes public right away, politics invariably grows short of breath; it becomes short term and thins out into mere chatter. Total transparency imposes a temporality on political communication that makes slow, long-term planning impossible. A vision directed toward the future proves more and more difficult to obtain. And things that take time to mature receive less and less attention.

As total communication and total networking run their course, it proves harder than ever to be an outsider, to hold a different opinion. Transparent communication is communication that has a smoothing and leveling effect. It leads to synchronization and uniformity. It eliminates Otherness. Compulsive conformity proceeds from transparency. In this way, transparency stabilizes the dominant system.

Transparency is a neoliberal dispositive. It forces everything inward in order to transform it into information. Under today’s immaterial relations of production, more information and communication mean more productivity and acceleration. In contrast, secrecy, foreignness, and otherness represent obstacles for communication without borders. They are to be dismantled in the name of transparency.

Transparency makes the human being glassy. Therein lies its violence. Unrestricted freedom and communication switch into total control and surveillance. Social media are also coming to resemble, more and more, digital panoptica that discipline and exploit the social.

In disciplinary society, the occupants of the panopticon were isolated from each other for more thorough surveillance, and they were not permitted to speak. The inhabitants of the digital panopticon, on the other hand, engage in lively communication and bare themselves of their own free will. In this way, they actively *collaborate* in the digital panopticon.

The digital society of control makes intensive use of freedom. It is only possible thanks to voluntary self-illumination and self-exposure. It exploits freedom. The society of control achieves perfection when its inhabitants do not communicate because of external constraint but out of inner need—that is, when the fear of giving up a private and intimate sphere yields to the need to put oneself on display shamelessly.

Transparency is an ideology. Like all ideologies, it has a positive core that has been mystified and made absolute. The danger of transparency lies in such ideologization. If totalized, it yields terror.

I LIVE FROM WHAT OTHERS

DON'T KNOW ABOUT ME.

—PETER HANDKE*

THE SOCIETY OF POSITIVITY

No buzzword dominates contemporary public discourse so much as “transparency.” Above all, it is emphatically invoked in connection with the freedom of information. The omnipresent demand for transparency, which has reached the point of fetishism and totalization, goes back to a paradigm shift that cannot be restricted to the realm of politics and economics. Today the society of negativity is yielding to a society that progressively dismantles negativity in favor of positivity. Accordingly, the society of transparency manifests itself first and foremost as a *society of positivity*.

Matters prove transparent when they shed all negativity, when they are smoothed out and leveled, when they do not resist being integrated into smooth streams of capital, communication, and information. Actions prove transparent when they are made operational—subordinate to a calculable, steerable, and controllable process. Time becomes transparent when it glides into a sequence of readily available present moments. This is also how the future undergoes positivization, yielding an optimal presence. Transparent time knows neither fate nor event. Images are transparent when—freed from all dramaturgy, choreography, and scenography, from any hermeneutic depth, and indeed from any meaning at all—they become pornographic. Pornography is unmediated contact between the image and the eye. Things prove transparent when they abandon their singularity and find expression through their price alone. Money, which makes it possible to equate anything with anything else, abolishes all incommensurability, any and all singularity. The society of transparency is an *inferno of the same*.

Whoever connects transparency only with corruption and the freedom of information has failed to recognize its scope. Transparency is a *systemic* compulsion gripping all social processes and subjecting them to a deep-reaching change. Today’s social system submits all its processes to the demand for transparency in order to *operationalize* and *accelerate* them. Pressure for acceleration represents the corollary of dismantling negativity. Communication reaches its maximum velocity where like responds to like, when a chain reaction of likeness occurs. The negativity of alterity and foreignness—in other words, the resistance of the Other—disturbs and delays the smooth communication of the Same. Transparency stabilizes and speeds the system by eliminating the Other and the Alien. This systemic compulsion makes the society of transparency a calibrated society. Herein lies its totalitarian trait: “New word for *Gleichschaltung*: Transparency.”¹

Transparent language is a formal, indeed, a purely machinic, operational language that harbors no ambivalence. Wilhelm von Humboldt already pointed to the fundamental intransparency that inhabits human language:

Nobody means by a word precisely and exactly what his neighbour does, and the difference, be it ever so small, vibrates, like a ripple in water, throughout the entire language. Thus all understanding is always at the same time a not-understanding, all concurrence in thought and feeling at the same time a divergence.²

A world consisting only of information, where communication meant circulation without interference, would amount to a machine. The society of positivity is dominated by the “transparency and obscenity of information in a universe emptied of event.”³ Compulsion for transparency flattens out the human being itself, making it a functional element within a system. Therein lies the violence of transparency.

Clearly the human soul requires realms where it can be at home without the gaze of the Other. It claims a certain impermeability. Total illumination would scorch it and cause a particular kind of *spiritual burnout*. Only machines are transparent. Eventfulness and freedom, which constitute life fundamentally, do not admit transparency. Thus, Humboldt also observes of language:

[A] thing may spring up in man, for which no understanding can discover the reason in previous circumstances; and we should . . . violate, indeed, the historical truth of its emergence and change, if we sought to exclude from it the possibility of such inexplicable phenomena.⁴

The ideology of “postprivacy” proves equally naïve. In the name of transparency, it demands completely surrendering the private sphere, which is supposed to lead to see-through communication. The view rests on several errors. For one, human existence is *not transparent, even to itself*. According to Freud, the ego denies

precisely what the unconscious affirms and desires without reserve. The id remains largely hidden to the ego. Therefore, a rift runs through the human psyche and prevents the ego from agreeing even with itself. This fundamental rift renders self-transparency impossible. A rift also gapes between people. For this reason, interpersonal transparency proves impossible to achieve. It is also not worth trying to do so. The other's very lack of transparency is what keeps the relationship alive. Georg Simmel writes:

The mere fact of absolute knowledge, of full psychological exploration, sobers us even without prior intoxication, paralyzes the vitality of relations. . . . The fertile depth of relationships, which senses and honors something more, something final, behind all that is revealed . . . , simply rewards the sensitivity [*Zartheit*] and self-control that still respects inner privacy even in the most intimate, all-consuming relationship, which allows the right to secrets to be preserved.⁵

Compulsive transparency lacks this same "sensitivity"—which simply means respect for Otherness that can never be completely eliminated. Given the pathos for transparency that has laid hold of contemporary society, it seems necessary to gain practical familiarity with the pathos of distance. Distance and shame refuse to be integrated into the accelerated circulation of capital, information, and communication. In this way, all confidential spaces for withdrawing are removed in the name of transparency. Light floods them, and they are then depleted. It only makes the world more shameless and more naked.

Autonomy presumes one person's freedom not to understand another. Richard Sennett remarks: "Rather than an equality of understanding, a transparent equality, autonomy means accepting in the other what you do not understand, an opaque equality."⁶ What is more, a transparent relationship is a dead one, altogether lacking attraction and vitality. A new Enlightenment is called for: there are positive, productive spheres of human existence and coexistence that the compulsion for transparency is simply demolishing. In this sense, Nietzsche writes: "*The new Enlightenment*. . . . It is not enough to recognize in what ignorance man and animal lives; you must also learn to possess the will to ignorance. You must understand that without such ignorance life itself would be impossible, that under this condition alone does the living preserve itself and flourish."⁷

It has been demonstrated that more information does not necessarily lead to better decisions.⁸ Intuition, for example, transcends available data and follows its own logic. Today the growing, indeed the rampant, mass of information is crippling all higher judgment. Often less knowledge and information achieves something more. It is not unusual for the negativity of omitting and forgetting to prove productive. The society of transparency cannot tolerate a gap [*Lücke*] in information or of sight. Yet both thinking and inspiration require a vacuum. Incidentally, the German word for happiness [*Glück*] derives from this open space; up until the Late Middle Ages, pronunciation revealed as much [*Gelücke*]. It follows that a society that no longer admits the negativity of a gap would be a society without happiness. Love without something hidden to sight is pornography. And without a gap in knowledge, thinking degenerates into calculation.

The society of positivity has taken leave of both dialectics and hermeneutics. The dialectic is based on negativity. Thus, Hegel's "Spirit" does not turn away from the negative but endures and preserves it within itself. Negativity nourishes the "life of the mind." Spirit has "power," according to Hegel, "only by looking the negative in the face and tarrying with it."⁹ Such lingering yields the "magical power that converts it into being." In contrast, whoever "surfs" only for what is positive proves mindless. The Spirit is slow because it tarries with the negative and works through it. The system of transparency abolishes all negativity in order to accelerate itself. Tarrying with the negative has given way to racing and raving in the positive.

Nor does the society of positivity tolerate negative feelings. Consequently, one loses the ability to handle suffering and pain, to give them form. For Nietzsche, the human soul owes its depth, grandeur, and strength precisely to the time it spends with the negative. Human spirit is born from pain, too: "That tension of the soul in unhappiness which cultivates its strength, . . . its inventiveness and courage in enduring, persevering, interpreting, and exploiting suffering, and whatever has been granted to it of profundity, secret, mask, spirit, cunning, greatness—was it not granted through suffering, through the discipline of great suffering?"¹⁰ The society of positivity is now in the process of organizing the human psyche in an entirely new way. In the course of positivization, even love flattens out into an arrangement of pleasant feelings and states of arousal without complexity or consequence. Alain Badiou's *In Praise of Love* quotes the slogans of the dating service Meetic: "Be in love without falling in love!" Or, "You don't have to suffer to be in love!"¹¹ Love undergoes domestication and is positivized as a formula for consumption and comfort. Even the slightest injury must be avoided. Suffering and passion are figures of negativity. On the one hand, they are giving way to enjoyment without negativity. On

the other, their place has been taken by psychic disturbances such as exhaustion, fatigue, and depression—all of which are to be traced back to the excess of positivity.

Theory in the strong sense of the word is a phenomenon of negativity, too. It makes a decision determining what belongs and what does not. As a mode of highly selective narration, it draws a line of distinction. On the basis of such negativity, theory is violent. It is “produced to prevent things . . . from touching” and “to redistinquish what has been confused.”¹² Without the negativity of distinction, matters proliferate and grow promiscuously. In this respect, theory borders on the ceremonial, which separates the initiated and the uninitiated. It is mistaken to assume that the mass of positive data and information—which is assuming untold dimensions today—has made theory superfluous, that is, that comparing data can replace the use of models. Theory, as negativity, occupies a position anterior to positive data and information. Data-based positive science does not represent the cause so much as the effect of the imminent end of theory, properly speaking. It is not possible to replace theory with positive science. The latter lacks the negativity of decision, which determines what *is*, or what *must be*, in the first place. Theory as negativity makes reality itself appear ever and radically different; it presents reality in another light.

Politics is strategic action. For this reason alone, it inhabits a realm of secrecy. Total transparency cripples it. The “postulate of openness,” Carl Schmitt wrote, “finds its specific opponent in the idea that *arcana* belong to every kind of politics”; “political-technical secrets . . . are in fact just as necessary for absolutism as business and economic secrets are for an economic life that depends on private property and competition.”¹³ Only politics amounting to *theatocracy* can do without secrets. In such a case, however, political action gives way to mere staging. An “audience of Papagenos,” in Schmitt’s phrasing, makes the *arcanum* vanish:

The eighteenth century staked much on self-confidence and the aristocratic concept of secrecy. In a society that no longer has such courage, there can be no more “arcana,” no more hierarchy, no more secret diplomacy; in fact, no more politics. To every great politics belongs the “arcanum.” Everything takes place on stage (before an audience of Papagenos).¹⁴

It follows that the end of secrecy would be the end of politics. Accordingly, Schmitt demands of politics more “courage to secrecy.”¹⁵

As the party of transparency, the Pirate Party is continuing the move toward the postpolitical; this amounts to depoliticization. It is an antiparty, a party without color. Transparency is colorless. Convictions do not gain entry as ideologies, but only as ideology-free opinions. Opinions are matters of no consequence; they are neither as comprehensive nor as penetrating as ideologies. They lack cogent negativity. Therefore, today’s *society of opinion* leaves what already exists untouched. “Liquid democracy” displays flexibility by changing colors according to circumstance. The Pirate Party represents a colorless party of opinion. Here politics yields to administering social needs while leaving the framework of socio-economic relations unchanged and clinging to them. As an antiparty, the Pirate Party proves unable to articulate political will or to produce new social coordinates.

Compulsive transparency stabilizes the existing system most effectively. Transparency is inherently positive. It does not harbor negativity that might radically question the political-economic system as it stands. It is blind to what lies outside the system. It confirms and optimizes only what already exists. For this reason, the society of positivity goes hand-in-hand with the postpolitical. Only depoliticized space proves wholly transparent. Without *reference*, politics deteriorates into a matter of *referendum*.

The general consensus of the society of positivity is “Like.” It is telling that Facebook has consistently refused to introduce a “Dislike” button. The society of positivity avoids negativity in all forms because negativity makes communication stall. The value of communication is measured solely in terms of the quantity of information and the speed of exchange. The mass of communication also augments its economic value. Negative judgments impair communication. Further communication occurs more quickly following “Like” than “Dislike.” Most importantly, the negativity that rejection entails cannot be exploited economically.

Transparency and truth are not identical. Truth is a negative force insofar as it presents and asserts *itself* by declaring *all else* false. Further information—or simply an accumulation of information—produces no truth. It lacks direction, that is, sense. Precisely because of the lacking negativity of what holds true, positivity proliferates and propagates. Hyperinformation and hypercommunication attest to lack of truth—indeed, to lack of being. More information, or more communication, does not eliminate the fundamental absence of clarity of the

whole. If anything, it heightens it.

THE SOCIETY OF EXHIBITION

According to Walter Benjamin, it is “more important” for cult objects to “be extant” than to “be seen.”¹ “Cult value” depends on existence, not on exhibition. The practice of locking sacred items in an inaccessible room, and thereby withdrawing them from visibility, heightens their cult value. For example, some images of the Madonna remain covered almost all year. Only priests may approach certain divine statues. Negativity implemented through separation (*secret, secretus*), fencing-off, and isolation constitutes cult value. In the society of positivity, things become commodities; they must be displayed in order to be; cult value disappears in favor of exhibition value. Bare existence has no meaning as far as exhibition value is concerned. Whatever rests in itself—that is, remains what it is [*bei sich verweilt*—possesses no value. Value accrues only insofar as objects are seen. The compulsion for display that hands everything over to visibility makes the *aura*—the “appearance of a distance”—vanish entirely. Exhibition value, which signals the fulfillment of capitalism, cannot be derived from the Marxian opposition between use value and exchange value. It is not use value because it stands removed from the sphere of utility; it is not exchange value because it does not reflect any labor. It exists thanks only to the attention it produces.

On the one hand, Benjamin observes, the exhibition value of photography represses cult value all down the line. On the other hand, he notes that cult value does not retreat without offering resistance; rather, it “finds its last refuge” in “the human countenance.” Therefore, it is not by chance that portraiture occupies a central position in early photography.

In the cult of remembrance of dead or absent loved ones, the cult value of the image finds its last refuge. In the fleeting expression of a human countenance, the *aura* beckons . . . for the last time. This is what gives them their melancholy and incomparable beauty. But as the human being withdraws from the photographic image, exhibition value for the first time shows its superiority to cult value.²

The “human countenance” has long since disappeared from photography—along with the cult value it held. The age of Facebook and Photoshop assures that the “human countenance” has become a mere *face* that equals only its exhibition value. The face is a visage on display, “strip[ped] of its *aura*.”³ It is the commodity form of the “human countenance.” As a surface, the face proves more transparent than the countenance, which Emmanuel Levinas has deemed a privileged site for transcendence to emerge via the Other. Transparency stands opposed to transcendence. The face inhabits the immanency of the Same.

Digital photography wipes out all negativity. It requires neither a darkroom nor developing. No negative precedes it. It is purely positive. Becoming, aging, and dying have all been erased:

Not only does [the photograph] commonly have the fate of paper (perishable), but even if it is attached to more lasting supports, it is still mortal: like a living organism, it is born on the level of the sprouting silver grains, it flourishes a moment, then ages. . . . Attacked by light, by humidity, it fades, weakens, vanishes.⁴

Roland Barthes associates photography with a mode of living in which the negativity of time plays a constitutive role. All the same, it remains linked to its technological preconditions—in this case, to its analog nature. Digital photography is the corollary of an entirely different way of living, one that dispenses with negativity more and more. It is transparent photography: without birth or death, without destiny or event. Destiny is not transparent. Transparent photography lacks semantic and temporal density [*Verdichtung*]. That is why it *says* nothing.

For Barthes, the temporal substance of “this-is-how-it-was” represents the essence of photography. The photograph bears witness to what has been. That is why mourning [*Trauer*] constitutes its fundamental mood. Barthes considers the date to be part of the photographic image “because it . . . allows me to compute life, death, the inexorable extinction of the generations.”⁵ The date inscribes mortality, transitoriness. He writes of a photo by André Kertész: “it is *possible* that Ernest, a schoolboy photographed in 1931 . . . , is still living (but where? how? What a novel!).”⁶ Today’s photography, fulfilled entirely by exhibition value, displays a different temporality. It is determined by the present which lacks negativity and therefore destiny—it admits no narrative tension, nothing “dramatic” in the sense of a novel [*Roman*]. What it expresses has nothing romantic about it.

In the society of exhibition, every subject is also its own advertising object. Everything is measured by its exhibition value. The society of exhibition is a society of pornography. Everything has been turned outward, stripped, exposed, undressed, and put on show. The excess of display turns everything into a commodity; possessing “no secret,” it stands “doomed . . . to immediate devouring.”⁷ Capitalist economy subjects everything to compulsory exhibition. The staging of display alone generates value; all the inherent nature of things [*Eigenwüchsigkeit der Dinge*] has been abandoned. They do not vanish in the dark, but through overexposure: “More generally things visible do not come to an end in obscurity and silence—instead they fade into the more visible than visible: obscenity.”⁸

Pornography destroys not just eros, but also sex. Pornographic exhibition causes estrangement from sexual desire. It makes it impossible to live desire. Sexuality dissolves into feminine simulations of pleasure and masculine performances of performance. Pleasure on display, in an exhibition, is not pleasure at all. Compulsive exhibition entails the alienation of the body itself. It become impossible to dwell within it. It is a matter of exhibiting it and thereby exploiting it. Exhibition is exploitation. The imperative to display destroys dwelling itself. When the world becomes a display room, dwelling proves impossible. Dwelling yields to solicitation [*Werben*], which serves to heighten the capital of attention [*Aufmerksamkeitskapital*]. Dwelling originally meant “to be at peace, to be brought to peace, to remain in peace [*zufrieden sein, zum Frieden gebracht, in ihm bleiben*].”⁹ Unrelenting compulsion to exhibit and perform threatens this peace. It cannot be exhibited. The *thing*, as Heidegger defines it, also vanishes entirely. It cannot be exhibited, for it consists solely of cult value.

Hypervisibility is obscene; it lacks the negativity of what is hidden, inaccessible, and secret. Smooth streams of hypercommunication are also obscene; hypercommunication is free of the negativity of Otherness. The compulsion to hand everything over to communication and visibility is obscene. The pornographic putting-on-display of body and soul is obscene.

Exhibition value above all depends on beautiful looks. In this way, compulsive display produces the compulsion to achieve beauty and fitness. *Operation Schönheit* pursues the goal of maximizing exhibition value. Today’s (role) models convey no inner values but outer measures to which one seeks to correspond, even by violent means. The imperative to exhibit leads to an absolutization of the Visible and the External. The Invisible does not exist, for it generates no exhibition value, no attention.

Compulsion to display exploits the visible. The gleaming surface is transparent in its own way. After all, nothing more is asked of it. It possesses no deep hermeneutic structure. The face is a countenance that has become transparent, which strives to maximize exhibition value. Compulsion to exhibit ultimately robs us of our visage and vision [*Gesicht*]. It no longer proves possible to be as one looks. The absolutization of exhibition value finds expression as the tyranny of visibility. The increase of images is not inherently problematic; what proves problematic is the iconic compulsion to become a picture. Everything must become visible. The imperative of transparency suspects everything that does not submit to visibility. Therein lies its violence.

Today visual communication occurs through infection, abreaction, or reflex. It lacks all aesthetic reflection. Its aestheticization is ultimately anesthetic. The judgment of taste expressed in “Like,” for example, requires no sustained contemplation. Images filled with exhibition value offer no complexity. They are unambiguous—that is, pornographic. They lack all brokenness, which would trigger physical or mental reflection. Complexity slows down communication. Anesthetic hypercommunication reduces complexity in order to accelerate itself. It is significantly faster than sensory communication. The senses are slow. They impede the accelerated circulation of information and communication. Thus, transparency comes with an absence of sense. The mass of information and communication derives from a *horror vacui*.

The society of transparency views all distance as negativity to be eliminated. Distance represents an obstacle to the acceleration of the flows of communication and capital. In keeping with its inner logic, the society of transparency eliminates every form of distance. Transparency ultimately proves to be “the total promiscuity of the look with what it sees,” namely “prostitution.”¹⁰ It requires that things and images radiate in perpetuity. The missing distance makes perception proceed by means of tactility and touch. Tactility refers to contact without physicality, “epidermal contiguity of eye and image,”¹¹ just a breath away. Because distance is lacking, no aesthetic contemplation, no lingering, proves possible. Tactile perception is the end of the aesthetic distance of the gaze, indeed, the end of the gaze. Lack of distance is not proximity. If anything, it destroys it. Proximity

is rich in space, whereas distancelessness annihilates space. A certain distance is inscribed within proximity. Therefore its dimensions are broad. In this sense, Heidegger speaks of a “pure nearness which sustains the distance [*reine die Ferne aushaltende Nähe*].”¹² However, the “pain of the nearness of the distant”¹³ counts as negativity to be eliminated. Transparency re-moves [*ent-fernt*] everything into uniform de-distantiation that stands neither near nor far.

THE SOCIETY OF EVIDENCE

The society of transparency is hostile to pleasure. Within the economy of human desire, pleasure and transparency do not fit together. Transparency is foreign to libidinal economy. Precisely the negativity of the secret, the veil, and concealment incite desire and make pleasure more intense. That is why the seducer plays with masks, illusion, and appearances. Compulsive transparency annihilates room for the play [*Spiel-Räume*] of pleasure and desire [*Lust*]. Evidence admits deduction, not seduction. The seducer takes paths that proceed by detour, digression, and indirection. The art employs equivocal signs:

Seduction often uses ambiguous codes, which make the prototypical seducers of Western culture exemplary of a certain form of freedom from morality because ambivalence and ambiguity are essentially ways of maintaining uncertainty with regard to the intention of the speaker. They enable both power and freedom: that is, the capacity to say something without meaning it, the capacity to imply several meanings at once. Seducers use ambiguous speech because they do not feel accountable to norms of sincerity and symmetry. So-called “politically correct” practices, by contrast, request a form of transparency and lack of ambiguity—so as to ensure maximum contractual freedom and equality, and thus neutralize the traditional rhetorical and emotional halo of seduction.¹

Playing with equivocation and ambivalence, with mystery and enigma, heightens erotic tension. Transparency or straightforwardness would be the end of eros—that is, pornography. Thus it is no accident that our contemporary society of transparency is at the same time a porno-society as well. Also, the practice of “postprivacy,” which demands an unrestricted mutual uncovering in the name of transparency, proves detrimental to pleasure and desire.

According to Simmel, we are “simply so constituted that we . . . need not only a certain proportion of truth and error as the basis for our life, but also as much clarity and ambiguity in the pattern of our life’s elements.”² It follows that transparency deprives things of all “appeal” [*Reiz*] and “prohibits fantasy from incorporating its possibilities; no reality can compensate us for their loss, because fantasy is *self-activity* that cannot be replaced in the long run by obtaining and enjoying.” Simmel continues, “a part even of the persons closest to us must be offered in the form of ambiguity and opacity for their attraction to remain elevated for us.”³ Fantasy is essential for the economy of pleasure. An object offered bare turns it off. Only the withdrawal and concealment of the object kindles it. Not enjoyment in real time, but imaginative preludes and postludes, temporal deferrals, deepen pleasure and desire. Unmediated enjoyment, which admits no imaginative or narrative detour, is pornographic. What is more, the hyperreal over-focus and obviousness of media images paralyzes and suffocates fantasy. According to Kant, the imagination [*Einbildungskraft*] is based on play. It presumes room for play, where nothing is clearly defined or drawn. It requires a certain fuzziness and indistinctness. It is not transparent to itself, whereas understanding [*Verstand*] is marked by self-transparency. For this reason, understanding also does not engage in play. It works with unambiguous concepts.

In *The Coming Community*, Giorgio Agamben relates a parable about the Kingdom of the Messiah, which Ernst Bloch told Benjamin one evening:

A rabbi, a real cabalist, once said that in order to establish the Kingdom of Peace it is not enough to destroy everything nor to begin a completely new world. It is sufficient to displace this cup or this bush or this stone just a little, and thus everything. But this small displacement is so difficult to achieve and its measure is so difficult to find that, with regard to the world, humans are incapable of it and it is necessary that the Messiah come.⁴

To bring about the Kingdom of Peace, things are displaced only slightly. As Agamben remarks, the minimal change does not occur in the things themselves, but at their “periphery.” Mysteriously, it makes them “more brilliant” (*clarior*). A “halo” arises through “vibration,” through a “glow at the edges.”⁵ Taking Agamben’s line of thinking further, the subtle vibration causes indistinctness to emerge; starting from their borders, it envelops things in a mysterious radiance. The holy is not transparent. Indeed, a mysterious lack of definition defines it. The coming Kingdom of Peace will not be called a society of transparency. Transparency is not a state of peace.

Not just the space of the holy but also that of desire offers no transparency. It is “bent”; “the only way to reach the Object-Lady is indirectly, in a devious, meandering way.”⁶ The Lady [*frouwe*]*—*the object of desire in courtly love—provides a “black hole” around which desire thickens. According to Jacques Lacan, desire is “in-

roduced oddly enough through the door of privation or of inaccessibility.”⁷ He likens the matter to the “indecipherable form” of anamorphosis, wherein the image appears only in a distorted, warped state.⁸ In other words, it is anything but *evident* (in Latin, *videre* means “to see”). Courtly love, according to Lacan, is “anamorphic.”⁹ In temporal terms, too, its object is an anamorphosis, for the object can be achieved “only as the endless repeating of an interrupted gesture.”¹⁰ Lacan refers to it in German, *das Ding*; its impenetrability and hiddenness prohibit its image to be fashioned. It defies representation: “What one finds in *das Ding* is the true secret.”¹¹

Transparency represents a condition of symmetry. Accordingly, the society of transparency endeavors to eliminate all asymmetrical relations. The latter include power. In itself, power is not diabolical. In many cases, it proves productive and generative. It creates a space of leeway and free play for the political shaping of society. Power also plays a significant role in the production of pleasure and desire. Libidinal economy follows the logic of the economy of power. When asked why human beings seek to exercise power, Foucault answered by pointing to the economy of pleasure. The freer people are in their relations, the greater the desire to determine the behavior of others. The more open play is—the more varied the modes in which one guides others’ actions—the greater the pleasure. Intransparency and incalculability play a key role in games of strategy. Power involves strategic play, too. Therefore, it unfolds in an open space:

Power consists of strategic games. We know very well indeed that power is not an evil. Take, for example, sexual relationships or love relationships. To exercise power over another, in a sort of open strategic game, where things could be reversed, that is not evil. That is part of love, passion, of sexual pleasure.¹²

The Nietzschean desire [*Lust*] that seeks “eternity” springs from midnight. Nietzsche would say that we have not abolished God so long as we believe in transparency. Against the intrusive gaze, against general making-visible, Nietzsche defends appearance, masks, mystery, enigmas, ruse, and play:

Whatever is profound loves masks; what is most profound even hates image and parable. . . . There are actions of love and extravagant generosity after which nothing is more advisable than to take a stick and give any eyewitness a sound thrashing. . . . There is not only guile behind a mask—there is so much graciousness in cunning. . . . Every profound spirit needs a mask; even more, around every profound spirit a mask is growing continually.¹³

The profound spirit emerges under the protection of a mask, which grows around it like a protective skin. The entirely Other—the New—thrives only behind a mask that protects it from the Same. Nor does cunning equal malice. It is more efficient and less violent than action steered by the categorical imperative. In this sense, Nietzsche writes, “Ruse, better than force [*List besser als Gewalt*].”¹⁴ It proves suppler, more flexible insofar as it observes its surroundings and makes full use of the potential given at hand. It sees more than the categorical imperative, which, thanks to its rigidity, is self-transparent. Violence stands closer to truth than cunning. Thus it generates more “evidence.” Here Nietzsche invokes a freer mode of living—one that would not be possible in a society of full illumination and control. It is also free in the sense that its course cannot be determined by contractual thinking that insists on equality, or by the economy of exchange.

Secrecy and darkness often exude fascination. According to Augustine, God has deployed metaphors and obscured Holy Writ intentionally, in order to fan desire:

These things are covered as it were in figural garb . . . to exercise the pious inquirer’s senses, lest they appear cheap by lying bare [*nuda*] and exposed [*prompta*]. The same holds for things we have learned elsewhere, where they were spoken openly and plainly [*manifeste*]. When they are brought out of hiding, our discovery of them in some way renews them, so they taste sweet [*dulcescunt*]. Their being hidden [*obscurantur*] in this manner represents no ill will toward those who wish to learn; rather, it adds further emphasis, so that one may desire them all the more ardently for their being withheld—so one may take even greater pleasure in finding what one longs for.¹⁵

Figural garb eroticizes the Word. It raises it to an object of desire. The Word exercises a more seductive effect when disguised figurally. The negativity of concealment transforms hermeneutics into erotics. Discovering and deciphering occur as pleasurable laying-bare. In contrast, information stands naked. The nudity of the 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).

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.¹

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 veilless 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 creations—that of the Creator.”² Only a form or an object [*Gebilde*] 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 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.”³ Before the Fall, Adam and Eve did not stand naked because “clothing of grace,” “clothing of light”⁴ 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.⁵

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.⁶

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 way, to force the body of the Other into incongruous positions that reveal its obscenity, that is, its irreparable loss of all grace.”⁷

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.⁸

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.”⁹ 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 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. . . . Shown as a pure means beyond any concrete expressivity, it becomes available for a new use, a new form of erotic communication.¹⁰

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.

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.”¹¹ 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 erotics 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.’”¹² 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.”¹³ 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.

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.*”¹⁴ 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 [*Ergriffen-heit*] 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.¹⁵

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.”¹⁶

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.¹⁷ 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.”¹⁸ Transparency is obscene when it keeps nothing covered or hidden, but rather hands 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.”¹⁹ 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*”²⁰ 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).²¹

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.”²² 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.

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.²³

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.

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."¹

Addition is more transparent than narration. Only a process that is *additive* and not *narrative* admits acceleration. Only the operation of a processor is wholly transparent, because it proceeds solely through addition. Rituals and ceremonies, in contrast, are narrative processes; they elude acceleration. It would be sacrilegious to seek to accelerate a sacrificial act. Rituals and ceremonies have their own temporality, their own rhythm and tact. The society of transparency abolishes all rituals and ceremonies because they do not admit operationalization; that is, they impede the accelerated circulation of information, communication, and production.

In contrast to calculation, thinking is not self-transparent. Thinking does not follow precalculated paths, but betakes itself into the open. According to Hegel, negativity inhabits thinking, which causes it to experience what transforms it. The negativity of becoming-different-from-oneself proves constitutive of thinking. Herein lies its difference from calculating, which always remains self-identical. Such likeness provides the condition of possibility for acceleration. Negativity distinguishes not only experience, but also knowledge [*Erkenntnis*]. A single insight can put all that exists, everything as an entirety, into question and change it. Information lacks such negativity. Likewise, experience [*Erfahrung*] holds consequences that exude transformative power. In this respect, it differs from experiencing [*Erlebnis*], which leaves what exists as it stands.

The absence of narrativity distinguishes the processor from the procession, which is a narrative event. Unlike a processor, a procession has a strong sense of direction. For this reason, it is anything but obscene. Both "processor" and "procession" derive from the Latin verb *procedere*, which means "to step forward." The procession is harnessed by narration, which lends it tension. Processions stage special passages of a narration scenically. Scenography marks them. Because of their narrativity, a particular temporality inhabits them. Therefore it is neither possible nor meaningful to accelerate their *procedere*. Narration is not addition at all. The *procedere* of the processor, on the other hand, lacks all narrativity. Its activity has no image, no scenes. In contrast to the procession, it tells [*erzählt*] nothing. It simply counts [*zählt*]. Numbers are naked. Process, which likewise derives from the Latin verb *procedere*, is poor in narrativity because of its functionality. This makes it different from narrative sequence, which requires choreography or scenography. The functionally determined process is simply the object of steering or management. Society becomes obscene "when there is no longer a scene, when everything becomes inexorably transparent."²

Pilgrimages often culminate in the form of a procession. Conclusion in the strict sense is possible only within narration. In a denarrativized, deritualized world, the ending only amounts to a breaking-off that gives pain and unsettles [*der schmerzt und verstört*]. Only in the frame of narration can the ending appear as completion. Without a narrative quality, an ending is always absolute loss, absolute lack. The processor knows no narration; therefore, it proves incapable of reaching a conclusion. The pilgrimage is a narrative event. For this reason, the itinerary is not a passage to be traversed as quickly as possible, but a path rich in significance. Being underway is charged with meanings such as atonement, healing, or thanksgiving. Because of this narrativity, pilgrimage cannot be accelerated. Moreover, the path of pilgrimage is a transition to a "there" [*Dort*]. In terms of temporality, the pilgrim is on the way to a future in which well-being or salvation [*ein Heil*] is expected. For

this reason, he is not a tourist. The tourist sticks to the present, stays in the here-and-now. He is not underway in the proper sense. The ways he travels hold no significance, for they are not remarkable [*sehenswert*]. The tourist knows nothing of the rich significance, the narrativity, of the way. The way loses all narrative vigor and becomes an empty passage. This semantic impoverishment, the missing narrativity of space and time, is obscene. Negativity, in the form of obstacle or transition, constitutes narrative tension. The compulsion for transparency dismantles all borders and thresholds. Space becomes transparent when it is smoothed, leveled, and emptied out. Transparent space is semantically impoverished. Meanings arise only at thresholds and in transitions, indeed, through obstacles. A child's first experience of space is also a threshold experience. Thresholds and transitions are zones of mystery, uncertainty, transformation, death, and fear, but also of yearning, hope, and expectation. Their negativity constitutes the topology of passion.

Narration practices selection. The narrative path is narrow; it admits only certain events. Thereby it prevents the positive from proliferating and de-individualizing. The excess of positivity that dominates contemporary society shows that it has lost its connection to narrativity. This also affects memory. It is narrativity that distinguishes it from storage, which simply works additively and accumulates. Because of their historicity, memory traces are subject to constant rearrangement and reinscription.³ In contrast, stored data remains the same. Today memory is being positivized into a pile of garbage and data—a “junkshop” or storage unit stuffed full of “images of all kinds and origins, used and worn-out symbols piled up any-old-how.”⁴ Things in a junkshop simply lie next to each other; they are not stratified. Therefore history is absent. The junkshop can neither remember nor forget.

Compulsive transparency annihilates the fragrance of things, the fragrance of time. Transparency has no fragrance. Transparent communication, which admits nothing undefined, is obscene. Unmediated reaction and abreaction are also obscene. For Proust, “immediate enjoyment” is incapable of beauty. The beauty of one thing appears “only much later,” in light of another thing's beauty, as a reminiscence. The momentary gleam of the spectacle, immediate stimulation, is not beautiful, but rather the quiet afterglow, the phosphorescence of time. A quick succession of events or stimuli does not constitute the temporality of the beautiful. Beauty is a pupil [*Zögling*], a late bloomer. Only belatedly do things reveal their fragrant essence of beauty. This essence consists of temporal layers and deposits that phosphoresce. Transparency does not phosphoresce.

The crisis of our times is not acceleration, but rather the scattering and dissociation of temporality. Temporal dis-synchrony makes time buzz without direction and disintegrate into a mere series of punctual, atomized presences. Thereby, time becomes additive and is emptied of all narrativity. Atoms have no fragrance. A figurative attraction, a narrative gravity must first unite atoms into fragrant molecules. Only complex, narrative formations exude [*verströmen*] fragrance. Because acceleration per se does not represent the actual problem, the solution does not involve deceleration. Deceleration alone produces no tact, no rhythm, no fragrance. It does not prevent falling into emptiness.

THE SOCIETY OF INTIMACY

The world of the eighteenth century was a *theatrum mundi*. The public sphere resembled a stage. Scenic distance hindered immediate contact between bodies and souls. The theatrical stands opposed to the tactile. Communication occurs through ritual forms and signs; this unburdens the soul. In modernity, theatrical distance is increasingly abandoned in favor of intimacy. Richard Sennett sees a fateful development here, which deprives one of the ability to “play with and invest feeling in external images of the self.”¹ Formalization, conventionalization, and ritualization do not exclude expressivity. The theater is a site of expression. But acts of expression here are objective feelings and not manifestations of psychic interiority. Therefore they are represented and not exhibited. The world today is no theater where actions and feelings are represented and interpreted, but a market on which intimacies are exhibited, sold, and consumed. The theater is a site of representation, whereas the market is a site of exhibition. Today theatrical representation is yielding to pornographic exhibition.

Sennett assumes “that theatricality has a special, hostile relation to intimacy; theatricality has an equally special, friendly relation to a strong public life.”² The culture of intimacy ascends when the objective-public world, which does not concern intimate feelings and sensations, experiences a fall. According to the ideology of intimacy, social relations prove more real, genuine, credible, and authentic the more closely they approach the inner psychic needs of individuals. Intimacy is the *psychological formula of transparency*. One believes that one attains transparency of the soul by revealing intimate feelings and emotions, by laying the soul bare.

Social media and personalized search engines set up, in the internet, a space of absolute closeness [*Nahraum*]; here the outside has been eliminated. One encounters only oneself and one’s own life. No negativity stands available to make change possible. This digital vicinity [*Nachbarschaft*] offers users only sectors of the world that please them. In this fashion, it dismantles the public sphere [*Öffentlichkeit*—indeed, it dismantles public, critical consciousness—and it privatizes the world. The internet transforms into an intimate sphere or comfort zone. Proximity, from which all distance has been eliminated, is another form in which transparency finds expression.

The tyranny of intimacy psychologizes and personalizes everything. Even politics cannot escape its grasp. Accordingly, politicians are no longer measured by their actions. Instead, general interest concerns their persons; this entails compulsive staging on their part. The loss of the public sphere leaves behind a void; intimate details and private matters pour into it. Publicizing a persona takes the place of the public sphere. In the process, the public sphere becomes an exhibition space. It grows more and more distant from the space of communal action.

“Person” (in Latin, *persona*) originally means “mask.” It gives the voice sounding through it (*per-sonare*) character; indeed, it lends the voice shape and form. As a society of revealing and denuding, the society of transparency works against all forms of the mask, against symbolic appearance [*Schein*]. The mounting deritualization and denarrativization of society also strip it of forms of symbolic appearance and render it naked. Objective rules, not subjective psychic states, determine play and ritual. Whenever one plays with others, one subordinates oneself to the rules of the game. The sociability of play is not based on mutual self-disclosure. Instead, human beings become sociable when they preserve distance from one another. Intimacy, in contrast, destroys distance.

The society of intimacy mistrusts ritualized gestures and ceremonial conduct. They strike it as external and inauthentic. Ritual takes place as action with externalized forms of expression that have a de-individualizing, depersonalizing, and depsychologizing effect. Those who participate in ritual practice “expressive action,”³ yet this does not mean that they have to put themselves on display and stand exposed. The society of intimacy is a psychologized, deritualized society. It is a society of confession, laying-bare, and the pornographic lack of distance.

Intimacy eliminates objective room for play in order to make way for subjective stirrings of affect. Objective signs circulate in a ritual-ceremonial space. This space cannot be narcissistically cathected. In a certain respect, it proves empty and absent. Narcissism expresses distanceless intimacy with oneself, that is, lack of self-dis-

tance. Narcissistic subjects who lack the ability of scenic distantiation populate the society of intimacy. Sennett notes: "The narcissist is not hungry for experiences, he is hungry for Experience. Looking for an expression or reflection of himself in Experience, he devalues each particular interaction or scene."⁴ According to Sennett, narcissistic disorder is on the rise "because a new kind of society encourages the growth of its psychic components and erases a sense of meaningful social encounter outside its terms, outside the boundaries of the single self, in public."⁵ "Intimate society" does away with the ritualistic, ceremonial signs through which one might escape oneself, lose oneself. Experience [*Erfahrung*] means facing the Other. Experiencing [*Erlebnis*], in contrast, means encountering oneself everywhere. The narcissistic subject cannot fence itself off. The borders of its being grow hazy. In consequence, no stable self-image emerges. The narcissistic subject melts into itself to such an extent that it proves impossible to play with identity [*mit sich zu spielen*]. Grown depressive, the narcissist drowns in his borderless self-intimacy. No void or absence distances the narcissist from himself.

THE SOCIETY OF INFORMATION

Upon inspection, Plato's cave is clearly constructed as a theater. The prisoners sit like theatergoers before a stage. Between the prisoners and the fire behind them leads a path; along the path runs a low wall that resembles "a partition above which the exhibitors of puppet shows display their art."¹ All manner of implements, statues, and figures in stone or wood are carried along; they extend over the partition and cast their shadows on the wall at which the prisoners stare, enraptured. Since the prisoners cannot turn around, they think the shadows themselves are speaking. Plato's cave presents a kind of shadow theater, then. The objects that cast shadows are not the real things of the world; they are, one and all, theatrical figures and props. After all, shadows and reflections of real things exist only outside the cave. Were one of the prisoners led up into the world of light, Plato surmises:

there would be need of habituation . . . to enable him to see the things higher up. At first he would most easily discern the shadows and, after that, the likeness or reflections in water of men and other things, and later, the things themselves.²

The prisoners in the cave do not see the shadow images of the real world. Rather, a theater unfolds before them. Moreover, the fire provides artificial light. In fact, the prisoners are bound by scenes—by scenic illusions. They give themselves over to a play, to narration. Plato's allegory does not represent different modes of cognition, as his interpreters commonly claim; rather, it represents different ways of living, that is, narrative and cognitive modes of existence. Plato's cave is a theater. In the allegory of the cave, the theater as a *world of narration* stands opposed to the *world of insight*.

The fire in the cave produces scenic illusions as artificial light. It casts appearances [*Schein*]. In this, it differs from natural light as the medium of truth. For Plato, light displays a strong sense of direction. It streams from the Sun as its source. All that is, is ordered toward the Sun as the idea of the Good. It forms a point of transcendence, is located even "beyond Being." Thus, it is also called "God." What *is* owes its truth to this transcendence. Platonic sunlight is hierarchizing. It establishes gradations with regard to knowledge, which extend from the world of mere likenesses, on through sensorially perceptible things, up to the intelligible world of the Ideas.

Plato's cave is a narrative world. No causal link joins the things that are there. A kind of dramaturgy or scenography connects the things (or signs) with each other by narrative means. The light of truth denarrativizes the world. The sun annihilates mere appearance. The play of mimesis and metamorphosis yields to working at truth [*Arbeit an Wahrheit*]. Plato condemns any hint of change in favor of rigid identity. His critique of mimesis specifically concerns appearance and play. Plato forbids any scenic representation, and he denies the poet entrance into his city of truth:

If a man . . . capable by his cunning of assuming every kind of shape and imitating all things should arrive in our city, bringing with himself the poems which he wished to exhibit, we should fall down and worship him as a holy and wondrous and delightful creature, but should say to him that there is no man of that kind among us in our city, nor is it lawful for such a man to arise among us, and we should send him away to another city, after pouring myrrh down over his head and crowning him with fillets of wool.³

Likewise, the society of transparency is a society without poets, without seduction or metamorphosis. After all, it is the poet who produces scenic illusions, forms of appearance, and ritual and ceremonial signs; he sets artifacts and antifacts against hyperreal, naked evidence.

The metaphor of light, which dominates philosophical and theological discourse from antiquity over the Middle Ages up to the Enlightenment, offers strong referentiality. Light springs from a well or a source. It provides the medium for obligating, prohibiting, and promising instances such as God and Reason. Consequently, it gives rise to negativity, which has a polarizing effect and produces oppositions. Light and darkness are coeval. Light and shadow belong together. The Good has Evil as its corollary. The light of reason and the darkness of the irrational (or the merely sensory) bring each other forth.

In contrast to Plato's world of truth, today's society of transparency lacks divine light inhabited by metaphysical tension. Transparency has no transcendence. The society of transparency is see-through without light. It is not illuminated by light that streams from a transcendent source. Transparency does not come about

through an illuminating source of light. The medium of transparency is not light, but rather lightless radiation; instead of illuminating, it suffuses everything and makes it see-through. In contrast to light, it is penetrating and intrusive. Moreover, its effect is homogenizing and leveling, whereas metaphysical light generates hierarchies and distinctions; thereby, it creates order and points of orientation.

The society of transparency is the society of information. Information is a phenomenon as such insofar as it lacks all negativity. It amounts to positivized, operationalized language. Heidegger would call it a language of "Framing" [*Ge-Stell*]: "speaking is challenged to correspond in every respect to Framing in which all present beings can be commandeered. Within Framing, speaking turns into information."⁴ Information positions [*stellt*] human language. Heidegger conceives "Framing" in terms of domination. Accordingly, figures of order such as commanding [*Bestellen*], imagining [*Vorstellen*], and producing [*Herstellen*] signify power and rule. Commanding positions being as substance [*Bestand*]; imagining positions it as an object [*Gegenstand*]. However, Heidegger's Framing does not encompass the forms of positioning that are characteristic of today. Exhibiting [*Aus-Stellen*] or putting-on-display [*Zur-Schau-Stellen*] do not primarily serve the acquisition of power. Power is not the aim so much as attention [*Aufmerksamkeit*]. The motivating factor is not *polemos* but *porno*. Power and attention are not coextensive. Holding power means holding the Other at one's mercy; it is unnecessary to seek attention. Nor does attention automatically generate power.

Heidegger also considers the "picture" only from the perspective of domination:

"Picture" means . . . that which sounds in the colloquial expression to be "in the picture" about something. . . . "To put oneself in the picture" about something means: to place the being itself before one just as things are with it, and, as so placed, to keep it permanently before one.⁵

For Heidegger, the picture is the medium through which one takes over being and holds it fast. This theory of the picture does not explain today's media images, for they are simulacra that no longer represent "beings." They do not serve the purpose of "positioning," being "before oneself," and "constantly having it in this way." As simulacra without reference, they lead an independent existence, so to speak. They also proliferate beyond power and dominion. They are, as it were, fuller with being and life than what simply "is." Today's multimediated mass of information and communication presents things more as an accumulation [*Ge-Menge*] than as a "framing."⁶

The society of transparency not only lacks truth; it also lacks symbolic appearance. Neither truth nor symbolic appearance are see-through. Only emptiness is entirely transparent. To avert this emptiness, a mass of information is brought into circulation. The mass of information and imagery offers fullness in which emptiness is still noticeable. More information and communication alone do not illuminate the world. Transparency also does not entail clairvoyance. The mass of information produces no truth. The more information is set free, the more difficult it proves to survey the world. Hyperinformation and hypercommunication bring no light into darkness.

THE SOCIETY OF UNVEILING

In a certain sense, the eighteenth century was not entirely unlike the present. It already knew the pathos of unveiling and transparency. Thus, in his study of Rousseau, Jean Starobinski writes:

That appearances are deceiving was hardly a novel theme in 1748. In the theater and the church, in novels and in newspapers, sham, convention, hypocrisy, and masks were denounced in a variety of ways. In the vocabulary of polemic and satire no words occurred more often than *unveil* and *unmask*.¹

Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions* are characteristic for the incipient epoch of truth-as-avowal. From the outset, the *Confessions* declare the intention to show a human being "in every way true to nature" [*toute la vérité de la nature*]. The author's "enterprise," which "has no precedent," involves the merciless revelation of his "heart." Rousseau addresses God: "I have displayed myself as I was. . . . I have bared my secret soul [*mon intérieur*] as Thou thyself hast seen it."² He means for his heart to be crystal clear [*transparent comme le cristal*].³ The crystalline heart provides a fundamental metaphor of Rousseau's thought: "His heart, transparent as crystal, can hide nothing of what happens within it. Every mood it feels is transmitted to his eyes and face."⁴ Rousseau calls for the "opening of the heart," "by means of which all sentiments, all thoughts, are shared, so that everyone, feeling as he should, may show himself to others as he is."⁵ Rousseau exhorts his fellow human beings to "unveil" their own hearts "with the same sincerity." Herein lies Rousseau's *dictatorship of the heart*.

Rousseau's demand for transparency announces a paradigm shift. The world of the eighteenth century was still a theater. It was full of scenes, masks, and figures. Fashion itself was theatrical. No essential difference existed between street clothes and theatrical costumes. Even masks became fashionable. People were wholly enamored of staging; they gave themselves over to scenic illusions. Ladies' hairstyles (*pouf*) were shaped into scenes that portrayed either historical events (*pouf à la circonstance*) or feelings (*pouf au sentiment*). To this end, porcelain figures were also woven into the hair. A whole garden or a ship with full sails might be carried on one's head. Both men and women painted parts of their faces with red makeup. The face itself became a stage on which one lent expression to character traits with the help of beauty marks (*mouches*). Placed at the corner of the eye, for example, a beauty mark signified passion. At the lower lip, it indicated the bearer's straightforwardness. The body was a site of scenic representation, too. However, it was not a matter of giving unfalsified expression to the hidden "inside" (*l'intérieur*), much less to the "heart." Instead, the point was to toy with appearances, to play with scenic illusions. The body was a doll without a soul to be dressed, decorated, and invested with signs and meanings.

Rousseau sets his discourse of the heart and truth against the play of masks and roles. Thus, he vehemently criticizes the plan to erect a theater in Geneva. Theater represents an "art of counterfeiting oneself, or putting on another character than one's own, of appearing different than one is, of becoming passionate in cold blood, of saying what one does not think as naturally as if one really did think it, and, finally, of forgetting one's own place by dint of taking another's."⁶ The theater is rejected as a site of disguise, appearance, and seduction lacking all transparency. Expression must not be a pose; it must reflect the transparent heart.

In Rousseau, one can observe how the morality of total transparency necessarily switches to tyranny. The heroic project of transparency—wanting to tear down veils, bring everything to light, and drive away darkness—leads to violence. The prohibition against the theater and mimesis, which Plato had already legislated for his ideal city, impresses totalitarian traits on Rousseau's transparent society. Rousseau prefers small cities because "individuals, always in the public eye, are born censors of one another" and "the police can easily watch everyone."⁷ Rousseau's society of transparency turns out to be a society of total control and surveillance. His call for transparency escalates into the categorical imperative:

A single precept of morality can do for all the others; it is this: Never do or say anything that thou dost not wish everyone to see and hear; and for my part I have always regarded as the worthiest of men that Roman who wanted his house to be built in such a way that whatever occurred within it could be seen.⁸

Rousseau's demand for transparency of the heart is a moral imperative. The Roman with a transparent house follows the "precept of morality," after all. Today, "the perfect house with a roof, walls, windows and

doors” is already hopelessly “perforated” by “[m]aterial and nonmaterial cables.” It collapses into a “ruin through whose cracks gust the winds of communication.”⁹ The digital wind of communication penetrates everything and makes it see-through. It blows through the society of transparency. However, the digital net, even as the medium of transparency, is subject to no moral imperative. It so to speak lacks a heart—traditionally, the theological-metaphysical medium of truth. Digital transparency is not cardiographic but pornographic. Moreover, it brings forth economic panoptica. The goal is not moral purification of the heart, but maximal profit, maximal attention. Utter illumination [*Ausleuchtung*] promises maximal gains.

THE SOCIETY OF CONTROL

We are experiencing the end of “the perspectival truth of the panoptic system,” Baudrillard remarked in 1978.¹ In presenting his argument, he referred to the medium of television:

The eye of TV is no longer the source of an absolute gaze, and the ideal of control is no longer that of transparency. This still presupposes an objective space (that of the Renaissance) and the omnipotence of the despotic gaze.²

When he wrote these words, Baudrillard could not know about digital networking, of course. Today, contra this diagnosis, we must observe: at the moment, we are not experiencing the end of the panopticon, but rather the beginning of an entirely new, *aperspectival* panopticon. The digital panopticon of the twenty-first century is *aperspectival* insofar as it no longer conducts surveillance from a central point, with the omnipotence of the despotic gaze. The distinction between center and periphery, which is fundamental to the Benthamian panopticon, has disappeared entirely. The digital panopticon functions without any perspectival optics. That is what makes it efficient. *Aperspectival*, penetrating illumination [*Durchleuchtung*] proves more effective than perspectival surveillance because it means utter illumination of everyone from everywhere, which anyone can perform.

Bentham’s panopticon is a phenomenon of disciplinary society; it was supposed to afford improvement. Prisons, factories, madhouses, hospitals, and schools were subjected to panoptic control. These are the typical institutions of disciplinary society. The cells arranged in a circle around the control tower are strictly separated from one another, and so the occupants cannot communicate. The separating walls assure that they also cannot see each other. For the purpose of improvement, one reads in Bentham, they are exposed to isolation. The gaze of the supervisor reaches every corner of the cell, whereas he himself remains invisible to occupants: “The essence of it consists, then, in the *centrality* of the inspector’s situation, combined with the well-known and most effectual contrivances for seeing *without being seen*.”³ With the help of technological cunning, the illusion of permanent surveillance is achieved. Therein lies its perspectivism, which founds the structure of power and domination. While occupants of the Benthamian panopticon are aware of the supervisor’s constant presence, the inhabitants of the digital panopticon think that they are free.

Today’s society of control possesses a distinct panoptic structure. In contrast to the occupants of the Benthamian panopticon, who are isolated from each other, the inhabitants of today’s panopticon network and communicate with each other intensively. Not lonesomeness through isolation, but hypercommunication guarantees transparency. Above all, the particularity of the digital panopticon is that its inhabitants actively collaborate in its construction and maintenance by putting themselves on display and baring themselves. They display themselves on the panoptic market. Pornographic putting-on-display and panoptic control complement each other. Exhibitionism and voyeurism feed the net as a digital panopticon. The society of control achieves perfection when subjects bare themselves not through outer constraint but through self-generated need, that is, when the fear of having to abandon one’s private and intimate sphere yields to the need to put oneself on display without shame.

In light of the unremitting progress of surveillance technology, the futurologist David Brin has rushed to the fore and called for the surveillance of all by all—that is, for the democratization of surveillance. This holds the promise of a “transparent society.” He duly announces a categorical imperative: “Can we stand living exposed to scrutiny, our secrets laid open, if in return we get flashlights of our own that we can shine on anyone?”⁴ Brin’s utopia of a “transparent society” rests on unlimited surveillance. Asymmetrical flows of information producing power relations and domination are supposed to be eliminated. What Brin is calling for, then, is complete mutual illumination. “Below” is not just watched over by “above”; “above” is also watched over by “below.” Everyone should hand everyone else over to visibility and control; this would hold for the private sphere, too. Such total surveillance degrades “transparent society” into an inhuman society of control: everyone controls everyone.

Transparency and power do not get along well. Power likes to cloak itself in secrecy. The praxis of *arcana* is one technique that power employs. Transparency dismantles the arcane sphere of power. Yet mutual trans-

parency can only be achieved through permanent surveillance, which always takes on increasingly excessive forms. Such is the logic of surveillance society. Total control destroys the freedom of action and ultimately leads to *Gleichschaltung*. It is not possible simply to replace trust, which makes way for free spheres of action, with control: “The people have to believe in and trust their ruler; when they trust, they grant him a measure of freedom to act without constant auditing, monitoring, and oversight. Lacking that autonomy, he could indeed never make a move.”⁵

Trust is only possible in a state between knowing and not-knowing. Trust means establishing a positive relationship with the Other, even in ignorance. It makes actions possible despite one’s lack of knowledge. If I know everything in advance, there is no need for trust. Transparency is a state in which all not-knowing is eliminated. Where transparency prevails, no room for trust exists. Instead of affirming that “transparency creates trust,” one should instead say, “transparency dismantles trust.” The demand for transparency grows loud precisely when trust no longer prevails. In a society based on trust, no intrusive demand for transparency would surface. The society of transparency is a society of mistrust and suspicion; it relies on control because of vanishing confidence. Strident calls for transparency point to the simple fact that the moral foundation of society has grown faulty, that moral values such as honesty and uprightness are losing their meaning more and more. As the new social imperative, transparency is taking the place of a moral instance that would break new ground.

The society of transparency obeys the logic of the society of achievement [*Leistungsgesellschaft*] entirely. The achievement-subject [*Leistungssubjekt*] operates independently of external domination forcing it to work and exploiting it. One is the master and entrepreneur of oneself. However, the disappearance of the instance of domination does not lead to real freedom or the absence of constraint, for the achievement-subject exploits *itself*. The exploiter is simultaneously the exploited. Perpetrator and victim collapse into one. Auto-exploitation proves more efficient than allo-exploitation because a feeling of freedom attends it. The achievement-subject subjects itself to freely willed, self-generated constraint. This dialectic of freedom also underlies the society of control. Utter auto-illumination functions more efficiently than utter allo-illumination because it is attended by the sensation of freedom.

Above all, the project of the panopticon had a moral—or biopolitical—motivation. According to Bentham, the first result to be expected of panoptic control is seeing “morals reformed.”⁶ Further effects include “health preserved” and “instruction diffused”; “the Gordian knot of the Poor-Laws are not cut, but untied.”⁷ But today’s compulsive transparency no longer has an explicitly moral or biopolitical imperative; above all, it follows an economic imperative. People who illuminate themselves entirely surrender to exploitation. Illumination is exploitation. Overexposing individual subjects maximizes economic efficiency. The transparent customer is the new prisoner—indeed, the *homo sacer*—of the digital panopticon.

No community, in the strong sense, can form in the society of transparency. Instead, chance gatherings [*Ansammlungen*] or crowds [*Vielheiten*] of isolated individuals, or egos, emerge; they pursue a mutual interest or cluster around a product line (“brand communities”). These groups are different from assemblies, which might yet prove capable of mutual political action, of constituting a “we.” They lack spirit.⁸ Gatherings such as brand communities constitute an additive formation without any inner density. Consumers voluntarily give themselves over to panoptic surveillance that steers and satisfies their needs. On this score, social media prove no different from panoptic machines. Communication and commerce, freedom and control, collapse into one. Opening up relations of production to consumers suggests reciprocal transparency; however, it ultimately turns out to be the exploitation of the social. The social degrades into a functional element within the process of production and undergoes operationalization. It chiefly serves to optimize relations of production. The illusory freedom of consumers lacks all negativity. They no longer constitute an outside that might question the systemic inside.

Today the entire globe is developing into a panopticon. There is no outside space. The panopticon is becoming total. No wall separates inside from outside. Google and social networks, which present themselves as spaces of freedom, are assuming panoptic forms. Today surveillance is not occurring as an attack on freedom,⁹ as is normally assumed. Instead, people are voluntarily surrendering to the panoptic gaze. They deliberately collaborate in the digital panopticon by denuding and exhibiting themselves. The prisoner in the digital panopticon is a perpetrator and a victim at the same time. Herein lies the dialectic of freedom. Freedom turns out to

be a form of control.

NOTES

*Epigraph: Peter Handke, *Am Felsfenster morgens* (Salzburg: Residenz, 1998), 336.

THE SOCIETY OF POSITIVITY

1. Ulrich Schacht, *Über Schnee und Geschichte* (Berlin: Matthes & Seitz, 2012), journal entry for June 23, 2011.
2. Wilhelm von Humboldt, *On Language*, ed. Michael Losonsky (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 63.
3. Jean Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, trans. Phil Beitchman and W.G.J. Niesluchowski (Los Angeles: Semiotext[e], 2008), 45.
4. Humboldt, *On Language*, 64.
5. Georg Simmel, *Sociology: Inquiries into the Construction of Social Forms, Vol. 1*, trans. Anthony J. Blasi, Anton K. Jacobs, and Mathew Kanjirathinkal (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 324–25; translation modified.
6. Richard Sennett, *Respect in a World of Inequality* (New York: Norton, 2011), 122.
7. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Nachgelassene Fragmente Frühjahr-Herbst 1884, Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1973), 226 [vol. 7.2].
8. Cf. Gerd Gigerenzer, *Bauchentscheidungen. Die Intelligenz des Unbewussten und die Macht der Intuition* (Munich: Bertelsman, 2007).
9. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 19.
10. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Basic Writings*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Modern Library, 2000), 344.
11. Alain Badiou, *In Praise of Love*, trans. Peter Bush (New York: New Press, 2012), 6; translation modified.
12. Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, 217.
13. Carl Schmitt, *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*, trans. Ellen Kennedy (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988), 37–38.
14. Carl Schmitt, *Roman Catholicism and Political Form*, trans. G. L. Ulmen (Westport: Greenwood, 1996), 34.
15. Ibid.

THE SOCIETY OF EXHIBITION

1. Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge: Belknap, 2008), 25; translation modified.
2. Ibid., 27.
3. Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, 84.
4. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections of Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill & Wang, 1981), 93.
5. Ibid., 84.
6. Ibid., 84.
7. Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, 84.
8. Ibid., 30.
9. Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 147.
10. Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, 84.
11. Baudrillard, *The Transparency of Evil: Essays on Extreme Phenomena*, trans. James Benedict (London: Verso, 1993), 55.
12. Martin Heidegger, *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry*, trans. Keith Hoeller (Amherst, NY: Humanity, 2000), 168.
13. Martin Heidegger, "Who Is Nietzsche's Zarathustra?" in *The New Nietzsche: Contemporary Styles of Interpretation*, ed. David Allison (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985), 68; translation slightly modified.

THE SOCIETY OF EVIDENCE

1. Eva Illouz, *Why Love Hurts* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013), 191.
2. Simmel, *Sociology*, 324; translation slightly modified.
3. Ibid., 324; translation slightly modified.
4. Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, trans. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 53; translation slightly modified.
5. Ibid., 54.
6. Slavoj Žižek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment: Six Essays on Women and Causality* (London: Verso, 1994), 94.

7. Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis: 1959–1960. The Seminar Book VII*, trans. Dennis Porter (New York: Norton, 1997), 149.
8. Lacan, *Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, 135.
9. Lacan, *Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, 136.
10. Žižek, *Metastases of Enjoyment*, 92.
11. Lacan, *Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, 46.
12. Michel Foucault, *The Final Foucault*, ed. James Bernauer and David Rasmussen (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988), 18; translation slightly modified.
13. Nietzsche, *Basic Writings*, 240–41.
14. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Nachgelassene Fragmente, Juli 1882 bis Winter 1883–1884, Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1977), 513 [vol. 7.1].
15. Quoted in Martin Andree, *Archäologie der Medienwirkung* (Munich: Fink, 2005), 189.

THE SOCIETY OF PORNOGRAPHY

1. Walter Benjamin, “Goethe’s Elective Affinities,” *Selected Writings 1913–1926, Vol. 1*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 351.
2. Ibid.
3. Giorgio Agamben, *Nudities*, trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 57.
4. Ibid., 57.
5. Ibid., 90.
6. Cf. *ibid.*, 89: “The face, now an accomplice of nudity—as it looks into the lens or winks at the spectator—lets the absence of secret be seen; it expresses only a letting-be-seen, a pure exhibition.”
7. Ibid., 75.
8. “The movements that he did manage to make looked so comic that I was hard pressed to restrain my laughter.—From that day, indeed, as it were, from that moment on, the young man underwent an incomprehensible transformation. He began to stay for days at a time in front of the mirror; and he lost one charm after another. An invisible and inconceivable force, like an iron net, seemed to settle over and impinge upon the free play of movements, and after a year had gone by, not a trace could be found of the charming allure that had once entranced all those whose eyes fell upon him.” Heinrich von Kleist, *Selected Prose*, trans. Peter Wortsman (New York: Archipelago, 2010), 271.
9. Agamben, *Nudities*, 88.
10. Giorgio Agamben, *Profanations*, trans. Jeff Fort (Cambridge: Zone, 2007), 90.
11. Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill & Wang, 1975), 10.
12. Agamben, *Nudities*, 90.
13. Baudrillard, *Transparency of Evil*, 166.
14. Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 27.
15. Ibid., 41.
16. Ibid., 51–53.
17. Ibid., 41.
18. Ibid., 41.
19. Ibid., 55.
20. Ibid., 55.
21. Ibid., 53.
22. Ibid., 53.
23. Ibid., 26.

THE SOCIETY OF ACCELERATION

1. Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, 29.
2. Ibid., 92.
3. To Wilhelm Fliess, Freud wrote: “I am working on the assumption that our psychical mechanism has come about by a process of stratification: the material present in the shape of memory-traces is from time to time subjected to a rearrangement in accordance with fresh circumstances—is, as it were, transcribed. Thus what is essentially new in my theory is the thesis that memory is present not once but several times over, that it is registered in various species of ‘signs.’” Sigmund Freud, *The Origins of Psychoanalysis: Letters to Wilhelm Fliess*, trans. Eric Mosbacher and James Strachey (New York: Basic, 1954), 173.

4. Paul Virilio, *The Information Bomb* (London: Verso, 2006), 38; translation slightly modified.

THE SOCIETY OF INTIMACY

1. Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (New York: Norton, 1992), 37.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., 266.
4. Ibid., 325.
5. Ibid., 8.

THE SOCIETY OF INFORMATION

1. Plato, *The Collected Dialogues*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 747 [*Politeia* 514b]; translation modified.
2. Ibid., 748 [516a].
3. Ibid., 642 [398a].
4. Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 132.
5. Martin Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, trans. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 67.
6. The virtual world lacks the resistance of the Real and the negativity of the Other. Heidegger would invoke the “earth” against its gravity-free positivity. It stands for the hidden, the undisclosable, and the self-secluding: “Earth shatters every attempt to penetrate it. . . . The earth is openly illuminated as itself only where it is apprehended and preserved as the essentially undisclosable, as that which withdraws from every disclosure, in other words, keeps itself entirely closed up. . . . The earth is the essentially self-secluding” (*Off the Beaten Track*, 25). The “sky” is also inscribed with the unknown: “Thus the unknown god appears as the unknown by way of the sky’s manifestness” (*Poetry, Language, Thought*, 221). Likewise, Heidegger’s “truth,” as “unhiddenness/unconcealment,” remains embedded in “hiddenness/concealment.” “The unhidden must be torn away [*entrissen*] from a hiddenness” (*Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeil [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998], 171). Thus, the truth is traversed by a “tear” [*Riss*]. The negativity of the “tear,” for Heidegger, is “pain.” The society of positivity avoids “pain.” The truth as unhiddenness is neither light without negativity nor transparent radiance. It is a “clearing” [*Lichtung*] surrounded by dark forests. In this, it differs from evidence and transparency, which lacks all negativity.

THE SOCIETY OF UNVEILING

1. Jean Starobinski, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Transparency and Obstruction*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 3.
2. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Confessions*, trans. J. M. Cohen (New York: Penguin, 1953), 17.
3. Ibid., 415.
4. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Rousseau, Judge of Jean-Jacques*, ed. Roger D. Masters and Christopher Kelly (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1990), 155.
5. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Julie, Or the New Heloise: Letters of Two Lovers Who Live in a Small Town at the Foot of the Alps*, trans. Philip Stewart and Jean Vaché (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1997), 524.
6. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Letter to D'Alembert and Writings for the Theater*, trans. and ed. Allan Bloom, Charles Butterworth, and Christopher Kelly (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2004), 309.
7. Ibid., 294.
8. Rousseau, *Julie*, 349. Rousseau conceives a state of nature in which human beings could see through each other: “Before art had fashioned our manners and taught our passions to speak a borrowed language, our morals were rustic but natural, and differences in conduct announced those of character at first glance. Human nature, at bottom, was not better. But men found their security in the ease of seeing through one another, and that advantage, of which we no longer sense the value, spared them many vices.” Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Major Political Writings*, trans. John T. Scott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 13.
9. Vilém Flusser, *The Freedom of the Migrant: Objections to Nationalism*, trans. Kenneth Kronenberg (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 57.

THE SOCIETY OF CONTROL

1. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 29.
2. Ibid.
3. Jeremy Bentham, *Panopticon Writings* (London: Verso, 1995), 43 [Letter V].
4. David Brin, *The Transparent Society* (Boston: Addison-Wesley, 1998), 14.
5. Sennett, *Respect in a World of Inequality*, 122.

6. Bentham, *Panopticon Writings*, 31 [Preface].

7. Ibid.

8. Cf. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 110: "With this, we already have before us the Notion of *Spirit*. . . 'I' that is 'We' and 'We' that is 'I.'"

9. Hence the title of a book by Juli Zeh and Ilija Trojanow, *Angriff auf die Freiheit: Sicherheitswahn, Überwachungsstaat und der Abbau bürgerlicher Rechte* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2010); in translation, *Attack on Freedom: Mania for Security, the Surveillance State, and the Dismantling of Civil Rights*.