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THE ECLIPTIC OF SEX

Nothing is less certain today than sex, behind the liberation of its discourse. And nothing today is less certain than desire, behind the proliferation of its images.

desire

In matters of sex, the proliferation is approaching total loss. Here lies the secret of the ever increasing production of sex and its signs, and the hyperrealism of sexual pleasure, particularly feminine pleasure. The principle of uncertainty has extended to sexual reason, as well as political and economic reason.

The state of sex's liberation is also that of its indetermination. No more want, no more prohibitions, and no more limits: it is the loss of every referential principle. Economic reason is sustained only by penury; it is put into question with the realization of its objective, the abolition of the spectre of penury. Desire too is sustained only by want. When desire is entirely on the side of demand, when it is operationalized without restrictions, it loses its imaginary and, therefore, its reality; it appears everywhere, but in generalized simulation. It is the ghost of desire that haunts the defunct reality of sex. Sex is everywhere, except in sexuality (Barthes).

*lack of money
system
of power*

In sexual mythology, the transition towards the feminine is contemporaneous with the passage from determination to general indetermination. The feminine is not substituted for the

masculine as one sex for another, according to some structural inversion. It is substituted as the end of the determinate representation of sex, as the notation of the law that regulates the difference between the sexes. The ascent of the feminine corresponds to both the apogee of sexual pleasure and a catastrophe relative to sex's reality principle.

And so it is femininity that is gripping, in the present and fatal situation of sex's hyperreality – as it was yesterday, but in direct contrast, in irony and seduction.

* * *

Freud was right: there is but one sexuality, one libido – and it is masculine. Sexuality has a strong, discriminative structure centered on the phallus, castration, the Name-of-the-Father, and repression. There is none other. There is no use dreaming of some non-phallic, unlocked, unmarked sexuality. There is no use seeking, from within this structure, to have the feminine pass through to the other side, or to cross terms. Either the structure remains the same, with the female being entirely absorbed by the male, or else it collapses, and there is no longer either female or male – the degree zero of the structure. This is very much what is happening today: erotic polyvalence, the infinite potentiality of desire, different connections, diffractions, libidinal intensities – all multiple variants of a liberatory alternative coming from the frontiers of a psychoanalysis free of Freud, or from the frontiers of desire free of psychoanalysis. Behind the effervescence of the paradigm of sex, everything is converging towards the non-differentiation of the structure and its potential neutralization.

The danger of the sexual revolution for the female is that she will be enclosed within a structure that condemns her to either discrimination when the structure is strong, or a derisory triumph within a weakened structure.

The feminine, however, is, and has always been, somewhere else. That is the secret of its strength. Just as it is said that something lasts because its existence is not adequate to its essence, it must be said that the feminine seduces because it is never where it thinks it is, or where it thinks itself. The feminine is not found in the history of suffering and oppression imputed

to it – women's historical tribulations (though by guile it conceals itself therein). It suffers such servitude only when assigned to and repressed within this structure – to which the sexual revolution assigns and represses it all the more dramatically. But by what aberrant complicity (complicit with what? if not, precisely, the male) would one have us believe that this is the female's history? Repression is already here in full force, in the narrative of women's sexual and political misery, to the exclusion of every other type of strength and sovereignty.

There is an alternative to sex and to power, one that psychoanalysis cannot know because its axiomatics are sexual. And yes, this alternative is undoubtedly of the order of the feminine, understood outside the opposition masculine/feminine, that opposition being essentially masculine, sexual in intention, and incapable of being overturned without ceasing to exist.

This strength of the feminine is that of seduction.

* * *

One may catch a glimpse of another, parallel universe (the two never meet) with the decline of psychoanalysis and sexuality as strong structures, and their cleansing within a psy and molecular universe (that of their final liberation). A universe that can no longer be interpreted in terms of psychic or psychological relations, nor those of repression and the unconscious, but must be interpreted in the terms of play, challenges, duels, the strategy of appearances – that is, the terms of seduction. A universe that can no longer be interpreted in terms of structures and diacritical oppositions, but implies a seductive reversibility – a universe where the feminine is not what opposes the masculine, but what seduces the masculine.

In seduction the feminine is neither a marked nor an unmarked term. It does not mask the "autonomy" of desire, pleasure or the body, or of a speech or writing that it has supposedly lost(?). Nor does it lay claim to some truth of its own. It seduces.

To be sure, one calls the sovereignty of seduction feminine by convention, the same convention that claims sexuality to be fundamentally masculine. But the important point is that this form of sovereignty has always existed – delineating, from a distance, the feminine as something that is nothing, that is never

so female as male in masculine
female seduces male in feminine
this in libo p. P. S. Slett on the

"produced," is never where it is produced (and certainly cannot, therefore, be found in any "feminist" demand). And this not from the perspective of a psychic or biological bi-sexuality, but that of the trans-sexuality of seduction which the entire organization of sex tends to reject - as does psychoanalysis in accordance with the axiom that there is no other structure than that of sexuality (which renders it incapable, by definition, of speaking about anything else).

* * *

What does the women's movement oppose to the phallocratic structure? Autonomy, difference, a specificity of desire and pleasure, a different relation to the female body, a speech, a writing - but never seduction. They are ashamed of seduction, as implying an artificial presentation of the body, or a life of vassalage and prostitution. They do not understand that seduction represents mastery over the symbolic universe, while power represents only mastery of the real universe. The sovereignty of seduction is incommensurable with the possession of political or sexual power.

There is a strange, fierce complicity between the feminist movement and the order of truth. For seduction is resisted and rejected as a misappropriation of women's true being, a truth that in the last instance is to be found inscribed in their bodies and desires. In one stroke the immense privilege of the feminine is effaced: the privilege of having never acceded to truth or meaning and of having remained absolute master of the realm of appearances. The capacity immanent to seduction to deny things their truth and turn it into a game, the pure play of appearances, and thereby foil all systems of power and meaning with a mere turn of the hand. The ability to turn appearances in on themselves, to play on the body's appearances, rather than with the depths of desire. Now all appearances are reversible... only at the level of appearances are systems fragile and vulnerable... meaning is vulnerable only to enchantment. One must be incredibly blind to deny the sole force that is equal and superior to all others, since with a simple play of the strategy of appearances, it turns them upside down.

* * *

seduction illusion (Lange) ...

Anatomy is destiny, Freud said. One might be surprised that the feminist movement's rejection of this definition, phallic by definition, and sealed with the stamp of anatomy, opens onto an alternative that remains fundamentally biological and anatomical:

Indeed, woman's pleasure does not have to choose between clitoral activity and vaginal passivity, for example. The pleasure of the vaginal caress does not have to be substituted for that of the clitoral caress. They each contribute, irreplaceably, to woman's pleasure. Among other caresses... Fondling the breasts, touching the vulva, spreading the lips, stroking the posterior wall of the vagina, brushing against the mouth of the uterus, and so on. To evoke only a few of the most specifically female pleasures.

Luce Irigaray

Parole de femme? But it is always an anatomical speech, always that of the body. What is specific to women lies in the diffraction of the erogenous zones, in a decentered eroticism, the diffuse polyvalence of sexual pleasure and the transfiguration of the entire body by desire: this is the theme song that runs through the entire female, sexual revolution, but also through our entire culture of the body, from the Anagrammes of Bellmer to Deleuze's mechanized connections. It is always a question of the body (if not the anatomical, then the organic, erogenous body, the functional body that, even in fragmented and metaphorical form, would have pleasure as its object and desire as its natural manifestation. But then either the body is here only a metaphor (and if this is the case, what is the sexual revolution, and our entire culture, having become a body culture, talking about?), or else, with this body speech, this woman's speech, we have, very definitely, entered into an anatomical destiny, into anatomy as destiny. There is nothing here radically opposed to Freud's maxim.

Nowhere is it a question of seduction, the body worked by artifice (and not by desire), the body seduced, the body to be

seduction - the body worked by artifice & not by desire

artificial
 artificial presentation of the body
 not mastery
 Seduction - the body worked by artifice & not by desire

tag p. 11

Winnicott's
Breakdown
Luce

THE ECLIPTIC OF SEX 11

seduced, the body in its passion separated from its truth, from that ethical truth of desire which obsesses us - that serious, profoundly religious truth that the body today incarnates, and for which seduction is just as evil and deceitful as it once was for religion. Nowhere is it a question of the body delivered to appearances. Now, seduction alone is radically opposed to anatomy as destiny. Seduction alone breaks the distinctive sexualization of bodies and the inevitable phallic economy that results.

Any movement that believes it can subvert a system by its infra-structure is naive. Seduction is more intelligent, and seemingly spontaneously so. Immediately obvious - seduction need not be demonstrated, nor justified - it is there all at once, in the reversal of all the alleged depth of the real, of all psychology, anatomy, truth, or power. It knows (this is its secret) that there is no anatomy, nor psychology, that all signs are reversible. Nothing belongs to it, except appearances - all powers elude it, but it "reversibilizes" all their signs. How can one oppose seduction? The only thing truly at stake is mastery of the strategy of appearances, against the force of being and reality. There is no need to play being against being, or truth against truth; why become stuck undermining foundations, when a light manipulation of appearances will do.

Now woman is but appearance. And it is the feminine as appearance that thwarts masculine depth. Instead of rising up against such "insulting" counsel, women would do well to let themselves be seduced by its truth, for here lies the secret of their strength, which they are in the process of losing by erecting a contrary, feminine depth.

* * *

It is not quite the feminine as surface that is opposed to the masculine as depth, but the feminine as indistinctness of surface and depth. Or as indifference to the authentic and the artificial. Joan Riviere, in "Feminité sans mascarade" (La Psychoanalyse no. 7), makes a fundamental claim - one that contains within it all seduction: "Whether femininity be authentic or superficial, it is fundamentally the same thing."

This can be said only of the feminine. The masculine, by contrast, possesses unfailing powers of discrimination and abso-

Indifference to the authentic & the artificial

lute criteria for pronouncing the truth. The masculine is certain, the feminine is insoluble.

Now, surprisingly, this proposition, that in the feminine the very distinction between authenticity and artifice is without foundation, also defines the space of simulation. Here too one cannot distinguish between reality and its models, there being no other reality than that secreted by the simulative models, just as there is no other femininity than that of appearances. Simulation too is insoluble.

This strange coincidence points to the ambiguity of the feminine: it simultaneously provides radical evidence of simulation, and the only possibility of its overcoming - in seduction, precisely.

Thus the academy is masculine & is pushed for that depth - that penetration etc. depth is the root of the cure etc. (Sigmund Freud)
But dandy is feminine & is playful & we may embrace simulation & esp the insolubility of it - to succeed with strategies of appearances that seduction is the alternative to simulation -

So what if academic study is impossible? certainly necessary in our culture but must be always seduced into its consciousness. (That's what I want to do in end of story ending.)

because it presents an indistinct between surface & depth (so (Luce) is between authentic & artificial.

Simulation

*transvestites
seduce the signs
themselves*

*obsessed
with play
itself*

transvestites love is this game of signs, what excites them is to seduce the signs themselves. With them everything is makeup, theater, and seduction. They appear obsessed with games of sex, but they are obsessed, first of all, with play itself; and if their lives appear more sexually endowed than our own, it is because they make sex into a total, gestural, sensual, and ritual game, an exalted but ironic invocation.

Nico seemed so beautiful only because her femininity appeared so completely put on. She emanated something more than beauty, something more sublime, a different seduction. And there was deception: she was a false drag queen, a real woman, in fact, playing the queen. It is easier for a non-female/female than for a real woman, already legitimated by her sex, to move amongst the signs and take seduction to the limit. Only the non-female/female can exercise an untainted fascination, because s/he is more seductive than sexual. The fascination is lost when the real sex shows through; to be sure, some other desire may find something here, but precisely no longer in that perfection that belongs to artifice alone.

Seduction is always more singular and sublime than sex, and it commands the higher price.

One must not seek to ground transvestism in bisexuality. For the sexes and sexual dispositions, whether mixed or ambivalent, indefinite or inverted, are still real, and still bear witness to the psychic reality of sex. Here, however, it is this very definition of the sexual that is eclipsed. Not that this game is perverse. What is perverse is what perverts the order of the terms; but here there are no longer any terms to pervert, only signs to seduce.

Nor should one seek to ground transvestism in the unconscious or in "latent homosexuality." The old casuistry of latency is itself a product of the sexual imaginary of surfaces and depths, and always implies a diagnosis of symptoms and prognosis for their correction. But here nothing is latent, everything calls into question the very idea of a secret, determinate instance of sex, the idea that the deep play of phantasies controls the superficial play of signs. On the contrary, everything is played out in the vertigo of this inversion, this transsubstantiation of sex into signs that is the secret of all seduction.

THE ETHERAL IRONY OF
THE COMMUNITY

*This femininity, the eternal irony
of the community.*

Hegel

Femininity as a principle of uncertainty.

It causes the sexual poles to waver. It is not the pole opposed to masculinity, but what abolishes the differential opposition, and thus sexuality itself, as incarnated historically in the masculine phallocracy, as it might be incarnated in the future in a female phallocracy.

If femininity is a principle of uncertainty, it is where it is itself uncertain that this uncertainty will be greatest: in the play of femininity.

Transvestism. Neither homosexuals nor transsexuals, transvestites like to play with the indistinctness of the sexes. The spell they cast, over themselves as well as others, is born of sexual vacillation and not, as is customary, the attraction of one sex for the other. They do not really like male men or female women, nor those who define themselves, redundantly, as distinct sexual beings. In order for sex to exist, signs must reduplicate biological being. Here the signs are separated from biology, and consequently the sexes no longer exist properly speaking. What

*This femininity...
is the...
of the community*

Perhaps the transvestite's ability to seduce comes straight from parody - a parody of sex by its over-signification. The prostitution of transvestites would then have a different meaning from the more common prostitution of women. It would be closer to the sacred prostitution practiced by the Ancients (or the sacred status of the hermaphrodite). It would be contiguous with the theater, or with makeup, the ritual and burlesque ostentation of a sex whose own pleasure is absent.

The seduction itself is coupled with a parody in which an implacable hostility to the feminine shows through, and which might be interpreted as a male appropriation of the panoply of female allurements. The transvestite would then reproduce the situation of the first warrior - he alone was seductive - the woman being nul (consider fascism, and its affinity for transvestites). But rather than the addition of the sexes is not this their invalidation? And doesn't the masculine, in this mockery of femininity, rescind its status and prerogatives in order to become a contrapuntal element in a ritual game?

In any case, this parody of femininity is not quite as acerbic as one might think, since it is the parody of femininity as men imagine and stage it, as well as phantasize it. A femininity exaggerated, degraded, parodied (drag queens in Barcelona keep their moustaches and expose their hairy chests), the claim is that in this society femininity is naught but the signs with which men rig it up. To over-simulate femininity is to suggest that woman is but a masculine model of simulation. Here is a challenge to the female model by way of a female game, a challenge to the female/woman by way of the female/sign. And it is possible that this living, feigned denunciation, which plays on the furthest bounds of artifice, and simultaneously plays with the mechanisms of femininity to the point of perfection, is more lucid and radical than all the ideopolitical claims of a femininity "alienated in its being." Here femininity is said to have no being (no nature, writing, singular pleasures or, as Freud said, particularized libido). Contrary to every search for an authentic femininity, for a woman's speech, etc., the claim here is that the female is nothing, and that this is her strength.

Here is a more subtle response than feminism's outright denial of the law of castration. For the latter encounters symbolic, not

anatomical fate, one that weighs on all possible sexuality. The overturning of this law, therefore, can only result from its parodic resolution, from the ex-centricity of the signs of femininity, the reduplication of signs that puts an end to every insoluble biology or metaphysics of the sexes. Makeup is nothing else: a triumphant parody, a solution by excess, the surface hyper-simulation of this in-depth simulation that is itself the symbolic law of castration - a transsexual game of seduction.

The irony of artificial practices: the peculiar ability of the painted woman or prostitute to exaggerate her features, to turn them into more than a sign, and by this usage of, not the false as opposed to the true, but the more false than false, to incarnate the peaks of sexuality while simultaneously being absorbed in their simulation. The irony proper to the constitution of woman as idol or sex object: in her closed perfection, she puts an end to sex play and refers man, the lord and master of sexual reality, to his transparency as an imaginary subject. The ironic power of the object, then, which she loses when promoted to the status of a subject.

All masculine power is a power to produce. All that is produced, be it the production of woman as female, falls within the register of masculine power. The only, and irresistible, power of femininity is the inverse power of seduction. In itself it is nul, seduction has no power of its own, only that of annulling the power of production. But it always annuls the latter.

Has there, moreover, ever been a phallic power? This entire history of patriarchal domination, of phallocracy, the immemorial male privilege, is perhaps only a story. Beginning with the exchange of women in primitive societies, stupidly interpreted as the first stage of woman-as-object. All that we have been asked to believe - the universal discourse on the inequality of the sexes, the theme song of an egalitarian and revolutionary modernity (reinforced, these days, with all the energies of a failed revolution) - is perhaps one gigantic misunderstanding. The opposite hypothesis is just as plausible and, from a certain perspective, more interesting - that is, that the feminine has never been dominated, but has always been dominant. The feminine considered not as a sex, but as the form transversal to every sex, as well as to every power, as the secret, virulent form

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very important
the feminine
has never been
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of in-sexuality. The feminine as a challenge whose devastation can be experienced today throughout the entire expanse of sexuality. And hasn't this challenge, which is also that of seduction, always been triumphant?

In this sense, the masculine has always been but a residual, secondary and fragile formation, one that must be defended by retrenchments, institutions, and artifices. The phallic fortress offers all the signs of a fortress, that is to say, of weakness. It can defend itself only from the ramparts of a manifest sexuality of a finality of sex that exhausts itself in reproduction, or in the orgasm.

One can hypothesize that the feminine is the only sex, and that the masculine only exists by a superhuman effort to leave it. A moment's distraction, and one falls back into the feminine. The feminine would have a decisive advantage, the masculine a definite handicap. One sees how ridiculous it is to want to "liberate" the one in order that it accede to the fragility of the other's "power," to the eccentric, paradoxical, paranoid and tiresome masculine state.

The phallic fable reversed: where woman is created from man by subtraction, here it is man created from woman by exception. A fable easily strengthened by Bettelheim's analysis in *Symbolic Wounds*, where men are said to have erected their powers and institutions in order to thwart the originally far superior powers of women. The driving force is not penis envy, but on the contrary, man's jealousy of woman's power of fertilization. This female advantage could not be atoned; a different order had to be built at all costs, a masculine social, political and economic order, wherein this advantage could be reduced. Thus the ritual practices whereby the signs of the opposite sex are appropriated are largely masculine: scarifications, mutilations, artificial vaginizations, couvades, etc.

All this is as convincing as a paradoxical hypothesis can be (and it is always more interesting than the received wisdom), but in the end it only reverses the terms, and so turns the feminine into an original substance, a sort of anthropological infrastructure. It reverses the anatomical determination, but lets it subsist as destiny - and once again the "irony of femininity" is lost.

even from a web search internet - always the same
The feminine knows - always the same
See below
1990

The irony is lost when the feminine is instituted as a sex, even and above all when it is in order to denounce its oppression. It is the eternal illusion of enlightenment humanism, which aspires to liberate the servile sex, race or class in the very terms of its servitude. That the feminine becomes a sex in its own right! An absurdity, if posed in neither the terms of sex nor power.

The feminine knows neither equivalence nor value: it is, therefore, not soluble in power. It is not even subversive, it is reversible. Power, on the other hand, is soluble in the reversibility of the feminine. If the "facts" cannot decide whether it was the masculine or feminine that was dominant throughout the ages (once again, the thesis of women's oppression is based on a caricatural phallogocratic myth), by contrast, it remains clear that in matters of sexuality, the reversible form prevails over the linear form. The excluded form prevails, secretly, over the dominant form. The seductive form prevails over the productive form.

Femininity in this sense is on the same side as madness. It is because madness secretly prevails that it must be normalized (thanks to, amongst other things, the hypothesis of the unconscious). It is because femininity secretly prevails that it must be recycled and normalized (in sexual liberation in particular).

* * *

And in the orgasm:
The despoilment of the orgasm, the absence of sexual pleasure, is often advanced as characteristic of women's oppression. A flagrant injustice whose immediate rectification everyone must pursue in accord with the injunctions of a sort of long-distance race or sex rally. Sexual pleasure has become a requisite and a fundamental right. The most recent of the rights of man, it has acceded to the dignity of a categorical imperative. It is immoral to act otherwise. But this imperative does not even have the Kantian charm of endless finalities. As the management and self-management of desire, its imposition does not, no more than that of the law, allow ignorance as a defense.

But this is to remain unaware that sexual pleasure too is rever-

Information processing (IT) is the best position
of mass production...
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Handwritten notes in margin

Handwritten notes in margin

sible, that is to say that, in the absence or denial of the orgasm, superior intensity is possible. It is here, where the end of sex becomes aleatory again, that something arises that can be called seduction or delight. Or again, sexual pleasure can be just a pretext for another, more exciting, more passionate game. This is what occurred in *The Empire of the Senses*, where the aim was to push sexual pleasure to its limit and beyond – a challenge that prevails over the workings of desire, because it is much more dizzying, because it involves the passions while the other implies only a drive.

But this vertigo can be equally present in the rejection of sexual pleasure. Who knows if women, far from being “despoiled,” have not, from time immemorial, been playing a game of their own by triumphantly asserting a right to sexual reticence? If they have not, from the depths of their sexual impassibility, been throwing down a challenge, challenging men's pleasure to be but the pleasure of men alone? No one knows to what destructive depths such provocation can go, nor what omnipotence it implies. Men, reduced to solitary pleasures, and enmeshed within the directives of delight and conquest, never did find a way out.

Who won this game with its different strategies? Men, apparently, all down the line. But it is by no means certain that they did not lose themselves in this terrain and become bogged down (as in that of the seizure of power) consequent to a sort of forward flight that could neither assure them of safety, nor relieve them of their secret despair at what had escaped them – whatever their gains or calculations. This had to end: it was imperative that women have orgasms. Measures had to be taken to liberate them and make them climax – thereby ending this unbearable challenge that ultimately nullifies sexual pleasure in a possible strategy of non-pleasure. For sexual pleasure knows no strategy: it is only energy seeking an outlet. It is therefore quite inferior to any strategy that uses it as its material, and uses desire itself as a tactical element. This is the central theme of the libertine sexuality of the eighteenth century, from Laclous to Casanova and Sade (including Kierkegaard in *Diary of the Seducer*), for whom sexuality still retains its ceremonial, ritual and strategic character, before sinking, with the Rights of Man and psychology, into the revealed truth of sex.

★ ★ ★

Here then is the era of the pill when sexual pleasure is decreed. The end of the right to sexual reticence. Women must realize that they are being dispossessed of something essential for them to put up so much resistance (all those ghosts of “missed” acts) to the “rational” adoption of the pill. The same resistance as that of entire generations to school, medicine, security and work. The same profound intuition about the ravages of an unfettered liberty, speech or pleasure. Defiance, the other's defiance, is no longer possible: all symbolic logic has been eliminated to the advantage of a permanent erection and its blackmail (without counting the tendencious lowering of the rate of sexual pleasure itself).

The “traditional” woman's sexuality was neither repressed nor forbidden. Within her role she was entirely herself; she was in no way defeated, nor passive, nor did she dream of her future “liberation.” It is the beautiful souls who, retrospectively, see women as alienated from time immemorial, and then liberated. And there is a profound disdain in this vision, the same disdain as that shown towards the “alienated” masses supposedly incapable of being anything but mystified sheep.

It is easy to paint a picture of woman alienated through the ages, and then open the doors of desire for her under the auspices of the revolution and psychoanalysis. It is all so simple, so obscene in its simplicity – worse, it implies the very essence of sexism and racism: commiseration.

Fortunately, the female has never fit this image. She has always had her own strategy, the unremitting, winning strategy of challenge (one of whose major forms is seduction). There is no need to lament the wrongs she suffered, nor to want to rectify them. No need to play the lover of justice for the weaker sex. No need to mortgage everything for some liberation or desire whose secret had to wait till the twentieth century to be revealed. At each moment of the story the game was played with a full deck, with all the cards, including the trumps. And men did not win, not at all. On the contrary, it is women who are now about to lose, precisely under the sign of sexual pleas-

ure - but this is another story.

* * *

It is the story of the feminine in the present tense, in a culture that produces everything, makes everything speak, everything babble, everything climax. The promotion of the female as a sex in its own right (equal rights, equal pleasures), of the female as value - at the expense of the female as a principle of uncertainty. All sexual liberation lies in this strategy: the imposition of the rights, status and pleasure of women. The over-exposing and staging of the female as sex, and of the orgasm as the repeated proof of sex.

Pornography states this clearly. A trilogy of spread, sensualism and signification, pornography promotes female sexual pleasure in so exaggerated a manner, only in order to better bury the uncertainty that hovers over the "black continent." No more of that "eternal irony of the community" of which Hegel spoke. Henceforth women will climax, and will know why. All femininity will be made visible - woman as emblematic of orgasm, and orgasm as emblematic of sexuality. No more uncertainty, no more secrets. This is the radical obscenity that is beginning.

* * *

Pasolini's *Salo, or a 120 Days* - a veritable twilight of seduction. All reversibility has been abolished in accordance with an implacable logic. Everything is irreversibly masculine and dead. Even the complicity, the promiscuity between executioners and victims has disappeared: inanimate torture, perpetrated without emotion, a cold machination. (Here one perceives that sexual gratification is truly the industrial usufruct of the body, and the opposite of all seduction: it is a product of extraction, a technological product of a machinery of bodies, a logistics of pleasure which goes straight to its objective, only to find its object dead).

The film illustrates the truth that in a dominant masculine system, and in every dominant system (which thereby becomes

masculine), it is femininity that incarnates reversibility, the possibility of play and symbolic involvement. *Salo* is a universe completely sanitized of that minimum of seduction that provides the stakes not just of sex, but of every relation, including death and the exchange of death (this is expressed in *Salo*, as in Sade, by the predominance of sodomy). It is here that it becomes apparent that the feminine is not a sex (opposed to the other), but what counters the sex that alone has full rights and the full exercise of these rights, the sex that holds a monopoly on sex: the masculine, itself haunted by the fear of something other, of which sex is but the disenchanting form: seduction. The latter is a game, sex is a function. Seduction supposes a ritual order, sex and desire a natural order. It is these two fundamental forms that confront each other in the male and female, and not some biological difference or some naive rivalry of power.

* * *

The feminine is not just seduction; it also suggests a challenge to the male to be the sex, to monopolize sex and sexual pleasure, a challenge to go to the limits of its hegemony and exercise it unto death. Today phallocracy is collapsing under the pressure of this challenge (present throughout our culture's sexual history), and its inability to meet it. Our entire conception of sexuality may be collapsing because constructed around the phallic function and the positive definition of sex. Every positive form can accommodate itself to its negative form, but understands the challenge of the reversible form as mortal. Every structure can adapt to its subversion or inversion, but not to the reversion of its terms. Seduction is this reversible form.

Not the seduction to which women have been historically consigned: the culture of the gynaeceum, of rouge and lace, a seduction reworked by the mirror stage and the female imaginary, the terrain of sex games and ruses (though here lies the only bodily ritual of western culture left, all the others having disappeared, including politeness). But seduction as an ironic, alternative form, one that breaks the referentiality of sex and provides a space, not of desire, but of play and defiance.

Handwritten notes: "possibility of play and symbolic involvement", "THE ECLIPTIC OF SEX 21", "possibility of symbolic involvement"

*

Handwritten note: "Eros"

Handwritten notes: "Seduction is a game", "sex is a function", "Seduction supposes a ritual order, sex and desire a natural order"

Handwritten notes: "The feminine is not just seduction; it also suggests a challenge to the male to be the sex, to monopolize sex and sexual pleasure, a challenge to go to the limits of its hegemony and exercise it unto death"

Handwritten note: "Seduction is a game"

Handwritten note: "Seduction described"

Handwritten note: "Eros is the opposite of seduction"

This is what occurs in the most banal games of seduction: I shy away; it is not you who will give me pleasure, it is I who will make you play, and thereby rob you of your pleasure. A game in continuous movement — one cannot assume that sexual strategies alone are involved. There is, above all, a strategy of displacement (*se-ducere*: to take aside, to divert from one's path) that implies a distortion of sex's truth. To play is not to take pleasure. Seduction, as a passion and as a game at the level of the sign, acquires a certain sovereignty; it is seduction that prevails in the long term because it implies a reversible, indeterminate order.

The glamour of seduction is quite superior to the Christian consolation of the pleasures of the flesh. One wants us to consider the latter a natural finality — and many are driven mad for failing to attain it. But love has nothing to do with sex drives, if not in the libidinal look of our contemporary culture. Love is a challenge and a prize: a challenge to the other to return the love. And to be seduced is to challenge the other to be seduced in turn (there is no finer argument than to accuse a woman of being incapable of being seduced). Perversion, from this perspective takes on a somewhat different meaning: it is to pretend to be seduced without being seduced, without being capable of being seduced.

The law of seduction takes the form of an uninterrupted ritual exchange where seducer and seduced constantly raise the stakes in a game that never ends. And cannot end since the dividing line that defines the victory of the one and the defeat of the other, is illegible. And because there is no limit to the challenge to love more than one is loved, or to be always more seduced — if not death. Sex, on the other hand, has a quick, banal end: the orgasm, the immediate form of desire's realization.

In analysis, one can see the extreme danger that may be incurred by a man who begins to listen to a woman's demand for sexual pleasure. If, through her desire, a woman alters the unalterability within which a man cannot help but enclose her, if she herself becomes an immediate and limitless demand, if she no longer remains within

this enclosure and is no longer held by it, the man finds himself cast into a subsuicidal state. A demand that tolerates no delay, no excuse, that is limitless with regard to intensity and duration, shatters the absolute represented by woman, by feminine sexuality, and even by feminine pleasure. ...Feminine sexual pleasure can always be rendered divine again, and thus controlled, reduced to the coolness of marble breasts, whereas the demand for enjoyment made by a woman to the man who is bound to her without being able to flee, causes him to lose his bearings and the feeling of pure contingency... When all desire is channelled into the demand for enjoyment, the world turns upside down and bursts asunder. This is doubtless why our culture has taught women to demand nothing in order to induce them to desire nothing...¹

And this "desire, all of which is channelled into the demand for enjoyment"? Does it still concern woman's "desire"? Isn't this a form of madness, which has but little to do with "liberation"? What is this new, feminine figure of unlimited sexual demand, an unlimited claim to sexual gratification? This, in effect, is the end point to which our culture is rushing — and Roustang is right, it conceals a form of subsuicidal collective violence. And not just for men, but for women too, and for sexuality in general.

We say no to those who love only women; those who love only men; those who love only children (there are also the elderly, sados, machos, dogs, cats)... The new militant, with his refined egocentrism, claims a right to his sexual racism. But we say no to all sectarianism. If one must become a misogynist to be a pederast, an androphobe to be

1. François Roustang, *Dire Mastery* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1982), pp. 104-5.

a lesbian, ...if one must reject the pleasures of the night, chance encounters, and pick-ups in order to defend oneself against rape, then in the name of a struggle against certain prohibitions, one has returned to other taboos, moralisms, norms, blinkers...

Within our body we experience not one sex, not two, but a multitude of sexes. We do not see a man, or woman, but a human being, anthropomorphic(!)... Our bodies are tired of all the stereotyped cultural barriers, all the physiological segregation... We are male and female, adults and children, fairies, dykes, and gays, fuckers and fucked, buggers and buggered. We do not accept the reduction of all our sexual richness to a single sex. Our sapphism is only one facet of our sexuality. We refuse to limit ourselves to what society demands of us, that is, that we be either hetero, lesbian, gay the whole gamut of promotional products. We are unreasonable in all our desires.

Judith Belladonna Barbara Penton
Libé, July 1978

The frenzy of unlimited sex, an exacerbated ventilation of desire onto demand and gratification – doesn't this constitute a reversal of what Roustang described: if until now women were taught to demand nothing in order that they desired nothing, are they not now being taught to demand everything in order to desire nothing? The entire black continent decoded by sexual gratification?

Masculinity would be closer to the Law, femininity closer to sexual pleasure. But is not such pleasure the axiomatics of a decoded sexual universe – the feminine and liberating reference produced by the gradual enfeeblement of the Law, the Law becoming an injunction to pleasure after having been its interdiction. An effect of simulation inverted: it is when pleasure seeks openly to be autonomous, that it is truly a product of the Law. Or else the Law collapses, and where the Law disappears, pleasure is inaugurated as a new contract. What does it

matter: nothing has changed, and the inversion of signs is but a consequence of strategy. This is the significance of the present turnaround, and of the twin privileging of the feminine and pleasure over the masculine and prohibition that once dominated sexual reason. The exaltation of the feminine is a perfect instrument for the unprecedented generalization and controlled extension of sexual Reason.

An unexpected fate, one that cuts short all the illusions of desire and all the rationalizations of liberation. Marcuse:

What within a patriarchal system appears as the feminine antithesis of masculine values would then truly constitute a repressed social and historical alternative – the socialist alternative... To do away with patriarchal society is to deny all the particular qualities attributed to women as women, and thus to extend these qualities to all sectors of social life, to work and leisure alike. Women's liberation would then be, simultaneously, the liberation of men...

Actuels, Galilée, p. 33.

Suppose the feminine liberated and placed at the service of a new collective Eros (the same modus operandi as for the death drive – the same dialectic aligned with the new social Eros). But what happens if the feminine, far from being a set of specific qualities (which it may have been when repressed, but only then), proves, once "liberated," to be the expression of an erotic indetermination, and of the loss of any specific qualities, as much in the social as the sexual sphere?

The situation of the feminine was quite ironic in seduction, and is just as ironic today in its indetermination and equivocation; for its promotion as subject is accompanied by its return as object; that is to say, as generalized pornography. A strange coincidence. Women's liberation would very much like to cast the deciding vote against this objectification. But the cause is hopeless, for the significance of the liberation of the feminine lies in its radical ambiguity. Even Roustang's text, which tends to support the flood of female demands, cannot but have a

presentiment of the catastrophe that the channelling of all desire into the demand for gratification constitutes. Unless one considers the subsuicidal state of men provoked by this demand as a decisive argument, there is nothing that lets one distinguish the monstrosity of this demand for female gratification from the monstrosity of its total interdiction in years past.

A similar ambiguity can be found in the male and his weakness. The panic men feel when faced with the "liberated" female subject is equalled only by their fragility before the pornographic chasm of the "alienated" female sex, the female sex object. Whether a woman demands sexual satisfaction "by becoming conscious of the rationality of her desire," or offers herself in a state of total prostitution – whether the female be subject or object, liberated or prostituted, her sex is to be devouring, a gaping voracity. It is no accident that all pornography turns around the female sex. This is because erections are never certain (no scenes of impotence in pornography, they are averted by the hallucination of unrestrained feminine supply). In a sexuality made problematic by demands to prove and demonstrate itself without discontinuity, the marked position, the masculine position, will be fragile. By contrast, the female sex remains equal to itself in its availability, in its chasm, its degree zero. The continuity of female sexuality, as opposed to male intermittency, is enough to ensure its superiority at the level of the organic representation of sexual pleasure, the representation of endless sex that has come to dominate our fantasies.

Sexual liberation, like that of the productive forces, is potentially limitless. It demands a profusion come true, a "sexually affluent society." It can no more tolerate a scarcity of sexual goods, than of material goods. Now, this utopian continuity and availability can only be incarnated by the female sex. This is why in this society everything – objects, goods, services, relations of all types – will be feminized, sexualized in a feminine fashion. In advertising it is not so much a matter of adding sex to washing machines (which is absurd) as conferring on objects the imaginary, female quality of being available at will, of never being retractile or aleatory.

In pornography sexuality is lulled by this yawning monoto-

ny, where flaccid or erectile men play only a nominal role. Hard core has changed nothing: the male is no longer interesting because too determined, too marked – the phallus as canonical signifier – and thus too fragile. Fascination moves towards the neuter, towards an indeterminate chasm, a mobile, diffuse sexuality. The feminine's historical revenge after so many centuries of repression and frigidity? Perhaps, but more likely, the exhaustion of sexuality, whether it be the masculine sexuality that once nourished all the schemes of erectility, verticality, ascendancy, growth, production, etc., and is at present lost in the obsessive simulation of all these themes – or a feminine sexuality, as incarnated from time immemorial in seduction. Today, behind the mechanical objectification of the signs of sex, it is the masculine as fragile, and the feminine as degree zero which have the upper hand.

We are indeed in an original situation as regards sexual violence – violence done to the "subsuicidal" male by unbridled, female sensualism. But it is not a matter of a reversal of the historical violence done to women by male sexual force. The violence involved here is relative to the neutralization, depression and collapse of the marked term before the irruption of the non-marked term. It is not a real, generic violence, but a violence of dissuasion, the violence of the neuter, the violence of the degree zero.

So too is pornography: the violence of sex neutralized.

Phantasies of 7" 20 37
 true, too near to be true. And it is this that is fascinating, this excess of reality, this hyperreality of things. The only phantasy in pornography, if there is one, is thus not a phantasy of sex, but of the real, and its absorption into something other than the real, the hyperreal. Pornographic voyeurism is not a sexual voyeurism, but a voyeurism of representation and its perdition, a dizziness born of the loss of the scene and the irruption of the obscene.

Consequent to the anatomical zoom, the dimension of the real is abolished, the distance implied by the gaze gives way to an instantaneous, exacerbated representation, that of sex in its pure state, stripped not just of all seduction, but of its image's very potentiality. Sex so close that it merges with its own representation: the end of perspectival space, and therefore, that of the imaginary and of phantasy - end of the scene, end of an illusion.

Obscenity, however, is not pornography. Traditional obscenity still contains an element of transgression, provocation, or perversion. It plays on repression, with phantasies of violence. With sexual liberation this obscenity disappears: Marcuse's "repressive desublimation" goes this route (and even if it has not passed into general mores, the mythical triumph of release today, like that of repression yesterday, is total). The new obscenity, like the new philosophy (*la nouvelle philosophie*) arises on the burying grounds of the old, and has another meaning. It does not play with violent sex, sex with real stakes, but with sex neutralized by tolerance. Sex here is outrageously "rendered," but it is the rendering of something that has been removed. Pornography is its artificial synthesis, its ceremony but not its celebration. Something *neo* or *retro*, like those green spaces that substitute their chlorophyll effects for a defunct nature, and for this reason, partake of the same obscenity as pornography.

Modern unreality no longer implies the imaginary, it engages more reference, more truth, more exactitude - it consists in having everything pass into the absolute evidence of the real. As in hyperrealist paintings (the paintings of the "magic realists") where one can discern the grain of the face's skin, an unwonted microscopics that lacks even the charm of the uncanny. Hyperrealism is not surrealism, it is a vision that hunts down

Hyperrealism is a vision that hunts down illusions by means of visibility.

Sex emerges in
 it is a
 repressive
 and of a
 situation

What is by so
 the



STEREO-PORNO

Take me to your room and fuck me. There is something indefinable in your vocabulary, something left to be desired.

Philip Dick
The Schizos' Ball

Turning everything into reality
 Jimmy Cliff

The *trompe l'oeil* removes a dimension from real space, and this accounts for its seduction. Pornography by contrast adds a dimension to the space of sex, it makes the latter more real than the real - and this accounts for its absence of seduction.

There is no need to search for the phantasies that haunt pornography (fetishisms, perversions, primal scenes, etc.), for they are barred by an excess of "reality". Perhaps pornography is only an allegory, that is to say, a forcing of signs, a baroque enterprise of over-signification touching on the "grotesque" (literally, "grotesque" garden art added to a rocky nature as pornography adds the vividness of anatomical detail).

The obscenity itself burns and consumes its object. One sees from up close what one has never seen before; to one's good fortune, one has never seen one's genitals function from so close, nor for that matter, from so general a perspective. It is all too

Trompe l'oeil?

seduction by means of visibility. One "gives you more." This is already true of colour in film or television. One gives you so much - colour, lustre, sex, all in high fidelity, and with all the accents (that's life!) - that you have nothing to add; that is to say, nothing to give in exchange. Absolute repression: by giving you a little too much one takes away everything. Beware of what has been so well "rendered," when it is being returned to you without you ever having given it!

A bewildering, claustrophobic and obscene image, that of Japanese quadrophonics: an ideally conditioned room, fantastic technique, music in four dimensions, not just the three of the environing space, but a fourth, visceral dimension of internal space. The technical delirium of the perfect restitution of music (Bach, Monteverdi, Mozart!) that has never existed, that no one has ever heard, and that was not meant to be heard like this. Moreover, one does not "hear" it, for the distance that allows one to hear music, at a concert or somewhere else, is abolished. Instead it permeates one from all sides; there is no longer any musical space; it is the simulation of a total environment that dispossesses one of even the minimal analytic perception constitutive of music's charm. The Japanese have simple-mindedly, and in complete good faith, confused the real with the greatest number of dimensions possible. If they could construct hexaphonics, they would do it. Now, it is by this fourth dimension which they have added to music, that they castrate you of all musical pleasure. Something else fascinates (but no longer seduces) you: technical perfection, "high fidelity," which is just as obsessive and puritanical as the other, conjugal fidelity. This time, however, one no longer even knows what object it is faithful to, for no one knows where the real begins or ends, nor understands, therefore, the fever of perfectibility that persists in the real's reproduction.

Technique in this sense digs its own grave. For at the same time that it perfects the means of synthesis, it deepens the criteria of analysis and definition to such an extent that total faithfulness, exhaustiveness as regards the real becomes forever impossible. The real becomes a vertiginous phantasy of exactitude lost in the infinitalism.

In comparison with, for example, the *trompe-l'oeil*, which

saves on one dimension, "normal" three-dimensional space is already debased and impoverished by virtue of an excess of means (all that is real, or wants to be real, constitutes a debasement of this type). Quadrophonics, hyperstereo, or hifi constitute a conclusive debasement.

* Pornography is the quadrophonics of sex. It adds a third and fourth track to the sexual act. It is the hallucination of detail that rules. Science has already habituated us to this microscopics, this excess of the real in its microscopic detail, this voyeurism of exactitude - a close-up of the invisible structures of the cell - to this notion of an inexorable truth that can no longer be measured with reference to the play of appearances, and that can only be revealed by a sophisticated technical apparatus. End of the secret.

What else does pornography do, in its sham vision, than reveal the inexorable, microscopic truth of sex? It is directly descended from a metaphysics that supposes the phantasy of a hidden truth and its revelation, the phantasy of "repressed" energy and its production - on the obscene scene of the real. Thus the impasse of enlightened thought when asked, should one censure pornography and choose a well-tempered repression? There can be no definitive response in the affirmative, for pornography has reason on its side; it is part of the devastation of the real, of the insane illusion of the real and its objective "liberation." One cannot liberate the productive forces without wanting to "liberate" sex in its brute function; they are both equally obscene. The realist corruption of sex, the productivist corruption of labour - same symptoms, same combat.

The equivalent of the conveyor belt here, is the Japanese vaginal cyclorama - it outdoes any strip-tease. Prostitutes, their thighs open, sitting on the edge of a platform, Japanese workers in their shirt-sleeves (it is a popular spectacle), permitted to shove their noses up to their eyeballs within the woman's vagina in order to see, to see better - but what? They clamber over each other in order to gain access, and all the while the prostitutes speak to them gently, or rebuke them sharply for the sake of form. The rest of the spectacle, the flagellations, the reciprocal masturbation and traditional strip-tease, pales before this moment of absolute obscenity, this moment of visual voracity that

JT demands from the phantasy of a hidden truth -
 1) objectivism - seeks in over-exposure & production
 2) present the real as inessential - it is an object secret & revealed

no best
 reproduction of
 music

Distance

Confused the real
 with the greatest number
 of dimensions possible

Technique
 digs its own grave

Below
 relating to
 JT

Productive forces in spite of education

goes far beyond sexual possession. A sublime pornography: if they could do it, these guys would be swallowed up whole within the prostitute. An exaltation with death? Perhaps, but at the same time they are comparing and commenting on the respective vaginas in mortal seriousness, without ever smiling or breaking out in laughter, and without ever trying to touch – except when playing by the rules. No lewdness, but an extremely serious, infantile act borne of an undivided fascination with the mirror of the female organ, like Narcissus' fascination with his own image. Beyond the conventional idealism of the strip-tease (perhaps there might even be some seduction here), pornography at its most sublime reverses itself into a purified obscenity, an obscenity that is purer, deeper, more visceral. But why stop with nudity, or the genitalia? If the obscene is a matter of representation and not of sex, it must explore the very interior of the body and the viscera. Who knows what profound pleasure is to be found in the visual dismemberment of mucous membranes and smooth muscles? Our pornography still retains a restricted definition. Obscenity has an unlimited future.

But take heed, it is not a matter of the deepening of a drive; what is involved is an orgy of realism, an orgy of production. A rage (perhaps also a drive, but one that substitutes itself for all the others) to summon everything before the jurisdiction of signs. Let everything be rendered in the light of the sign, in the light of a visible energy. Let all speech be liberated and proclaim desire. We are reveling in this liberalization, which, in fact, simply marks the growing progress of obscenity. All that is hidden and still enjoys a forbidden status, will be unearthed, rendered to speech and made to bow before the facts. The real is growing ever larger, some day the entire universe will be real, and when the real is universal, there will be death.

* * *

Pornographic simulation: nudity is never anything but an extra sign. Nudity veiled by clothing functions as a secret; ambivalent referent. Unveiled, it surfaces as a sign and returns to the circulation of signs: nudity de-sign. The same occurs with hard core and blue porn: the sexual organ, whether erect or

open wide is just another sign in the hypersexual panoply. Phallus-design. The more one advances willy-nilly in sex's veracity, in the exposure of its workings, the more immersed one becomes in the accumulation of signs, and the more enclosed one becomes in the endless over-signification of a real that no longer exists, and of a body that never existed. Our entire body culture, with its concern for the "expression" of the body's "desires," for the stereophonics of desire, is a culture of irredeemable monstrosity and obscenity.

Hegel: "Just as when speaking of the exteriority of the human body, we said that its entire surface, in contrast to that of the animal world, reveals the presence and pulsation of the heart, we say of art that it has as its task to create in such a way that at all points of its surface the phenomenal, the appearance becomes an eye, the seat of the soul, rendering itself visible to the spirit." There is, therefore, never any nudity, never any nude body that is simply nude; there is never just a body. It is like the Indian said when the white man asked him why he ran around naked: "For me, it is all face." In a non-fetishistic culture (one that does not fetishize nudity as objective truth) the body is not, as in our own, opposed to the face, conceived as alone rich in expression and endowed with "eyes": it is itself a face, and looks at you. It is therefore not obscene, that is to say, made to be seen nude. It cannot be seen nude, no more than the face can for us, for the body is – and is only – a symbolic veil; and it is by way of this play of veils, which, literally, abolishes the body "as such," that seduction occurs. This is where seduction is at play and not in the tearing away of the veil in the name of some manifestation of truth or desire.

The indistinction of face and body in a total culture of appearances – the distinction between face and body in a culture of meaning (the body here becomes monstrously visible, it becomes the sign of a monster called desire) – then the total triumph in pornography of the obscene body, to the point where the face is effaced. The erotic models are faceless, the actors are neither beautiful, ugly, or expressive; functional nudity effaces everything in the "spectacularity" of sex. Certain films are no more than visceral sound-effects of a coital close-up; even the body disappears, dispersed amongst oversized, par-

author of 'Seduction of Sex'
 there is a culture of modern
 ...

b. h. ...
 ...
 ...

tial objects. Whatever the face, it remains inappropriate, for it breaks the obscenity and reintroduces meaning where everything aspires to abolish it in sexual excess and a nihilistic vertigo.

At the end of this terrorist debasement, where the body (and its "desire") are made to yield to the evidence, appearances no longer have any secret. A culture of the desublimation of appearances: everything is materialized in accord with the most objective categories. A pornographic culture *par excellence*; one that pursues the workings of the real at all times and in all places. A pornographic culture with its ideology of the concrete, of facticity and use, and its concern with the preeminence of use value, the material infrastructure of things, and the body as the material infrastructure of desire. A one-dimensional culture that exalts everything in the "concreteness of production" or of pleasure - unlimited mechanical labour or copulation. What is obscene about this world is that nothing is left to appearances, or to chance. Everything is a visible, necessary sign. Like those dolls, adorned with genitalia, that talk, pee, and will one day make love. And the little girl's reaction: "My little sister, she knows how to do that too. Can't you give me a real one?"

* * *

From the discourse of labour to the discourse of sex, from the discourse of productive forces to that of drives, one finds the same ultimatum, that of production in the literal sense of the term. Its original meaning, in fact, was not to fabricate, but to render visible or make appear. Sex is produced like one produces a document, or as one says of an actor that he performs (se produit) on stage.

To produce is to materialize by force what belongs to another order, that of the secret and of seduction. Seduction is, at all times and in all places, opposed to production. Seduction removes something from the order of the visible, while production constructs everything in full view, be it an object, a number or concept.

Everything is to be produced, everything is to be legible, everything is to become real, visible, accountable; everything is to be transcribed in relations of force, systems of concepts

nothing left to appearances
to be made appear
to produce
seduction is to materialize by force what belongs to another order
to render visible or make appear
to produce like one produces a document
to be legible
to become real
to be transcribed in relations of force, systems of concepts

one to think it is a necessary condition
an obscuring (like the puppet obscuring the light)

or measurable energy; everything is to be said, accumulated, indexed and recorded. This is sex as it exists in pornography, but more generally, this is the enterprise of our entire culture, whose natural condition is obscene: a culture of monstration, of demonstration, of productive monstrosity.

product
monstrosity

No seduction here, nor in pornography, given the abrupt production of sexual acts, and the ferocity of pleasure in its immediacy. There is nothing seductive about bodies traversed by a gaze literally sucked in by a vacuum of transparency; nor can there be even a hint of seduction within the universe of production, where a principle of transparency governs the forces belonging to the world of visible, calculable phenomena - objects, machines, sexual acts, or the gross national product.

* * *

The insoluble equivocalness of pornography: it puts an end to all seduction via sex, but at the same time it puts an end to sex via the accumulation of the signs of sex. Both triumphant parody and simulated agony - there lies its ambiguity. In a sense, pornography is true: it owes its truth to a system of sexual dissuasion by hallucination, dissuasion of the real by the hyper-real, and of the body by its forced materialization.

Pornography is usually faulted for two reasons - for manipulating sex in order to defuse the class struggle (always the old "mystified consciousness") and for corrupting sex (the good, true sex, the sex to be liberated, the sex to be considered amongst our natural rights) by its commodification. Pornography, then, is said to mask either the truth of capital and the infrastructure, or that of sex and desire. But in fact pornography does not mask anything (yes, that is indeed the case). It is not an ideology, i.e., it does not hide some truth; it is a simulacrum, i.e., it is a truth effect that hides the truth's non-existence.

La droite efface la gauche
la gauche efface la droite
la droite efface la gauche
la gauche efface la droite

Pornography says: there must be good sex somewhere, for I am its caricature. In its grotesque obscenity, it attempts to save sex's truth and provide the faltering sexual model with some credibility. Now, the whole question is whether good sex exists, or whether, quite simply, sex exists, somewhere - sex as

intention
truth effect

the body's ideal use value, sex as possible pleasures which can and must be "liberated." It is the same question demanded of political economy: is there "good" value, an ideal use value beyond exchange value understood as the inhuman abstraction of capital - an ideal value of goods or social relations which can and must be "liberated"?

SO IT is a
character of knowledge &
intelligence - it points,
that something like truth, & system
eminently not exist. -



SEDUCTION/PRODUCTION

In reality, pornography is but the paradoxical limit of the sexual. A "realistic" exacerbation, a maniacal obsession with the real: this is the obscene, in the etymological and every other sense. But is not the sexual itself already a forced materialization? Is not the advent of sexuality already part of occidental realistics, the compulsion proper to our culture to instantiate and instrumentalize everything?

It is absurd, when speaking of other cultures, to dissociate religion, economics, politics, and the legal system (i.e., the social and other classificatory phantasmagorias) for the reason that such a dissociation has not occurred, these concepts being like so many diseases with which we infect these cultures in order to better "understand" them. In the same manner, it is absurd to autonomize the sexual as a separate instance, an irreducible given, as something to which other instances or givens can be reduced. We need a critique of sexual Reason, or rather, a geneology of sexual Reason similar to Nietzsche's geneology of good and evil, for it is our new morality. One might say of sexuality, as of death: "it is a new wrinkle to which consciousness became accustomed not so long ago."

We remain perplexed and vaguely compassionate when confronted with cultures for which the sexual act is not a finality

Wax

not in like
& distinct
use in fact
to understand
has in our
to understand
it

in itself, for which sexuality does not have the mortal seriousness of an energy to be liberated, of an ejaculation to be forced, a production at any price, or hygienic auditing of the body. Cultures that preserve lengthy procedures of enticement and sensuality, long series of gifts and counter-gifts, with sex being but one service amongst others, and the act of love one possible end-term to a prescribed, ritualistic interchange. Such proceedings no longer make sense to us; sex has become, strictly speaking, the actualization of desire in pleasure – all else is literature. An extraordinary crystallization around the orgasmic, and more generally, the energizing function.

Ours is a culture of premature ejaculation. Increasingly all seduction, all manner of enticement – which is always a highly ritualized process – is effaced behind a naturalized sexual imperative, behind the immediate and imperative realization of desire. Our center of gravity has been displaced towards a libidinal economy concerned with only the naturalization of desire, a desire dedicated to drives, or to a machine-like functioning, but above all, to the imaginary of repression and liberation.

Henceforth one no longer says: "You have a soul and it must be saved," but:

"You have a sex, and you must put it to good use."

"You have an unconscious, and you must let the id speak."

"You have a body, and you must derive pleasure from it."

"You have a libido, and you must expend it," etc.

This pressure towards liquidity, flux and the accelerated articulation of the sexual, psychic and physical body is an exact replica of that which regulates exchange value: capital must circulate, there must no longer be any fixed point, investments must be ceaselessly renewed, value must radiate without respite – this is the form of value's present realization, and sexuality, the sexual model, is simply its mode of appearance at the level of the body.

As a model sex takes the form of an individual enterprise based on natural energy: to each his desire and may the best man prevail (in matters of pleasure). It is the selfsame form as

capital, and this is why sexuality, desire and pleasure are subaltern values. When they first appeared, not so long ago, as a system of reference on the horizon of western culture, it was as fallen, residual values – the ideal of inferior classes, the bourgeoisie, then the petty-bourgeoisie – relative to the aristocratic values of birth and blood, valour and seduction, or the collective values of religion and sacrifice.

Moreover, the body – this selfsame body to which we ceaselessly refer – has no other reality than that implied by the sexual and productive model. It is capital that, in a single movement, gives rise to both the energizing body of labour power, and the body of our dreams, a sanctuary of desires and drives, of psychic energy and the unconscious, the impulsive body that haunts the primary processes – the body itself having become a primary process, and thereby an anti-body, an ultimate revolutionary referent. The two bodies are simultaneously engendered in repression, and their apparent antagonism is but a consequence of their reduplication. When one uncovers in the body's secret places an "unbound" libidinal energy opposed to the "bound" energy of the productive body, when one uncovers in desire the truth of the body's phantasms and drives, one is still only disinterring the psychic metaphor of capital.

Here is your desire, your unconscious: a psychic metaphor of capital in the rubbish heap of political economy. And the sexual jurisdiction is but a fantastic extension of the commonplace ideal of private property, where everyone is assigned a certain amount of capital to manage: a psychic capital, a libidinal, sexual or unconscious capital, for which each person will have to answer individually, under the sign of his or her own liberation.

A fantastic reduction of seduction. This sexuality transformed by the revolution of desire, this mode of bodily production and circulation has acquired its present character, has come to be spoken of in terms of "sexual relations", only by forgetting all forms of seduction – just as one can speak of the social in terms of "relations" or "social relations", only after it has lost all symbolic substance.

Wherever sex has been erected into a function, an auto-

mous instance, it has liquidated seduction. Sex today generally occurs only in the place, and in place of a missing seduction, or as the residue and staging of a failed seduction. *It is then the absent form of seduction that is hallucinated sexually* – in the form of desire. The modern theory of desire draws its force from seduction's liquidation.

Henceforth, in place of a seductive form, there is a productive form, an "economy" of sex: the retrospective of a drive, the hallucination of a stock of sexual energy, of an unconscious in which the repression of desire and its clearance are inscribed. All this (and the psychic in general) results from the autonomization of sex – as nature and the economy were once the precipitate of the autonomization of production. Nature and desire, both of them idealized, succeed each other in the progressive designs for liberation, yesterday the liberation of the productive forces, today that of the body and sex:

One can speak of the birth of the sexual and of sex speech – just as one speaks of the birth of the clinic and clinical gaze – *where once there was nothing*, if not uncontrolled, unstable, insensate, or else highly ritualized forms. Where too, it follows, there was no repression, this thematic with which we have burdened all previous societies even more than our own. We condemn them as primitive from a technological perspective, but also from a sexual or psychic perspective, for they conceived of neither the sexual nor the unconscious. Fortunately, psychoanalysis has come along to lift the burden and reveal what was hidden. The incredible racism of the truth, the evangelical racism of the Word and its accession.

Where the sexual does not appear of and for itself, we act as though it were repressed; it is our way of saving it. And yet to speak of repressed or sublimated sexuality in primitive, feudal or other societies, or simply to speak of "sexuality" and the unconscious in such cases, is a sign of profound stupidity. It is not even certain that such talk holds the best key to unlocking our society. On this basis, that is, by calling into question the very hypothesis of sexuality, by questioning sex and desire as autonomous instances, it is possible to agree with Foucault and say (though not for the same reasons) that in our culture too there is no and never has been any repression either.

Sexuality as a discourse is, like political economy (and every other discursive system), only a montage or simulacrum which has always been traversed, thwarted and exceeded by actual practice. The coherence and transparency of *homo sexualis* has no more existence than the coherence and transparency of *homo economicus*.

It is a long process that simultaneously establishes the psychic and the sexual, that establishes the "other scene," that of the phantasy and the unconscious, at the same time as the energy produced therein – a psychic energy that is merely a direct consequence of the staged hallucination of repression, an energy hallucinated as sexual substance, which is then metaphorized and metonymized according to the various instances (topical, economic, etc.), and according to all the modalities of secondary and tertiary repression. Psychoanalysis, this most admirable edifice, the most beautiful hallucination of the back-world, as Nietzsche would say. The extraordinary effectiveness of this model for the simulation of scenes and energies – an extraordinary theoretical psychodrama, this staging of the psyche, this scenario of sex as a separate instance and insurmountable reality (akin to the hypostatization of production). What does it matter if the economic, the biological or the psychic bear the costs of this staging – of what concern is the "scene" or "the other scene": it is the entire scenario of sexuality (and psychoanalysis) as a model of simulation that should be questioned.

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It is true that in our culture the sexual has triumphed over seduction, and annexed it as a subaltern form. Our instrumental vision has inverted everything. For in the symbolic order seduction is primary, and sex appears only as an addendum. Sex in this latter order is like the recovery in an analytic cure, or a birth in a story of Levi-Strauss; it comes as an extra, without a relation of cause to effect. This is the secret of "symbolic efficacy": the world's workings are the result of a mental seduction. Thus the butcher Tchouang-Tseu whose understanding enabled him to describe the cow's interstitial structure without ever having used the blade of a knife: a sort of symbolic reso-

lution that, as an addendum, has a practical result.

Seduction too works on the mode of symbolic articulation, of a duel⁹ affinity with the structure of the other – sex may result, as an addendum, but not necessarily. More generally, seduction is a challenge to the very existence of the sexual order. And if our “liberation” seems to have reversed the terms and successfully challenged the order of seduction, it is by no means certain that its victory is not hollow. The question of the ultimate superiority of the ritual logics of challenge and seduction over the economic logics of sex and production still remains unresolved.

For revolutions and liberations are fragile, while seduction is inescapable. It is seduction that lies in wait for them – seduced as they are, despite everything, by the immense setbacks that turn them from their truth – and again it is seduction that awaits them even in their triumph. The sexual discourse itself is continually threatened with saying something other than what it says.

In an American film a guy pursues a street-walker, prudently, according to form. The woman responds, aggressively: “What do you want? Do you want to jump me? Then, change your approach! Say, I want to jump you!” and the guy, troubled, replies: “yes, I want to jump you.” “Then go fuck yourself!” And later, when he is driving her in his car: “I’ll make coffee, and then you can jump me.” In fact, this cynical conversation, which appears objective, functional, anatomical, and without nuance, is only a game. Play, challenge, and provocation are just beneath the surface. Its very brutality is rich with the inflections of love and complicity. It is a new manner of seduction.

Or this conversation taken from *The Schizophrenics’ Ball* by Philip Dick:

“Take me to your room and fuck me.”

“There is something indefinable in your vocabulary, something left to be desired.”

One can understand this as: Your proposition is unacceptable, it lacks the poetry of desire, it is too direct. But in a sense the text says the exact opposite: that the proposition has some-

*Trans. note: In French, the word *duel* means both duel/dual. Baudrillard is clearly playing on the double meaning of the word – agonal relations and reciprocal challenges. I translate the term ‘duel’, even in its adjectival form.

U.S. is the discourse form of the body. So a direct affirmation of the sun. THE ECLIPTIC OF SEX 43

thing “indefinable” about it, which thereby opens the path to desire. A direct sexual invitation is too direct to be true, and immediately refers to something else.

The first version deplores the obscenity of the conversation. The second is more subtle; it is capable of disclosing a twist to obscenity – obscenity as an enticement, and thus as an “indefinable” allusion to desire. An obscenity too brutal to be true, and too impolite to be dishonest – obscenity as a challenge and therefore, again, as seduction.

In the last instance, a purely sexual statement, a pure demand for sex, is impossible. One cannot be free of seduction, and the discourse of anti-seduction is but its last metamorphosis.

It is not just that a pure discourse of sexual demand is absurd given the complexity of affective relations; it quite simply does not exist. To believe in sex’s reality and in the possibility of speaking sex without mediation is a delusion – the delusion of every discourse that believes in transparency; it is also that of functional, scientific, and all other discourses with claims to the truth. Fortunately, the latter is continually undermined, dissipated, destroyed, or rather, circumvented, diverted, and seduced. Surreptitiously they are turned against themselves; surreptitiously they dissolve into a different game, a different set of stakes.

To be sure, neither pornography nor sexual transactions exercise any seduction. Like nudity, and like the truth, they are abject. They are the body’s disenchanted form, just as sex is the suppressed and disenchanted form of seduction, just as use value is the disenchanted form of the object, and just as, more generally, the real is the suppressed and disenchanted form of the world.

Nudity will never abolish seduction, for it immediately becomes something else, the hysterical enticements of a different game, one that goes beyond it. There is no degree zero, no objective reference, no point of neutrality, but always and again, stakes. Today all our signs appear to be converging – like the body in nudity and meaning in truth – towards some conclusive objectivity, an entropic and metastable form of the neutral. (What else is the ideal-typical, vacationing nude body, given over to the sun, itself hygienic and neutralized, with its luciferic-

an parody of burning). But is there ever a cessation of signs at some zero-point of the real or the neutral? Isn't there always a reversion of the neutral itself into a new spiral of stakes, seduction and death.

What seduction used to lie concealed in sex? What new seduction, what new challenge lies concealed in the abolition of what, within sex, was once at stake? (The same question on another plane: What challenge, what source of fascination, lies concealed in the masses, in the abolition of what was once at stake with the social?)

All descriptions of disenchanted systems, all hypotheses about the disenchantment of systems – the flood of simulation and dissuasion, the abolition of symbolic processes, the death of referentials – are perhaps false. The neutral is never neutral; it becomes an object of fascination. But does it then become an object of seduction?

* * *

Agonistic logics, logics of ritual and seduction, are stronger than sex. Like power, sex never has the last word. In *The Empire of The Senses*, a film that from end to end is occupied with the sex act, the latter, by its very persistence, comes to be possessed by the logic of another order. The film is unintelligible in terms of sex, for sexual pleasure, by itself, leads to everything but death. But the madness that seizes hold of the couple (a madness only for us, in reality it is a rigorous logic) pushes them to extremes, where meaning no longer has sense and the exercise of the senses is not in the least sensual. Nor is it intelligible in terms of mysticism or metaphysics. Its logic is one of challenge, impelled by the two partners outbidding each other. Or more precisely, the key event is the passage from a logic of pleasure at the beginning, where the man leads the game, to a logic of challenge and death, that occurs under the impetus of the woman – who thereby becomes the game's mistress, even if at first she was only a sexual object. It is the feminine principle that brings about the reversal of sex/value into an agonistic logic of seduction.

There is here no perversion or morbid drive, no interpreta-

tion drawn from our psycho-sexual frontiers, no "affinity" of Eros for Thanatos nor any ambivalence of desire. It is not a matter of sex, nor of the unconscious. The sexual act is viewed as a ritual act, ceremonial or warlike, for which (as in ancient tragedies on the theme of incest) death is the mandatory denouement, the emblematic form of the challenge's fulfillment.

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Thus the obscene can seduce, as can sex and pleasure. Even the most anti-seductive figures can become figures of seduction. (It has been said of the feminist discourse that, beyond its total absence of seduction, there lies a certain homosexual allure). These figures need only move beyond their truth into a reversible configuration, a configuration that is also that of their death. The same holds true for that figure of anti-seduction par excellence, power.

Power seduces. But not in the vulgar sense of the masses' desire for complicity (a tautology that ultimately seeks to ground seduction in the desire of others). No, power seduces by virtue of the reversibility that haunts it, and on which a minor cycle is instituted. No more dominant and dominated, no more victims and executioners (but "exploiters" and "exploited," they certainly exist, though quite separately, for there is no reversibility in production – but then nothing essential happens at this level). No more separate positions: power is realized according to a duel relation, whereby it throws a challenge to society, and its existence is challenged in return. If power cannot be "exchanged" in accord with this minor cycle of seduction, challenge and ruse, then it quite simply disappears.

At bottom, power does not exist. The unilateral character of of the relation of forces on which the "structure" and "reality" of power and its perpetual movement are supposedly instituted, does not exist. This is the dream of power imposed by reason, not its reality. Everything seeks its own death, including power. Or rather, everything demands to be exchanged, reversed, and abolished within a cycle (this is why neither repression nor the unconscious exist, for reversibility is always already there). *This alone is profoundly seductive*. Power

Power is anti-seductive for seduction

seduces only when it becomes a challenge to itself; otherwise it is just an exercise, and satisfies only the hegemonic logic of reason.

Seduction is stronger than power because it is reversible and mortal, while power, like value, seeks to be irreversible, cumulative and immortal. Power partakes of all the illusions of production, and of the real; it wants to be real, and so tends to become its own imaginary, its own superstition (with the help of theories that analyze it, be they to contest it). Seduction, on the other hand, is not of the order of the real – and is never of the order of force, nor relations of force. But precisely for this reason, it enmeshes all power's real actions, as well as the entire reality of production, in this unremitting reversibility and dis-accumulation – *without which there would be neither power nor accumulation*.

It is the emptiness behind, or at the very heart of power and production; it is this emptiness that today gives them their last glimmer of reality. Without that which reverses, annuls, and seduces them, they would never have had the authority of reality.

The real, moreover, has never interested anyone. It is a place of disenchantment, a simulacrum of accumulation against death. And there is nothing more tiresome. What sometimes renders the real fascinating – and the truth as well – is the imaginary catastrophe which lies behind it. Do you think that power, sex, economics – all these real, really big things – would have held up for a single moment unless sustained by fascination, a fascination that comes precisely from the mirror image in which they are reflected, from their continuous reversion, the palpable pleasure borne of their imminent catastrophe?

The real, particularly in the present, is nothing more than the stockpiling of dead matter, dead bodies and dead language – a residual sedimentation. Still we feel more secure when the stock of reality is assessed (the ecological lament speaks of material energies, but it conceals that what is disappearing is the real's energy, the real's reality, the possibility of its management, whether capitalist or revolutionary). If the horizon of production is beginning to vanish, that of speech, sex or desire can still take up the slack. To liberate, to give pleasure, to give

a speech, to give speech to others: this is real, it is something substantial, with a prospect of stocks. And, therefore, it is power.

Unfortunately not. That is to say, not for long. This "reality" is slowly dissipating. One wants sex, like power, to become an irreversible instance, and desire an irreversible energy (a stock of energy – desire, need it be said, is never far from capital). For we grant meaning only to what is irreversible: accumulation, progress, growth, production. Value, energy and desire imply irreversible processes – that is the very meaning of their liberation. (Inject the smallest dose of reversibility into our economic, political, sexual or institutional mechanisms, and everything collapses). This is what today assures sexuality of its mythical authority over hearts and bodies. But it is also what lies behind the fragility of sex, and of the entire edifice of production.

Seduction is stronger than production. It is stronger than sexuality, with which it must never be confused. It is not something internal to sexuality, though this is what it is generally reduced to. It is a circular, reversible process of challenges, oneupmanship and death. It is, on the contrary, sex that is the debased form, circumscribed as it is by the terms of energy and desire.

Seduction's entanglement with production and power, the irruption of a minimal reversibility within every irreversible process, such that the latter are secretly undermined, while simultaneously ensured of that minimal continuum of pleasure without which they would be nothing – this is what must be analyzed. At the same time knowing that production constantly seeks to eliminate seduction in order to establish itself on an economy of relations of force alone; and that sex, the production of sex, seeks to eliminate seduction in order to establish itself on an economy of relations of desire alone.

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This is why one must completely turn round what Foucault has to say in *The History of Sexuality I*, while still accepting its central hypothesis. Foucault sees only the production of sex as discourse. He is fascinated by the irreversible deployment

and interstitial saturation of a field of speech, which is at the same time the institution of a field of power, culminating in a field of knowledge that reflects (or invents) it. But from whence does power derive its somnambulistic functionality, this irresistible vocation to saturate space? If neither sociality nor sexuality exist unless reclaimed and staged by power, perhaps power too does not exist unless reclaimed and staged by knowledge (theory). In which case, the entire ensemble should be placed in simulation, and this too perfect mirror inverted, even if the "truth effects" it produces are marvelously decipherable.

Furthermore, the equation of power with knowledge, this convergence of mechanisms over a field of rule they have seemingly swept clean, this conjunction described by Foucault as complete and operational, is perhaps only the concurrence of two dead stars whose last glimmerings still illuminate each other, though they have lost their own radiance? In their original, authentic phase, knowledge and power were opposed to each other, sometimes violently (as were, moreover, sex and power). But if today they are merging, is this not due to the progressive extenuation of their reality principle, of their distinctive characteristics, their specific energies? Their conjunction then would herald not a reinforced positivity, but a twin indifferenciation, at the end of which only their phantoms would remain, mingling amongst themselves, left to haunt us.

In the last instance, behind the apparent stasis of knowledge and power which appears to arise from all sides, there would lie only the metastasis of power, the cancerous proliferation of a disturbed, disorganized structure. If power today is general, and can be detected at all levels ("molecular" power), if it has become cancerous, with its cells proliferating uncontrollably, without regard to the good old "genetic code" of politics, this is because it is itself afflicted and in a state of advanced decomposition. Or perhaps it is afflicted with hyperreality and in an acute crisis of simulation (the cancerous proliferation of only the signs of power) and, accordingly, has reached a state of general diffusion and saturation. Its somnambulistic operatinality.

One must therefore always wager on simulation and take the

signs from behind – signs that, when taken at face value and in good faith, always lead to the reality and evidence of power. Just as they lead to the reality and evidence of sex and production. It is this positivism that must not be taken at face value; and it is to this reversion of power in simulation one must devote one's efforts. Power will never do it by itself; and Foucault's text should be criticized for failing to do it and, therefore, for reviving the illusion of power.

The whole, obsessed as it is with maximizing power and sex, must be questioned as to its emptiness. Given its obsession with power as continuous expansion and investment, one must ask it the question of the reversion of the space of power, and of the reversion of the space of sex and its speech. Given its fascination with production, one must ask it the question of seduction.