

Machine-Men – User's Guide

1. *Disease is a language.*
 2. *The body is a representation.*
 3. *Medicine is a political practice.*
- Bryan S. Turner, *The Body and Society*

From subjects to patients

Under the rubble of the gamy, rotting democracies of the 20th century, we now see the upsurge of a new form of domination, a new and perverse relationship of collusion between the dominators and the dominated: biopower. This power effects us in the part of ourselves that is simultaneously the most exposed and the most hidden -- bare life. And that has produced a social formation where anything that lies outside the abstract domain of "economy" gets *nothing*. Bloom is the name of this defenseless, valueless, formless life, which to put it plainly lies outside of and even below the human. What is at play here is not undeserving of our attention: the western subject has been so totally devastated that politics itself has been rendered radically impossible, in its classical form. The vacuum of the subject, which once resided in philosophy, the sciences, and politics, has left a gaping hole which *is* Bloom. With Bloom, what we are dealing with is a human life that is reduced to total weakness, a creature that is incapable of desire, will or autonomy. Politics can but be tragically denied to such a creature, whose fate is one of constant *waiting and expectation* with no ends or object. In sum this society resembles a kind of hospital where each patient is possessed by an urgent desire only to change beds.

Domination hardly asks for anything from us except that we be *patient*, in the double sense of the term: we must put up with and passively undergo its disaster without ever demanding any reparations from it, and at the same time tolerate being dependent on it, not like one might depend on a father or on an employer – relationships that always leave some room for a possible emancipation – but like a patient depends on his doctor, that is, in a relationship any interruption to which would cause the death of the patient himself. *Patior* in Latin generally means *to suffer*, but it is from the same root that we have the word *passion* as well. Now, passion, insofar as it implies an *active* relationship with life, is the opposite of patience. It is precisely this active relation that domination has little by little brought about the disappearance of, for the "good" of the subjects; or in other words so that they make *good subjects*, dependent on it for their survival with a kind of artificial life-support on a global scale. And while human bodies continue to overrun the planet in an unprecedented proliferation guaranteed by "progress" in medicine, these bodies stripped of passion are abandoned by their minds, rendered foreign to the self and the other, while reality flattens out in a contingent plotline where everything speaks of everything except of us and our fate.

Why Viagra? What more can be said about this new frontier of aberration that humanity has just crossed?

What has been said about Viagra has thrown but a prudish light on its history and sometimes, between the statistics and one-liners, the present reality shows up on the surface, though *people* would never dare to take it to the next level. No attempt is made

to reveal the profound reasons for its appearance: regarding what advanced capitalism has done to human life, the form that human life has to take on in order to maintain itself, the *omertà* has been quite effective. That the coming humanity, or our contemporaries, those people we pass by in the stairway or supermarket, are to be afflicted by impotence – or believe themselves to be so, which comes down to the same thing – is not the real issue here. It's no longer incumbent upon us to ask ourselves whether the impotence striking the male populations of the industrialized nations corresponds to some schopenhauerian ruse on the part of the species itself to provoke the extinction of that part of itself that is most deeply sunken in abjection and unhappiness. The important thing is not so much the anthropological mutation that Viagra carries out; it's the terrain that its appearance was predicated upon, which for so long has been colonized by the most insidious forms of oppression.

Viagra is not the result of scientific research pressed forth by public demonstrations in favor of sex-finally-accessible-to-everyone, and it would be wrong to analyze its history from "the bottom up" perspective, from the perspective of its users. In effect the consumers of Viagra are not true consumers, or are such only to the extent that they purchase merely the effect, the consequence of the commodity, and not the commodity itself. For the first time, rather, such effect is neither a private sensation to be consumed more or less collectively, nor the preliminary condition for new relationships (a fine new car, a nice vacation, or the encounter of possible sex partners, etc.). The dematerialization of pornography and prostitution, their becoming-metaphysical, has already brought them into our telephones through erotic call-lines, but it's still not managed to slip them in between our sheets with us. With Viagra, men are buying the *modality* of their relations and the *conditions for their realization*; the sole domain where they have a choice – the partner, the other – automatically falls back into the shadows, because they have purchased, truth be told, none other than *potential human interchangeability*.

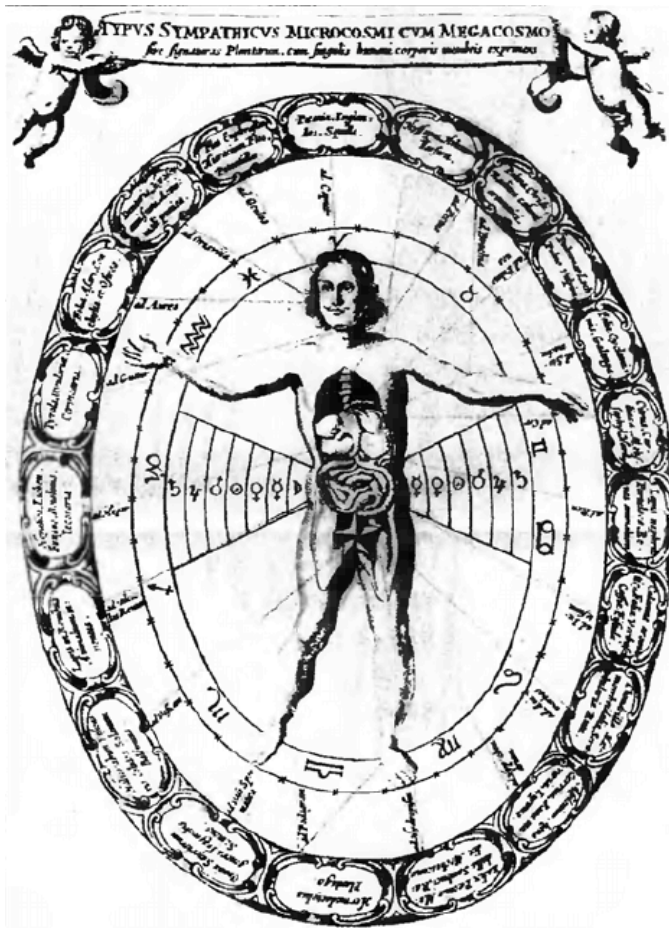
Viagra, biopolitics and the pleasure of knowing

Biopolitics, as defined by Foucault, is "the power to make live and let die," and it applies not just to each person in particular but also to the multiple and polycephalous body of the population as a whole, installing "security mechanisms around the random element inherent in each population of living beings," in order to "optimize a state of life," to "bring life under orderly management." (M. Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*)

Our sexuality, before it began to appear insufficient or pathological to us, had already been medicalized, not just in its deviant aspects but *as such*, "as if it were a particular zone of pathological fragility in human existence" (Foucault). It is we ourselves that adopt the pharmaceutical style, we ourselves that introject the medical norm and apply it to everything human.

We are permanently mobilized, like "assets"; above all in our playful and erotic activities, where otherwise we'd risk encountering that discolored image of ourselves and our freedom, which has been lost *since* always. And it is precisely there that domination installs its circus mirrors. And everything that truly speaks of us, our flesh and our feelings, our desires and our pains, everything in us that is passion and not passivity, is as foreign to us as a job that we didn't choose: "If power takes hold of bodies, it's not that it has at first to be interiorized into people's consciousness; there is a network of bio-power, of somato-power, which is itself the network from which sexuality itself is born as a historical and cultural phenomenon in which we simultaneously recognize ourselves and lose ourselves." (M. Foucault, *Power relations within bodies*)

"A good erection starts with a release of the erectile muscle that comprises the shaft of the penis. This release facilitates the dilation of the arteries and thus of the blood flow to the cavernous body, which permits the member to harden. This is what Viagra acts on."
(*Cosmopolitan*, July 1995)



Though we can't recall ever having seen such extreme crudeness, even in our high school natural sciences books, we shouldn't really be surprised to find it in the dailies and weeklies, with all their disturbing, *unheimlich* [uncanny] aspect of being simultaneously foreign and familiar. In our times, the *ars erotica* has become a *scientia sexualis*, which in order to understand things needs to classify them: an erection can *in itself* be "good" or "not so good," and what measures its value is the "quantity of orgasm/pleasure" that one can derive from it.

Centuries of alienation separate us from the simple wisdom of Rufus of Ephesus, who noted in his treatise on medicine: "the best thing for man is to devote his time to sexual relations when he is tormented simultaneously by the desires of the soul and the demands of the body."

Now we have entered the time of "cosmetic pharmacology," (*Le Monde*, September 4th, 1998), where drugs firm up tissue, stop balding, make you slender, erase the stigmata of time.

"Certainly," affirms Richard Friedman,

director of the psychopharmacology clinic in New York Hospital, "the limits are not obvious: if you're impotent or bald and that becomes an obsession for you, what's just a simple symptom can become a serious disease." And Marian Dunn, director of the center for studies in human sexuality at the State University of New York, adds: "impotence quickly becomes a vicious circle. It's a factor in depression that can have serious consequences on behavior and work." (*Le Monde*, October 14th, 1998). The human beings to come are to be *functional* and to function in all their aspects, even if at times they put up resistance to the massive penetration of control into private life, as in the case of those Wall Street financiers who were so hesitant to take flyers that the marketers hired sandwich board wearers to carry panels reading "are you a candidate for Viagra?" followed by a phone number; this immediately brought in hundreds of orders per month. (*Ibid*)

Second in sales after Prozac, Viagra, the name of which has given rise to various legends (it may have resulted from the coupling of "virile" and "Niagara" or perhaps from the Spanish *Vieja Agradecida*, "Grateful Old Lady"), was baptized with that name for its "vigorous and catch-all" connotation, the "neither masculine nor feminine, international, and not exclusively medical" ring to it (*ibid*). With Viagra alone, a whole new and

appalling chapter has opened in the history of sexuality in western civilization, where forty five million couples bewail the “impossibility of a normal sex life.”

To retake Michel Foucault’s expression, it is our insatiable “will to know” that opens up to us the doors of these pitiful bedrooms and indeed of all the other little rooms, where “normality” reigns – and how! – in the numbers: the 2 acts of sexual intercourse per week, which “fortunately” 41% of couples manage to consume.

These numbers, in reality, don’t just serve to satisfy the morbid curiosity of magazine readers or work as an indicator of the generalized social control of morals; they are also at the service of a *new inquisition into human misery*.

The American medical insurance companies¹ which contribute to reimbursing patients for the medications covered by their policies, have readily taken the side of the Church, and collaborate with the urologists and generalist doctors in interrogating those that declare themselves to be impotent. Ever eager to dictate meticulous checks and verifications, demanding to know when and how many times the difficulty has arisen, whether it appeared before or after the drug’s appearance on the market, they then finally – based on an *average* norm estimated at eight times per month – allow the unhappy patient to be granted his dose of artificial, rationed out “pleasure in a pill.” But in spite of their interrogations, the doctors still can’t manage to figure out with any degree of certainty who’s lying and who’s telling the truth; to such extent that “for Pfizer the requirements are contradictory: it is in the laboratory’s interest simultaneously to go beyond – for commercial reasons – having as a clientele merely the really ‘seriously’ afflicted individuals, and to officially maintain a strictly medical line to convince the various health insurance companies to go ahead and reimburse it.” (*Le Monde*, October 14th 1998). One way or another, the rich are certainly willing to pay for the diseases suffered by the poor, but certainly not for their pleasure; the social structure is still not ready to redistribute the new costs for the management of both pain *and* leisure, as domination in fact now requires. And so, certain private health insurance companies refuse to pay for the drug, and the powerful American retirees’ association AARP has even complained about the Federal Government asking the States to cover Viagra reimbursements for the poorest patients through the public health insurance system. And nevertheless, the American State, “in this new system where the private and public spheres are meshing and where sexual matters have become State matters,” (*Ibid*) must make new investments for its patients, above all for those who have been the most subject to its discipline, and whose bodies have been rendered as effectively docile and ready for obedience as possible. Thus, fifty million dollars were released to re-eroticize the flock of US American bodies, and those of retired soldiers, with Viagra.

Strange things, these interviews that we read in the newspapers, where we’re given to know the age, the profession, the civil status and the number of children fathered by simple fellows with names like Marius or Patrick, and then are suddenly and clandestinely introduced to their most intimate miseries. We don’t know what houses they live in, nor the color of their eyes, or what their wives’ faces look like, but we know all about their sexual habits, their dysfunctions and their pathologies; we find out whether the urologist took them seriously or not; we learn about the frustration they suffer from their penetration problems. It’s almost as if we were looking at those pornographic

¹ “A Californian corporation, Health Network, requires a medical report attesting to erectile dysfunction; Cigna Healthcare, an insurance firm where 15 million Americans have policies, requires documents that not only describe the symptoms but attest to its appearance before Viagra’s appearance on the market; Kaiser Permanente asks for clinical documentation and regardless will only reimburse Viagra prescriptions at 50%, not 70% as it does for all other medications.” (L’Espresso, no. 19, year XLVI)

photographs where one can distinguish the slightest details of the penis or vagina of the actors shown, but where an ironic black rectangle censors the faces, hiding from us any kind of a vision of their very being itself, and thus forbidding the eruption of anything that might painfully transcend the merely physical. Here we have entered into the indistinct domain where intimacy and foreignness overflow into one another, in a confusion where Bloom leads his mutilated existence, between ambiguity and curiosity.

"It is often said that we've been incapable of imagining new pleasures. At the very least however we have invented another kind of pleasure: the pleasure of the truth of pleasure, the pleasure of knowing it, exposing it, discovering it, being fascinating by seeing it, saying it, captivating and capturing others with it, confiding it secretly, driving it out cunningly; the pleasure specific to a real discourse on pleasure." (M. Foucault, *The Will to Know*)

Naturally, it didn't take long for victims to start appearing in this chemical war declared against sexual inefficiency, this crusade for sex at all costs: as of August 26th 1998, the Food and Drug Administration has counted sixty-nine people who suffered "*death by Viagra*", all of whom were between forty-eight and eighty years of age and had cardiovascular problems, regularly took one or more medications, and, we may add, aspired to a "normal sex life."

Our bodies speak, but we don't know how to listen; they are definitively separated from us, and in their discourse they only echo our intolerable absence from ourselves. Each "dysfunction" represents a lack of efficiency that must be corrected, each somatization is but a troublesome obstacle to be removed. Disease is just a particular case of an improper functioning in the communications system our organism has become, a process where the limits of the strategic apparatus that the self comprises are misread or transgressed.

We are unable to conceive of ourselves as an "organism" the sum of whose parts could never equal the whole.

Orthodox modern medicine explains to us that each and every symptom has a treatment specific to it, that it is not indispensable to seek the root cause of disturbances, since our diseases now have no more meaning or roots to them, in the perfect image of the Bloom suffering from them; it's good enough now to learn by heart - like some profane litany - the list of secondary effects, and if we forget to render homage to biopower, which dominates us with its disturbing presence in our everyday upkeep of ourselves, we'll get a death sentence, as did those diabetics who'd hoped that they might be able to make love again.

Synthetic texts, where we can't decipher the characters they're written in, our bodies *have to* offer themselves docilely to the hermeneutics of the "specialists"; we aren't expected to read the body - just re-write it.

The danger that this articulated expropriation apparatus tends to ward off is that everything that our slaves' brains manage to tolerate might be rejected by our insufficiently docile bodies, because there's apparently still some residual ancestral instinct of rebellion hidden in them; but *where?* - to find it is the quest of the *conquistadors* of the pharmaceutical industry, and their goal will soon be achieved.

On Indifferent Desire

Our era, where a super-abundance of images overlaps with the co-existence of numerous symbolic planes, could be defined as neo-baroque. But this apparent proliferation of chances given for the expression of desire is but the mask for the ever-probable agony of desire.

Desire has become *indifferent*, in the double sense where one can desire an object with no specific nature to it at all, an object deprived of particularity – the ‘anybody-ness’ of the Young-Girl which has been so prominent in these last generations, generations which have more and more managed to conform to her – or simply desire to remain unemotional and careless, that is, to cease responding to solicitations that are perpetual, but are deprived of any intensity of their own.

For all these people, human beings lost both in their bodies and their desires, there is still no remedy, and the doctors advise them not to take Viagra so as to keep them from being deceived: “this isn’t an aphrodisiac,” they never tire of repeating.

There is no mechanical remedy for the demise of desire among human beings in an era where “the opacity of sexual differences has been refuted by the transsexual body, the incommunicable foreignness of the singular *physis* abolished by its spectacular mediation, and doubt cast upon the mortality of the organic body by its promiscuity with the organ-less body of the commodity.” (G. Agamben, *The Coming Community*).

Indifferent desire, kept vacillating between the poles of sexual anorexia and bulimia, is no longer bound to affirming its contradictory existence: chemistry has stamped out all its weaknesses, the press has labeled it pathological, and the pharmaceutical industry has established the new parameters for it. Either get it up on command or disappear.

We can perhaps date the first appearance of indifferent desire back to the date of birth of Don Juan, in the middle of the triumph of the baroque and its *obsession with machines*.

Surprising apparatuses were set in motion, pulleys and carriages animating things with no souls; the prodigious exhibition of the *monstrum* put the sacred on stage and converted people to the faith. This was the era when in the cities the sacred melded with the profane in what was often a physical contiguity. Here a Neapolitan monk entered into the legend; when seeing the crowds go off to see a *commedia dell’arte* show involving the comic personage Punchinello, this monk grabbed a crucifix and shook it over the whole sacred scene, shouting, “come see! This is the real Punchinello!” The phrase was not as gratuitous as one might believe, since Punchinello – symbol of the vulgar ‘body’ and the trivial clown par excellence – was in reality also a familiar spirit of death, a psychopomp: one of those demons that escort the souls of the dead.



This baroque, contrary to ours, was a spectacle that rendered death omnipresent and exorcised it through its very exhibition, instead of always relegating it to the domain of the unthought.

It was within this time of perpetual *memento mori* that Don Juan was born, from the pen of a Spanish monk dedicated to demonstrating that mechanical desire, eternally disquiet and indifferent (“*che sia brutta, che sia bella, purché porti la gonnella voi sapete quel che fa*”²) is not a sin against the community of the living, but against that of the dead, against transcendence. What Don Juan really desires is none other than death itself. His continual provocations, his acting as if death did not exist, and his pathetic invitations to dine sent out to a ghost, all only demonstrate the mechanical nature of his movement within the world of the living. Without transcendence, there can be no seduction. Don

² “He cares not whether she be ugly or handsome; as long as she wears a petticoat – you know the rest!” Mozart/Da Ponte, *Don Giovanni*

Juan is not free; he is enslaved to the one-dimensionality of a time that is already oblivious to death, and thus is oblivious to love.

Death slowly left the western scene in a movement of “progressive disqualification”: “the great public ritualization of death disappeared – or was effaced at least – after the end of the 13th century... To the point where now, death – having ceased to be one of those brilliant ceremonies that individuals, the family, the group, and almost the whole society itself, participated in – has become, on the contrary, something people hide... And it’s almost like today it’s not so much sex as it is death that’s taboo.” (M. Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*). Once a passage from the earthly to the celestial kingdoms, the act of dying has now become unrepresentable within the frameworks of the new technological paradigm of power, and its mute disappearance, its frustrated ritualization, open the path to indifferent desire - desire that is indifferent to life and thus to death.

“Wherever power does not reign - nor initiative or decisiveness – living is dying, the passivity of life, escaped from itself and all mixed up with the disaster of a time with no present that we tolerate patiently; it is expecting misfortune, not as something to come but as something that’s always already been there and yet doesn’t clearly show itself: in this sense, the future and the past are doomed to indifference, because both of them have no present.” (M. Blanchot, *Writing the Disaster*)

In its implicit negation of death, indifferent desire – by refusing time – refuses life. Its very existence can only be grafted onto the *tabula rasa* of the passions, onto the degradation of the human being into a soulless machine. And the opposite of indifferent desire isn’t authentic desire; rather, the latter has always already disappeared when the former appears. In these conditions of production, this disappearance cannot be adequately expressed in what the Greeks called *ataraxia*, the strength of indifference to pain, nor by what the Buddhists call *upata*, or non-attachment. Authentic desire is thus only replaceable by indifferent desire, which, incapable of any transcendence, can only reverse itself to its bulimic donjuanesque pole: mechanical desire.

Authentic desire does not arise from deprivation, but is something rooted in the profound essence of the Self; it exists as a kind of inhalation, as a longing, as an effort to increase its own potential to be recognized by others. Contrary to a desire for things, it is human desire par excellence. It is an active desire, an auxiliary of the passions, whose metamorphoses are those of history. Enemy of the “private” as well as of property, authentic desire, the desire for desire, reveals the secret truth of the desirer, which renders him or her truly human.

“Desire (*cupiditas*),” writes Spinoza, “is the very essence of man, insofar as such essence is conceived as determinedness to act out of self-affection.” (*Ethics*, III), and, to put it in Spinozan terms, it is from his “essence” that man is exiled when he is inhabited by an indifference of desire. His Self becomes a strategic apparatus, and as such is deprived of its organic nature and exposed to the danger of becoming a *thing*, of being entirely objectified.

But all that can arise from a Self that is a mere strategic apparatus are *men without qualities*, with no “self-affection,” anonymous beings that never manage to return to *another state of being*, but remain confined in the emptiness of their one-dimensionality – masks without faces whose absence from themselves no words can describe – Blooms, “destroyed men (destroyed without destruction) who are as if without appearance, invisible even when you’re looking at them; and if they speak it is in the voice of others, a voice that’s always somehow other, which in some way accuses them, indicts them, and always forces them to respond to the silent misery they unconsciously carry within.” (M. Blanchot).

But the indifference of desire – now restricted to its mechanical pole – which manages the present stage of the process of men becoming things and becoming lost to themselves, also contains the possibility of its reversal, in the name of a reappropriation that must necessarily come through the body, which is all that the Self is still required to inhabit; this reappropriation also must necessarily come about through language, which before saying anything *always speaks to us as a body*, to the extent that the non-linguistic, the immediate, is the prior assumption present in language; after all, as Hegel explains, “the perfect element, where inwardness is as external as outwardness is internal, is language.” (Hegel, *Phenomenology of Mind*). That’s why “the singular ‘anyone’ that wishes to appropriate his very belonging itself, his being-in-language, and then rejects all identity and all conditions of belonging, is the State’s primary enemy.” (Giorgio Agamben).

On Reification

There is a way of using machine-men, but it’s not mechanical in and of itself. On the contrary, commodity domination had to colonize mankind’s very humanity in order to keep man in his machine-like state. But the present modalities of production can no longer make do with such slaves as these, as threatening as they are weary. They thus had to take apart the assembly lines, where the community of workers had such the detrimental tendency to remain palpable, and reconstruct them diffusely over the whole of the social body, even at the risk of revealing within them the metaphysical character of all slavery, of both the body and mind. Our times had to put the soul to work. And the soul must be sufficiently socialized; that is, it must have a sufficient number of sexual relations, but must at the same time remain foreign enough to itself that it wouldn’t desire that which could really liberate it: *making a different use of the body*.

From this perspective, control over the communication between human inwardness and the world becomes of central importance, and such control is achieved through desires: desires to consume, to escape, desires for professional success -- but above all, desires for *humanity*, for encounters with others that nevertheless are not pure connections.



“The historical particularities of the modern, Cartesian version of subjectivity have simply been replaced by a new post-modern configuration of detachment, a new ideal of substancelessness. It’s a dream of *ubiquity*, ... but what kind of body is free to change form and place at its whim, can become anyone, and travel anywhere?” (S. Bordo, *Feminism-Postmodernism*) “*Nobody*,” no-one; and that’s what indifferent desire desires of the other: their nobody-ness, their mask. All indifferent desire can do is stage itself as a desire for *no one*.

A simple desire for the envelope, a “sartorial libido”; that’s what men feel, those who feel themselves to be things-that-feel. “Instead of the teeming, confused viscosity of life and death, a neutral sexuality opens out onto the timeless horizon of *things*.” (M. Perniola, *The Sex-Appeal of the Inorganic*). People who have become *things* consider their

sensations with a curious detachment; nothing belongs to them anymore but the things themselves, and it's only things that they are able to desire. And they can desire others only to whatever extent the others themselves are things as well. Perniola, who has a decidedly short-sighted perspective, here gives as the unavoidable horizon a pointless, lazy sexuality among things. In his tranquil faith in the end of history, he goes on believing all the same that the coming humanity will have to liberate itself from performance anxiety by simply liberating itself from the desire to be human, trading it away for a reassuring, idle excitation of things. Quite the macabre perspective, one of a general exodus from living life, where thingified men will wander among things and commodities, nothing to one another but the obscure objects of object-desire. "If a vagina was just a vagina, and not an allegory for the earthly landscape, excitation couldn't be unlimited; in the same way, if the earthly landscape only called up the idea of itself, architecture would only be the construction and representation of the territory. We go from the vagina to the cosmos along a path that leads from the same to the same, because the vagina, the world, and our bodies themselves have now become uninhabitable places." (*Ibid.*)

On Post-Feminism

What woman has become in her relationship to male desire is the earthly realization of an archetype of sterile beauty, sufficient unto itself.

Each woman is now but a synthetic being, manipulated by the pharmaceutical and cosmetic industry if not by aesthetic surgery. Her model is but the synthetic advertised body, and her assistants for her self-reformatting are the women's magazines, closed and self-referential semiotic production systems paradoxically impermeable to male interference.

The fall of the patriarchal order and the womanization of the world can be partially explained by looking at the autonomization of the female body relative to male desire and to desire in general; the more the female body is the object of reformatting and remodeling, the more it loses its sensitive capacity to feel pleasure and express sensuality metaphysically.

Modern woman is concerned with being *desirable*, not with being desired.

The only order that replaced the fallen patriarchal order was a contradictory kind of *hedonist categorical imperative*, which marks the flesh with the stigmata of pain and impotence.

With Viagra, sexual relations become definitively autonomous from subjects, [and] the pharmaceutical industry copulates with itself in the form of woman chemically modified by birth-control pills and meal-replacement diet plans.

Viagra is not really a *drug for men*, because it's not so much about the kind of male inefficiency it remedies as it is about the female disturbance it puts an end to - if we can believe Erica Jong³, that is, according to whom for women "the utmost dilemma is to find herself faced with a soft penis."

In the Greek *polis*, the difference between the domestic home and the *agora* was implicit and fundamental, because it corresponded to the separation between the domain of the absence of freedom, where violence was used on slaves and unfree creatures – women and children – and the domain of free discussion, where persuasion was applied by citizen-men among their peers. But, as Hannah Arendt puts it, "In our understanding, the dividing line is entirely blurred, because we see the body of peoples and political communities in the image of a family whose everyday affairs have to be taken care of by a gigantic, nationwide administration of housekeeping. The scientific thought that

³ Author of the novel-bible of the feminine sexual revolution, *Fear of Flying*.

corresponds to this development is no longer political science but 'national economy' or 'social economy' or Volkswirtschaft, all of which indicate a kind of 'collective house-keeping.'"

Whereas leaving the domestic home could have expressed itself for women as a liberation from *oiko nomos*, from the law of the home, we see today that on the contrary that law has extended to the whole operation of society.

We can now speak of a feminization of the world, inasmuch as we live in a society of slaves with no masters.

Woman has never been so far from her sexual liberation, and thus from her corporeal liberation, than she is in the age of Viagra. The reason for the fall of male desire is in this exodus of woman from the body.

Quasi Unum Corpus

The female body has never been so public and at the same time so deserted as it is in the years of post-feminism: it is no longer more than a mere package, where every difference not codified by the languages of advertising is an imperfection to be ironed out, where every deviation from the well-known parameters is a handicap relative to the norms for the desirable.

The bitter truth of the Spectacle would seem to show us an obvious fact that has never found a place to affirm itself: *it's not beauty that inflames desire*; desire is a metaphysical entity. Plato wrote: "Eros is neither ugly nor beautiful, neither young nor old"; in other words, it does not inhabit the ephemeral space of the flesh.

Today, bodies are but sad edifices built and inhabited by chemistry. Bloom's body is an uninhabitable architecture.

The collapse of a symbolic order, instead of announcing an era of new freedoms, has been resolved in the decomposition of the body of society itself and consequently of the bodies of the individuals that comprise it.

As Titus Livius already explained in his *Apology for the Members and Stomach of Menenius Agrippa*, and as a vast literature has discussed both in the Middle Ages and the Baroque era, the bond between the political body of society and the personal bodies of the subjects is far beyond being just a pretty metaphor. To Saint Thomas, men comprised *quasi unum corpus* - almost one body - and all antiquity insisted on the equal necessity of the various members to the wellbeing of the organism as a whole. Rufus even went so far as to say that if the mind loses itself in vain imagining, it is necessary to "subjugate the soul and make the body obey."

In fact, "what makes mass society so difficult to bear is not the number of people involved, or at least not primarily," but the fact that individuals are as if plunged into a spiritualist séance where by some unexplainable miracle the table disappears and everyone is suddenly "sitting opposite each other no longer separated but also entirely unrelated to each other by anything tangible." (Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*), members detached from the body; bodiless organs exposed to an inevitable decomposition.

Faced with the economic demand that bodies survive the necrosis of the *bios politikos* abandoning them, what we're seeing now is an artificial reconstitution of the limits of organisms, a delimitation of their physical form and their aptitude for praxis.

Reformatting consists in the following: reproducing purely immanent impulses and potentials within a new, domesticated *form* deprived of any memory and almost completely devoid of psychological and metaphysical substance, making people into ever more predictable artificial intelligences and making their bodies into ever more docile apparatuses.

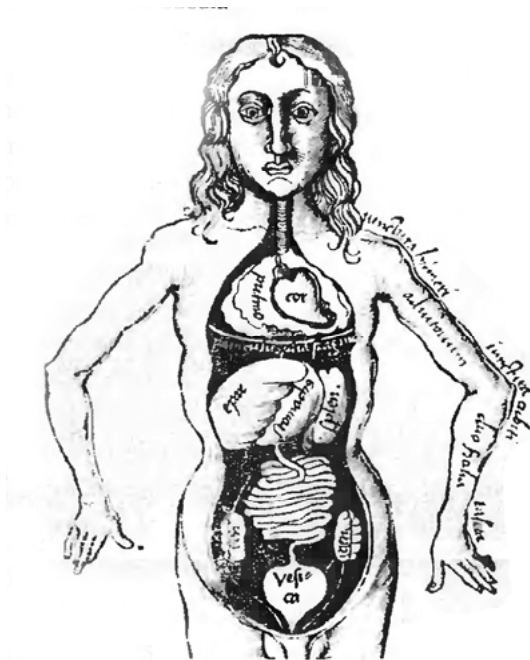
Indiscreet Jewels and Shekhina

The feminist movements of the seventies said “the personal is political”; they were demanding a place for the individual economy of desires far away from the Spectacle’s reflectors. They evoked a public that was not conditioned by advertisements and that produced a *different* meaning for the normativity informing all “private” space that believes itself to be singular.

The event that is Viagra proves not only the bankruptcy of this project but also – and this is the direct consequence of all of it – that everything that was growing in the shadows of the intimate space of feelings that people carried within themselves has now been thrust into the pitiless floodlights of the generalized media confessional.

What Viagra has conquered is not so much impotence as it is the residue of what Foucault called the “essential latency” of sexuality, which is what all forms of domination tend to unmask and which is not so much something the subject would like to hide, but is rather what remains hidden even to the subject him or herself.

In its final consequences, the so-called “sexual liberation” has translated into no more than a liberalization of sex and its secrets, on a market of desire autonomized from its object and from its subject; a market for which coitus, the new form of general abstract equivalency, *must* take place, like any other kind of commerce, independent of the persons involved, the feelings they feel, or the atmosphere and humor they are in. The mechanical erection, payable to the bearer on sight, has won out over all the metaphysics of Eros.



The *scientia sexualis* which replaced the *ars erotica* after the 18th century, is a kind of knowledge constructed and produced in order to defuse the disturbing potential that sex carries within it as a physical manifestation of the metaphysical: “the fragile point through which the threat of sickness invades us; the fragments of night that each of us carries within ourselves.” (*Ibid.*)

If formerly it was sufficient to drown sexuality in an eloquent censorship in order to render it harmless, the whole problem today for domination is to figure out how to resuscitate it at a time when it is dying, having been emptied out of its hidden meaning, exiled from its accursed share.

And so its silence must be prevented from bringing up questions, and the shadow of its absence kept from appearing in the forced light of commodity society’s eternal noon.

In Diderot’s *The Indiscreet Jewels*, the genie Cucufa fishes into the bottom of his pocket, and, among a few magic beans, some little toy pagodas made of lead and some moldy candy, finds a silver ring that when its bezel is turned makes the genital organs of those he meets start speaking.

In our times, domination, having abandoned its ancient logic of injunctions to non-existence and mutism, now works like Cucufa’s ring.

And what goes for sexual language goes for language *itself*: now, working even more effectively than silence itself, where thought can always take refuge, cell phones fully realize the heideggerian kingdom of chatter.

The objective of this impalpable sensations-market where all cultural commodities have a fully proper place is to be able to make us consume images and words at every instant of our lives everywhere, so as to break all continuity and meaning, and convince us that our lives have no end nor form.

It has become obvious that the commodity and consumption were essentially from the beginning a mode of communication, now that the communication of symbols and signs has won over the totality of human life and being.

The so-called “post-fordist” modes of production were not content to add to the expropriation of productive activity the alienation of the linguistic and communicative nature of men, the *logos* with which Heraclitus identified the Common; they have above all revealed, in the very same movement with which they dematerialized labor, that this expropriation *always* takes place on the metaphysical plane.

Certain kabbalists took account of this divorce of meaning and speech with the classic theme of “exile from the Shekhina.”

The Shekhina is the last of the ten Sephiroth or attributes of divinity, the one that expresses its very presence, its manifestation on Earth: speech.

A Talmudic tale tells of the admission to paradise of four rabbis: one of them broke the branches off the tree of the Sephiroth, a gesture that in the Kabbalah symbolizes Adam’s sin, separating the tree of Life from the tree of Knowledge. As a result of this separation, “the universe falls, Adam falls, everything is affected and disturbed ... nothing remained where it should be and as it should be; nothing therefore was from then on in its proper place. Everything is in Exile. The spiritual light of the Shekhina was dragged down into the darkness of the demonic world of evil. The result is the mixture of good and evil which must be dissolved by restoring the element of light to its former position [...] Thus there came into being the material world in which we live, and the existence of man as a part spiritual, part material being.” (Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*) The flesh, in the Kabbalists’ view, is but the clothing of mystic man, exiled from himself since the original sin; before then, man had a spiritual condition that was higher than that of the highest angel in the celestial hierarchy.

Had Adam not sinned, *Tiqqun*, Reunification, would have been accomplished; everything would have gone back to its place, and the universe would have been saved. And yet this fall into the commingling of good and evil, which were supposed to remain separate, and this tearing apart into artificial separations of what should have remained united, does not condemn us to definitive exile and irreversible impotence. The hell into which we have fallen is our restless wandering, and the desert that we traverse today is history; in a certain sense, “we are not only masters of our own destiny, and in the last resort are ourselves responsible for the continuation of our exile [*Galuth*], but we also fulfill a mission which reaches far beyond that.” (*Ibid.*) The great mistake of the Blooms rests in their incomprehension of the path that they are completing, in their lack of a *point of view* on the history they’re living out, in their ignorance of the place they occupy among people and things. The Kabbalah says that man falls into isolation when he wants to put himself in the place of God, in other words when man intends that freedom should serve him and that it is not for him to serve freedom.

Midway between transcendence and immanence, the Shekhina stands at the window that opens between our own nothingness and our own freedom. The language with which mystic man – who was higher than the angels – returns to his worldly clothing and

is reconciled with his body is a language that tells of the individual, that makes the individual rediscover him or herself, that opens man up to the recognition of others. Certainly such language is different for each person, but it is comprehensible to all those who follow the same path, that is: "to the extent that each individual has a particular task in the struggle for the realization of *Tiqqun*, according to the degree and state proper to his own soul" (*Ibid.*) Marx said essentially the same thing, but put it more precisely: "Only when real, individual man resumes the abstract citizen into himself...when man has recognized and organized his *own forces* as *social forces* so that social force is no longer separated from him in the form of *political* force, only then will human emancipation be completed." (Marx, *The Jewish Question*)

The Shekhina, intimate as it is with the celestial sphere, still stays lovingly close among all men, as it was in Israel and everywhere man is in exile; and in the same way, "whenever two men sit down to interpret the words of the Torah, the Shekhina is among them" (J. Abelson, *The Immanence of God in Rabbinical Literature*), because there is nowhere that the Shekhina is not to be found, nowhere that it does not suffer the same pain as man, "not even in the burning bush" (Exodus Rabbah, on Exodus 2:5). "When man endures sufferings, what does the Shekhina say? 'My hand is hurting, my head is hurting.'" (G. Scholem).

Even if the Shekhina never leaves us, because of its exile, it leaves us constantly exposed to the risk that "speech – that is, the non-latency and revelation of a given thing – might separate from that which it reveals, and acquire an autonomous consistency. In this condition of exile, the Shekhina loses its positive power and turns evil (the kabbalists say that it 'sucks the milk of evil')" (G. Agamben)

But there is something that can put an end to this exile: the consciousness that "speech in its original essence is a commitment to a third party on behalf of our neighbor: the act *par excellence*, the institution of society. The original function of speech consists not in designating an object in order to communicate with the other in a game with no consequences, but in assuming towards someone a responsibility on behalf of someone else. To speak is to engage the interests of men. Responsibility is the essence of language." (E. Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings*)

Biopolitics and Virile Currency

In these times, when an erection is purchased and planned, and when the historical emblem of domination has become something reproducible *in vitro*, separated from its sting and its meaning, all the obstacles to universal prostitution have been removed. Sex does not just *have* a market, it *is* a market, the final fragment of night that we carry within us; it cedes to the pure positivity of the denatured, characterless body of our times.

The "threshold of biological modernity" of a society is located at the moment when bare life becomes what's at stake in political strategies – assuming, that is, that life separated from its form can still be called life.

"For millennia, man has remained what he was for Aristotle: a living animal, and moreover one that is capable of a political existence; modern man is an animal, in the politics where what's at issue is his life as a living being." (M. Foucault) Death is no longer an instrument of domination, but has become the whole administration of the living within the domain of "value and utility," a domain where commerce is perfectly immaterial, and where the currency used is that very faculty of desire which comprises the totality of biological and cultural life.

"Let's imagine," writes Klossowski, that "we were to find ourselves in an industrial era where the producers have the means to demand, as payment, objects of feeling from consumers.

"These objects are living beings. Following this example of such exchange, producers and consumers come to constitute collections of 'persons' supposedly destined for pleasure, emotion, feelings. How can a human 'person' fill the function of currency? How could producers, instead of 'paying for' women, end up getting paid 'in women'? How would businessmen and industrialists pay their engineers and their workers? 'In women.' And who will do the upkeep on this living currency? Other women. Which implies the opposite: women with professional careers would get paid 'in boys.' And who will do upkeep on, and sustain this virile currency? Those who have feminine currency at their disposal." (P. Klossowsky, *Living Currency*).

The Coming Community

"In other words, to the persecution that works me over most patiently and which is the anonymous passion in myself, I must not only respond by off-loading it out of my consent; I must also respond to it with refusal, resistance and combat, returning to knowledge, to the self that knows, and knows that it is exposed." (M. Blanchot)

The coming community is a community that will liberate itself *thanks* to the body and consequently thanks to the words it will use in *speaking* the body.

Whereas in the fordist production model, the body was condemned to the assembly line by its repetitive gestures, and the mind remained "free" to think about ways of emancipating it (and the forms of its emancipation), now that work in advanced capitalist societies today is almost exclusively intellectual labor, the body, incredulous and forgotten, merely watches this new exploitation taking place. Forgotten during working hours, but constantly present in free time in the form of an obsession, the body is the most material of our determinations at the same time as it is the entry pass that allows access to the dematerialized labor market. It is the *person*, that mask whose upkeep must be taken care of in detail, so that it cannot express the self in its own language, the language of non-submission.

In this immense "desirability" market, we have to rely on commodity society's abstract and empty desire if we want to "fit in socially" and work. This new market does not comprise a space that we officially inhabit as singularities, but a general parameter to which we must conform.

Stuart Ewen cites an exemplary marketing brochure from the twenties with an early advertisement for female beauty products: on the cover there was an "impeccably clean, nude woman, all done up with powder and makeup, accompanied by the following caption: 'your masterpiece: yourself.'" (Stuart Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of Consumer Culture*).

"Publicity," explains Ewen, "had borrowed from social psychology the notion of the *social self* and had made it into an essential centerpiece of its arsenal. Thus everyone would define themselves in terms established by other people's judgments." Hence, "in her kitchen/machine room, the modern wife was supposed to spend her time asking herself whether her 'me,' her body, her personality, were competitive on the socio-sexual market defined by her workstation." (*Ibid.*)

What happened to wives on the eve of their emergence from the home and their entry into the factories is now happening to the whole of society, transformed into a "gigantic administration of housekeeping."

The female body is the privileged vehicle of biopower, as the Pygmalion myth shows. Society desires it as a doll capable of desiring, and oversees its becoming a “thing that feels.”

Though female frigidity comes as no surprise to Western man, since the West is tacitly in agreement with creating this sad subtext, male impotence is still quite shocking, and speaks a language of suffering that up to now was unheard.

The invention of a remedy for obtaining an orgasm, which in the end is faked on both sides, will not stop the discourse of the un-docile body but will merely constrain and repress it into a forced activity that will inevitably soon seek out a path of its own to self-liberation.

“Discipline is a political anatomy of details” that “dissociates the power of the body; it makes it on the one hand into an ‘aptitude,’ a ‘capacity’ that it seeks to increase, and on the other hand inverts its energy, the potential/power that might result from it, and puts it in a strict relation of subjugation. While economic exploitation separates the force and strength from labor, disciplinary coercion establishes the prohibitive bond between improved aptitude and increased domination.” (M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*). In a society where the social classes have been replaced by a “planetary petty bourgeoisie” (G. Agamben), a *new form of consciousness* is emerging. The battleground that is now sketching itself out is metaphysical in the sense of its immanence in the body, and it’s because it is symbolic and immaterial that it liberates the concrete and material. The microphysics of domination keeps the body in check with the use of meticulous techniques, “little tricks with a great power of diffusion; subtle arrangements with an innocent look to them but which are profoundly insinuating; devices that obey unavowable economies or carry out the tiniest coercions.” (M. Foucault) The struggles to come will be waged against this subtle form of expropriation; the new fight for liberation from the grip of microphysics will be metaphysical or will not be at all.

