

Love and *Other* Topics

Han defines the central thesis of “Melancholia” as follows: “The crisis of love does not derive from too many *others* so much as from the erosion of the *Other*.” His acknowledgement of the *other* references Levinas’ metaethics that frames an ethical relation between the subject and the *other* to cause transcendence. The metaphysical system that defines existence depends on sensation as an act of causation. Without sensation, there could be no distinction between the *same* and the *other*. Drawing from Kant’s transcendental idealism, sensation is the act of extracting and contextualizing the *noumenon* relative to the sensor. Yet, this act of sensing “affirms himself or herself as an irreducible singularity” (Moati 38). It is only through sensing can the sensor separate themselves from totalization. Without encountering the *other*, transcendence cannot be realized because “the metaphysical alterity of the Other requires the precondition of the position of the self, a here-below positioned in relation to an over-there” (Moati 30). Because transcendence requires the act of sensing as well as being sensed, the subject cannot separate himself from the *same* until encountering the *other*, which is known as the *event*. Within the act of sensing, the subject “depart[s] from the anonymity of history; in other words, it is to suspend, for a time—the time of the will—the legitimacy of any third-person perspective applied to the individual” (Moati 39). Transcendence is attained when the subject perceives himself being observed. Because the subject cannot access the perceptions of the *other*, the subject cannot totalize the *other* within the *event*. The *same* serves as a “ineliminable point of departure... which would compromise the development of the idea of the infinite” (Moati 32). Through encounter the *other*, the subject develops an ethical relation that reflects perception back at the self, thus completing transcendence and solidifying subject and *other*.

Encountering the face of the *other* amounts to introducing an ethical and metaphysical relationship. It is the perception of a face that “both announces a society[] and permits the maintaining of a separated I” (TI 68). When encountering the *other*, the face “is understood not simply as something present, but as the other’s corporeal self-presence, performed by the gaze or appeal we are exposed to” (Waldenfels 65). The face is representation, but the face is also the origin of sensation by the *other* that transcendence necessitates. The face exhibits a “refusal to be contained” and “cannot be comprehended,” which characterizes a defiance to totalization (TI 194). The infinity of the face separates it from an object and defines it as an *other*. Through the perception of the face, the subject encounters alterity, which results in the causal chain that characterizes the relationship between subject and *other*. Its resistance to totalization introduces an opportunity to exercise power, namely murder. Because encountering the *other* results in perceiving infinity, the act of negating the existence of the *other* through murder “exercises a power over what escapes power” (TI 198). The *other* exists independently from the subject and represents the possibility of total negation. Moreover, because negating existence can only be done to substances with transcendence, the *other* is the sole option to exercise power. But, when encountering the face once more, the subject encounters an “infinity, stronger than murder... the primordial *expression*... the first word: ‘you shall not commit murder’” (TI 199). Through perceiving the *primordial expression*, the subject experiences “the ethical resistance” that “threatens the eventuality of a struggle” (TI 199). This *ethical resistance* leads the subject to take a leap of faith that sets up the grounds for an ethical relationship that allows for both mutual transcendence and the continual alterity, introducing the possibility of love.

As long as the *feminine* assumes the form of the *other*, desire could be maintained with the continuance of alterity. The nature of sexuality, according to Levinas, depends on the infinity

because “the pathos of voluptuousness lies in the fact of being two” (*TO* 86). The alterity of the other, paired with the affirmation of the self, constitute “an essential and insatiable hunger... not merely an agitation that precedes the attempt at gratification, but is a desire augmented by such an attempt” (Sandford 35). The *feminine*, to Levinas, “is an alterity borne by a being as an essence and not as the reverse of his identity” (*TI* 121). Because the *feminine* is other, the subject perceives the infinite when encountering the *feminine*. The sexual difference is ontological, as the “Levinasian subject, coded as masculine, [] finds himself in the erotic relation face to face with alterity itself” (Sandford 39). The sexual difference introduces another distinction between the subject and the *other*, which ignites another avenue of separation. Despite the act of perception by the subject, “the Other is Other, even when [they] only erotic regard for her, implies that her otherness is not dependent on [their] recognizing it” (Beals 45). Love, in this case “is desire for the absolutely other... a desire without satisfaction which, precisely, understands the remoteness, the alterity, and the exteriority of the other” (*TI* 34). Yet, as for the source of desire, Han argues that there has been a separation from the body of the *other* and the alterity of the *other*. He claims, “the body—with its display value—has become a commodity. At the same time, the Other is being sexualized into an object for procuring arousal” (Han 12). The alterity of the *other* is being separated from the infinity of the *other*. The body, unlike the face, reduces the presence of the *other* because the body does not allow the subject to reflect perception onto themselves, nullifying transcendence. Although both the face and the body are elements of the *other*, the body, when subject to comparison, exists in the same. Within a society becoming progressively more integrated into capitalist systems, “economic life defines itself precisely by its naive indifference to the infinite.” (Moati 70). The subject in contemporary society comprehends the infinity differently than the subject facing the *primordial expression*.

Because the *feminine* is reduced to a thought of the subject, the reduction of the infinity of the *feminine* to the sameness of the body amounts to eroding the *other*.

Love introduces an element of complexity to enjoyment because, unlike pleasures such as eating, voluptuousness requires the negation of the *other*, which, paradoxically, requires the existence of the *other*. While the pleasures of eating can be achieved alone, the pleasures of love require the *other* to be achieved. Without the *other*, the subject does not pursue love because “the ego lives its happy dependence on the world as independence because, able to fulfil its needs, it fulfils them as if there were no tomorrow, for the sake of enjoyment” (Sandford 44). Within love, the subject’s “relationship with the Other is the absence of the other” (TO 90). As the impersonal “there is”, the desire to love differs from the desire to eat precisely because loving propels the subject to negation while eating propels the subject away from negation. Within the context of touch, Levinas characterizes the caress as “anticipation of [] pure future without content” (TO 89). Building on the framework of time in his later work, Levinas claims that the caress “consists in seizing upon nothing, in soliciting what ceaselessly escapes its form toward a future never future enough” (TI 257). Through the caress, the subject can perceive the *other*, and “beneath every positive object, the presence of the absence of all positive existents subsists within the positivity of the ‘there is’” (Moati 69). The pleasure of the caress affirms the negativity of the future, and it is through the *other* can the subject perceive the future without form. According to Han, however, the “contemporary culture of constant comparison leaves no room for the negativity of what is *atopos*” (Han 2). The *culture of constant comparison* reduces the alterity of the *other*, as the alterity of the *other* resides in the infinity of the *other*. Through the act of comparing, the infinity of the *other* is reduced to a thought, and “to reduce a reality to its content thought is to reduce it to the same” (TI 127). Within this “*inferno of the same*,” the *other* is

possessed and subjected to form, which reduces it to the same (Han 1). Within this state of possession, the subject is “both slave and master. Voluptuousity would be extinguished in possession” (TI 265). No longer does the subject sense the *other* and accepts their alterity but instead reduces the *other* to a thought within the same and disallows the experience of the caress.

The reduction of the *other* is achieved through internalization, so the mechanism in which the *other* is diminished can be described as a narcissistic process. Because “depression is a narcissistic malady,” Han hypothesizes that the widespread depression that defines contemporary society is the result of the reduction of the *other* caused by the *inferno of sameness* (Han 3). Because love is an act of negation, the act of reducing the possibility of love through the reduction of the *other* results in a depressed society. The solution, Han claims, is by reviving Eros. Within Levinas’ metaphysical system, restoring the *other* requires, once again, to have idea of the infinity. If the “endless freedom of choice, the overabundance of options, and the compulsion for perfection” has led individuals to forget the infinity with the *culture of constant comparison*, then resisting the narcissistic urge to internalize information and accepting the infinity when encountering the *other* would revive the alterity necessary for love (Han 1). Levinas claims that “happiness is made up not of an absence of needs... but of the satisfaction of all needs,” which, in context to Han’s thoughts on depression, means that the reduction of the *other* through narcissification constitutes a “need” that can be addressed through acquainting ourselves with the same alterity that the subject experienced when encountering the *primordial expression of the feminine* (TI 115). The *other* “whom [Han] desire and fascinates [him] is *placeless*” and “removed from the language of sameness” such as through reduction and comparison (Han 1-2). The dominating culture of comparing the body of the *other* diminishes

the possibility of perceiving the infinity, and it is only through relinquishing this compulsion to compare that depression can be cured and love be revived.

Capitalism and Pleasure

Freud starts *Civilization and its Discontents* on a pessimistic note: “Our possibilities of happiness are already restricted by our constitution” (CD 13-14). Within a social vacuum, an individual, according to the pleasure principle, gravitates towards “an avoidance of unpleasure or a production of pleasure” (BPP 1). The motivation is quite simple: individuals attempt to ease psychical tension, which can be further segmented into perceptual unpleasure and unconscious wounds, through manipulating their thoughts and environment. But, although “there exists in the mind a strong tendency towards the pleasure principle,” this tendency towards pleasure is also “opposed by certain other forces or circumstances, so that the final outcome cannot always be in harmony with the tendency towards pleasure” (BPP 3). Because individuals are products of the society in which they reside, there also exists a disconnect between the intention to ease psychical tension and the realization of easing psychical tension. Acting on pleasure is not always in the best interests of the subject, and the ego acts as a mediating “instinct[] of self-preservation” whereby “the pleasure principle is replaced by the *reality principle*” (BPP 3). Serving as a point of “introducing an ‘economic’ point of view into [Freud’s] work,” *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* introduced the ego as a challenge to the pleasure principle that can be manipulated by the social context that surrounds the subject (BPP 1). Now, more than ever, there exists an “intimate connection [] between culture and capital, between knowing—that is, consciousness—and the structure of political economy” (Hennessey 95). Just as it is impossible for the subject to exist in a social vacuum, the increased integration of capitalism and culture has reconstructed the meaning of pleasure in society. Because individuals cannot escape the capitalistic construction of society, the pleasure principle dooms individuals to unhappiness.

As civilization advances under capitalist institutions, capitalism becomes more integrated into cultural norms, changing the nature of love itself. In a somewhat reductionist view, Freud claims that “people give the name ‘love’ to the relation between a man and a woman whose genital needs have led them to found a ‘family’” (CD 39). The forces of creating civilization had been driven by the cohesion of family units within communities. The act of loving amounts to renouncing the freedom to choose additional sexual partners to view the infinity of the *other*. The reason to do so depends on two aspects of human nature that define love: exclusive attachment and overvaluation. Although the objective is sexual gratification, “the attachment may be only ‘sensual’, or it may be only ‘affectionate’, or it may be both” (Santas 119). But, as civilization became more synonymous with capitalism, the civilizing force of love has been “positivized into sexuality... at the same time, the Other is being sexualized into an object for procuring arousal” (Han 12). Mirroring Han’s decry of the *inferno of the same*, Hennessey ascribed the blame to consumerism for the erasing difference, stating that “commodity fetishism erases the material basis of value, it does so by attaching itself to the products of labor as soon as they are produced” (Hennessey 95). The nature of price itself distances a commodity from the conditions in which it was produced, instead defining the value of an object relative to other objects. This alienation pervades the collective conscious, eradicating the ability to see the infinity of the *other* because this thought process only allows for an individual to see the *same*. Echoing “the effort to determine the market value of everything,” the integration of prices around the world as result of globalized capitalism has caused the subject to conceptualize the *other* relative to other *others*, similar to how an individual conceptualize the value of a good relative to the price of its substitute goods (Badiou 4). With the “overabundance of options” available, the metaphysics of price has imposed a structural limitation to valuation and exclusivity (Han 1).

Because individuals direct their attention to achieve happiness through following implicit cultural directives, they do not challenge the capitalist institutions that are the true source of their unhappiness. In *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud mentions a contention that “our civilization is largely responsible for our misery, and that we should be much happier if we gave it up and returned to primitive conditions” (CD 23). This is because the “conjuncture of engineered production and engineered desire inducement interfaced with the construction of men and women as sexual subjects... The result was a reification of the erotic, ultimately inseparable from the retrenchment of capitalism” (Hennessey 103-104). Regardless of an individual’s consent to joining society, capitalism thrives on consumer demand, and it is within the structure of capitalism to prey on inexhaustible sources of demand, such as the human desire for pleasure. As a “formula for enjoyment” that “is supposed to generate pleasant feelings,” Eros has been marketed via the culture industry as a means to achieve happiness (Han 13). And, because “the central thesis of Freud’s theory of love is that all love is a derivative of sexual instincts,” the culture industry commodifies the *other* as means to satisfy sexual instincts without the view of the infinity that had defined pre-capitalistic love (Santas 117). The mechanism in which the culture industry fosters demand is to induce feelings of inadequacy, and “it was discovered that a person becomes neurotic because he cannot tolerate the amount of frustration which society imposes on him in the service of its cultural ideals” (CD 24). At the moment of birth, when individuals non-consensually join a capitalist society, they are indoctrinated within a culture that exploits their human nature, namely their desire to pursue pleasure through pursuing love, for profit. Yet, their means to satisfy these desires is highly regulated within the structure of the society itself, which introduces the paradox of achieving happiness in a society whose survival depends on individuals not achieving happiness.

Capitalism thrives on consumer demand, and demand is fostered by feelings of inadequacy. Because the survival of a capitalistic society depends on its participating members feeling inadequate, the conduct of structural figures would never allow individuals to feel satisfied and stop consuming. Within the moment of entry within a capitalistic society, an individual has been structurally condemned to be unhappy. But, the legitimacy of capitalism as an economic institution also depends on its ability to address the needs of its constituents. Because capitalism operates on the balance between maximizing profit through inducing dissatisfaction and minimizing the risk of institutional reform, the structure of capitalism controls the flow of pleasure to its participating members to a bare minimum to quell challenges to its legitimacy. And, because structural change is a feat with enormous short-term risks to the individual, capitalism allows individuals to sublimate their grievances from their dissatisfaction through controlled means. In this case, love as marketed by the culture industry serves as a “the backwards path that leads to complete satisfaction as a rule obstructed by the resistances which maintain the repressions. So there is no alternative but to advance in the direction in which growth is still free” (*BPP* 56). If individuals were to realize that their dissatisfaction is the product of capitalism, then they would seek institutional reform or change. But, because capitalism cultivates a means of resolution through love, then individuals sublimate their economic grievances through their interactions with their significant other. In this way, capitalism “behaves towards sexuality as a people or stratum of its population does which has subjected another one to its exploitation” (*CD* 41). Because “sexual love afforded [individuals] the strongest experiences of satisfaction,” individuals can sublimate their grievances towards the economic institution that exploits their nature through consuming sex as a good (*CD* 38). It is in this way that “the age of the ‘quickie’” has degraded sex into an object of consumption (Han 18).

The residual grievances, however, consecrate as violence within the affairs of love itself. In addition to sexuality as a life drive, Freud introduced the forces of the ego as a death drive. It is through the formation of the ego that “the first instinct came into being: the instinct to return to the inanimate state” (*BPP* 50). It is only through the countering force of Eros that individuals do not succumb to Thanatos. But, as Eros becomes isolated from negativity, the individual succumbs to the narcissistic forces of Thanatos because “above all, death concerns the ego, the *I*” (Han 25). When grievances cannot be directed outwards, it is natural that the destructive tendencies are directed inwards. The propagation of capitalist society leads to “sadism... a death instinct which, under the influence of the narcissistic libido, has been forced out of the ego and has consequently emerged in relation to the object” (*BPP* 73). Even within the exploitative structure of capitalism, “auto-exploitation proves much more efficient than allo-exploitation because it is accompanied by a feeling of liberty” (Han 9). Individuals are given freedom to choose their lovers, but it is the same freedom that is the source of their unhappiness. Within a society that cultivates narcissism, it is only “when a love-relationship is at its height there is no room left for any interest in the environment; a pair of lovers are sufficient to themselves” (*CD* 45). Individuals can achieve happiness through experiencing the *other* in infinity, but the structure of capitalism forces an individual to internalize the opportunity costs of exclusive attachment through showing them the *inferno of the same*. The structure of capitalism also frames sexuality as a pacifying force for “fear of revolt by the suppressed element,” which causes the home, the material consecration of love, to be a means to channel aggressiveness (*CD* 41). Under the exploitative structure of capitalism, the pleasure that is achieved through consuming sex prevents individuals from challenging the economic system that goads feelings of inadequacy for profit. The pleasure principle, under capitalism, is not pleasurable at all.

Death and Excess

Bataille introduces the transgressive qualities of Eros with a scenario: “A man who finds himself among others is irritated because he does not know why he is not one of the others. / In the bed next to a girl he loves, he forgets that he does not know why he is himself instead of the body he touches” (*VE* 6). Separating existence into continuous and discontinuous states, Bataille understands Eros as a means to progress from a discontinuous to a continuous state “under the loss of selfhood—which is akin to the experience of death” (Minguy 34). Deviating from philosophers such as Plato, who attributed Eros to a logic of possession, Bataille ascribes the fundamental drive of Eros as a possibility to achieve “sovereign freedom,” which is Bataille defines as an absolute surrender by the subject to the object (Minguy 35). In “The Solar Anus,” Bataille writes, “Beings only die to be born, in the manner that phalluses that leave bodies in order to enter them” (*VE* 7). Separation, paradoxically, is caused by the will to join, and death, similarly, is caused by the will to live. Therefore, it could be said that Eros is impelled within the structure of being. Although some have argued that death is a state that can be entered but not escaped, Bataille establishes a mechanism in which individuals can move between discontinuous and continuous existence through Eros. As individuals operate in their discontinuous existence, they accumulate energy and resources that need to be consumed. Throughout history, this energy had been appropriated by various economic and religious institutions to “liberate[] the ends of religious life from the domain of productive activity,” and the excess production of society is redistributed from individual to social consumption (*AS* 120). The norms of capitalism, however, encourage the accumulation of capital to generate growth, and society has created additional structures to incentivize consumption through sexualization. Yet, regardless of economic or religious institutions, Eros has served as a means of experiencing life through death.

The *Accursed Share* refers to the need to expend the excess energy and resources.

Bataille justifies this notion by writing that “if we do not have the force to destroy the surplus energy ourselves, it cannot be used, and [...] it is this energy that destroys us; it is we who pay the price of the inevitable explosion” (*AS* 24). Excess without consumption, to Bataille, serves as a mechanism of self-destruction. While the *restricted* economy of capitalism encourages the accumulation of capital to generate growth, the *general* economy of Bataille encourages the consumption of excess. The sun, to Bataille, represents the infinite source of excess that human civilization can never consume, and the progress of human civilization has been motivated by the desire to find new means of consumption to reduce the accursed share that the sun carries. In “The Notion of Expenditure”, Bataille introduces many means individuals use to waste resources to get rid of excess, including sacrifice, competitive games, and artistic production. The potlatch, in particular, offers an interesting study on consumption because the instance of a potlatch directly translates economic excess into social utility. Religion, specifically Christianity, had served as another means for individuals to resist the accumulation of excess capital because religion offers a means for individuals to utilize excess to access to sacred. Bataille characterizes the consumption of individuals under religious authority through “religious activities—sacrifices, festivals, luxurious amenities—absorb the excess energy of a society,” which “have no ends beyond themselves” (*VE* 120, 118). Regardless of culture, societies around the world have been organized to create structures that allow individuals to consume excess. And, for many of these instances, economic excess is converted into social utility through unproductive consumption. Since the origins of civilization, consumption has had a social cause, and it is through the changing structures of authority that have created different mechanisms to redistribute capital into unproductive expenditure to reduce excess.

Throughout various regimes of religious and economic authority, this consumption of excess has been regulated through institutions. Bataille introduces the social underpinnings of expenditure by relating excess and status, stating that “it is the constitution of a positive property of loss [...] that gives the institution its significant value... in unconscious forms, such as those described by psychoanalysis, it symbolizes excretion, which is linked to death” (*VE* 122). The expenditure of excess creates a system of consecrating value where the perceived value of an individual or institution is tied to the magnitude of expenditure; the extravagance of churches are an example of the reinforcing effects of status and exploitation. Through libidinally restrictive doctrines to prevent individuals from having excess sex, Christianity “in its turn deepened the degree of sensual disturbance by forbidding organized transgression” (*E* 127). The origin of this libidinal restriction, as Bataille summarizes through Martin Luther’s grievances, is economic. By introducing even more excess that individuals are unable to consume, individuals compensate for their inability to reduce libidinal excess by relinquishing more economic excess. While Eros serves as almost a bottomless means for individuals to consume, so does religion. But, through restrictions on Eros, individuals must turn to religion to rid their excess. When individuals are given the chance to use their excess energy on Eros, desire becomes “a fiery thing; it could burn up a man’s wealth to the last penny, it could burn out the life of the man in whom it was aroused” (*E* 133). Eros was restricted by Christianity as a means to direct excess towards religious goods. The same restrictions to Eros are not as prevalent in today’s society, but contemporary consumerism also channels expenditure towards pornographic products that reinforce a cycle of dissatisfaction. Individuals are free to act as they wish, but this “freedom amounts to being condemned to perpetual self-exploitation” (Han 26). While Christianity had created taboos associated with sexuality, consumerism welcomes sexuality as a means to sell pornographic

products. But, regardless of the temporal context, the expenditure of excess has been shaped through prevalent ideology created by institutions.

The unproductive consumption of resources and energy marks a fundamental departure to the conditions that define an individual under capitalism. Because these activities have “no ends beyond themselves,” they constitute a “a *loss* that must be as great as possible in order for that activity to take on its true meaning” (*VE* 118). Given the increased secularization and globalization of society that reduces the authority of religious authorities, however, the justification for individuals to relinquish their excess earnings to a centralized religious authority becomes more tenuous. Through income growth and shortened work weeks made possible in modernity, individuals have accumulated more money and time to expend on leisure and consumption, calling them to participate in the *general* economy through consumerism. Through participation in society, individuals are exposed to the “consumer culture [that] is constantly producing new wants and needs by means of media images and narratives” (Han 37). As incomes around the world increase, so too do means to expend income. Within the Malthusian world, low economic productivity had prevented individuals from reaching a point where they had enough energy and resources to participate in the *general* economy. An average basket of goods per capita would allow for sustenance, but not much more. But, given the secularization of society and the advancement of economic productivity under capitalism, individuals have developed new means to engage in unproductive consumption. This increased income, according to Bataille’s logic, would also mean more excess, which would cause additional unhappiness unless unproductively consumed. In Han’s depressed subject of contemporary society, Bataille offers a possible solution to reduce the accursed share that causes unhappiness via the method of unproductive consumption.

Within a system that invites accumulation and possession, the ultimate act of being human is to negate being, which is possible through Eros. “the impulse to live, heightened to the utmost and affirmed, approaches the impulse to die” (Han 24). The feelings that are generated through unproductive expenditure, both through *real* and *symbolic* expenditures, cannot be substituted by those of productive expenditure because of ingrained passion that is involved in these activities. Literature and the theatre, especially, carry a strong effect on individuals for their portrayal of tragedy. While death and violence have carried a taboo in numerous cultures throughout the world, there also exists an element that “fascinates us and disturbs us profoundly” (E 45). Yet, contradictorily, the view of death “drives us off, for we prefer life” (E 45). The simultaneous aversion and fascination with death because of various drives indicates the dual nature of the different drives that compel an individual. By defining death as the negation of the ego, the drive towards life is ultimately a drive towards death. Within the depressed subject, the “negativity of death is essential to erotic experience” (Han 25). The erotic life-impulses “overwhelm and dissolve its narcissistic and imaginary identity,” and the experience of Eros can liberate the depressed subject from the shackles of narcissism. (Han 25). Although modernity has brought upon more excess and isolation than individuals could ever consume and bear, Eros serves as a means for individuals to lose themselves for a moment and negate excess and isolation through death. Although Eros and death have been surrounded with countless taboos, it is only through continually transgressing can individuals overcome the problems that have been brought upon by modernity. Since Eros is defined as the drive towards life, the fundamental association between life and death indicates that experiencing death is necessary for an individual to overcome the narcissism so integral to the contemporary depressed subject.

Capitalism and Pornography

Agamben defines the profane as “the thing that is returned to the common use of men” (*P* 73). In a certain sense, profanation acts as a source of liberation because “to profane means to open the possibility of a special form of negligence, which ignores separation or, rather, puts it to a particular use” (*P* 75). This challenges the same capitalism that Weber postulated is the result of the secularization of Protestantism. The transition from religious to economic authority introduces what Benjamin described as “the first instance of a cult that creates guilt, not atonement” (Benjamin, *Capitalism as Religion*). Drawing from Benjamin’s account of capitalism as religion, Agamben expands on the unforgiving nature of secularization through arguing that pornography serves as a commodity used to oppress because it can be consumed without being profaned. According to Agamben, secularization “is a form of repression” that “neutralizes what it profanes” (*P* 77). Profanation, therefore, serves as a means to achieve the happiness that has been disallowed under capitalism. However, the integrity of both religious and capitalist systems depends on the existence of a good that can be consumed but cannot be profaned, or possessed, by its followers. It is in the interests of “the capitalist religion” in “creating something that is absolutely unprofaneable” as an act of self-preservation (*P* 83). Consumption reduces an object to a commodity, and profanation requires to further itemize this commodity into a possession before consumption. Therefore, as long as individuals operate within these constraints, their consumption “marks an absolute impossibility of free use, insofar as to be consumed the object must first be possessed as property” (Prozorov 78). Thus, the moment an individual is borne into a capitalist society that thrives on cultivating desire through pornography that individuals cannot profane is the moment that an individual is condemned to unhappiness.

Because individuals cannot escape the society in which they reside, they must engage with the products of the pornographication of society. And, because individuals cannot profane pornographic products, they exist without the means to achieve. Claiming that Agamben “adopt[s] the thesis of secularization,” Han asserts that Agamben “assume[s] every instance of setting-apart has an authentically religious core” (Han 29). *Profanations* attempts to characterize “a means of resistance to the conditions of the current ‘extreme phase’ of capitalism, and most particularly to the spectacular cultural regime of consumption that is integral to it” (Mills 126). It is through these means that capitalism, secularization, and pornographication are connected with each other. If the integration of mass consumerism into society is a product of late capitalism, then pornographication is the outcome of late capitalism using an unprofanable product to propagate cycles of mindless consumption. It is not surprising that Han remarks through Illouz how “consumerist and romantic desires reinforce each other” (Han 36). Echoing Freud’s ideas that “our civilization is largely responsible for our misery, and that we should be much happier if we gave it up and returned to primitive conditions,” the increased availability of information in society, paired with consumer demands for pornography, have created a constant culture of disappointment due to the inability to match the vivid reality provided by pornography (Freud 23). Agamben explains that “if, today, consumers in mass society are unhappy, it is not only because they consume objects that have incorporated within themselves their own ability to be used” (P 83). Paradoxically, the continued existence of consumerism is dependent on the the very plight it attempts to resolve: unhappiness. And, if profanation serves as a means for individuals to achieve happiness, it should make structural sense that a consumer culture dependent on achieving happiness through possession would never allow individuals to truly possess the item subject to their consumer desires.

It is from pornography that individuals are exposed to a “surplus visibility of surplus reality,” and individuals cannot escape from this pornographic framework because it is a self-reinforcing mechanism (Prozorov 81). Although pornography exists as a sexual fantasy, the commodification of the sexual act sometimes operates with more reality than the sexual act itself. As a “modern institution[] of imagination,” the pornography industry provides “visual displays of powerful narratives of the good life” (Illouz 202). Within a pornographic society where sex is reduced to its exhibition value, pornography becomes more real than reality itself, and individuals become less capable in finding satisfaction within their own love lives when pornography exists in a constant state of comparison. Decrying the *inferno of the same*, Han attributes the constant act of comparison leading to the demise of Eros in contemporary society. When an individual becomes indoctrinated within the culture of pornography, mundane activities no longer seem sufficient to represent reality, as even any task “can be endowed with or divested of this [pornographic] aura; hence it is easy to imagine a pornography of fishing in a culture that thoroughly banalized sexual behavior” (Prozorov 83). The inability for reality to operate within the same vividness as pornography leads individuals to experience disappointment, which perpetuates the cycle of consuming even more pornography. Because “people are more likely to perceive their own rationalized daily experience negatively as a result of exposure to media images,” pornography acts as a self-perpetuating cycle that reinforces its own consumption. As much of consumerism revolves around the idea of love, love, “more than other sentiments, must cope as insistently with the presence of another in institutionalized, routine frameworks... thus making ‘disappointment’ existentially inherent in the experience of love” (Illouz 215). Although the human desire to compare has already created difficulty in love, mass consumerism brought on by capitalism has reinforced this impulse to the extreme.

In *Nudities*, Agamban references the Fall as the realization of nudity as a sexual state. Representing “the transgression of the divine command” and “a passage from nudity without shame to nudity that must be concealed,” the origins of nudity as sexual state comes as a realization of the erotic value of the genitals (*N* 71). Likewise, the face has experienced a similar fall from grace due to the pornographication of society. Han claims that “the pornographic face says nothing. It has no expressivity or mystery,” which references Levinas’ conceptualization of the face as the source of infinity in the *other* that allows humans to experience love (Han 32). Likewise, Agamben cites the face as a reference to “site of the ontological experiment” that serves as “Emmanuel Levinas’s grounding of ethics [] in the face-to-face encounter” (Prozorov 88). According to Agamben, the face-body relationship “is marked by a fundamental asymmetry, in that our faces remain for the most part naked, while our bodies are normally covered” (*N* 88). But, if the face becomes pornographified as it has been in pornography, then it experiences a similar fall from grace as Adam and Eve experienced in the Fall. Just as nudity had been sexualized in the Fall, the face now serves as “an accomplice of nudity—as it looks into the lens or winks at the spectator—lets the absence of secret be seen; it expresses only a letting-be-seen, a pure exhibition” (*N* 89). But, unlike the caress, which requires perceiving the infinity of the *other*, pornography reduces the face to a commodity of simulating pleasure. The pornographic actor “affects and displays—like fashion models—the most absolute indifference, the most stoic ataraxy” (*P* 90). The naked body has been stigmatized in Christianity for its sexual value, which is why Christian societies hold an equivalency between virtue and chastity. But, pornography has allowed eroticism to “penetrate[] where it could have no place: the human face, which does not know nudity, for it is always already bare” (*P* 90). In contemporary mass consumerism, no

longer is nudity and sexuality the same. Capitalism has invaded Eden, and even the face is no longer safe from sexual commodification.

Similar to Leopold Bloom's fantasy while masturbating to Gerty in Joyce's *Ulysses*, pornography has expanded from an act of voyeurism to an inclusion of the viewer within the sexual act itself. No longer is the consumer of pornography a spectator to the act; contemporary pornography creates an actor out of the consumer. Han finds the concept of contemporary pornography paradoxical because "what is obscene about pornography is not an excess of sex, but the fact that it contains no sex at all" (Han 29). As "models in pornographic images increasingly demonstrate to the spectator their awareness of his or her gaze, their own expressions become ever more brazenly indifferent" (Prozorov 79). The actors in the pornographic film give the impression that they belong to the viewer, yet the viewer cannot possess them through exclusivity as they could do with a romantic partner. Even though the viewer of the pornographic film can observe the actors in the pornographic film having sex with each other, the indifference of the face to the act as well as the attention of the gaze towards the viewer gives the paradoxical impression that the viewer possesses the actor subject to their gaze. The fantasy that is created in the pornographic film is not enjoyed by the actors but catered towards the viewer. The face, in this case, serves as a commodity for the viewer's enjoyment, yet this false possession serves as the groundwork for their complacency with the capitalist system that prevents them from achieving happiness. Through pornography, individuals are able to consume and live out their sexual fantasies, yet the exhibitional value of the work renders sexuality into the "separate sphere of the unprofanable" (Prozorov 81). Even more than that, the expressions "change[] and became more brazen; the poses more complicated and animated, as if the models were intentionally exaggerated their indecency, thus showing their awareness of

being exposed to the lens” (*P* 89). The actor in the pornographic film expresses sexual enjoyment without emotional endearment, operating off of a commodification of sexual intimacy without real intimacy, which summarizes Agamben’s decry of consumption without profanation. The actor of the pornographic film is merely an actor but creates the illusion of authenticity through materializing the viewer’s fantasies for intimacy. Individuals, without the ability to fulfil the vivid fantasies set forth by pornography, are condemned to continue consuming without profaning and living without satisfying.

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