

# NUDITIES

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and Stefan Pedatella

Giorgio Agamben

*Stanford  
University  
Press*

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*Stanford  
California  
2011*

Stanford University Press  
Stanford, California

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Printed in the United States of America on acid-free, archival-quality paper

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Agamben, Giorgio, 1942–  
[*Nudità*. English]

*Nudities* / Giorgio Agamben ; translated by  
David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella.

p. cm. — (Meridian, crossing aesthetics)

“Originally published in Italian under the title *Nudità*.”

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-0-8047-6949-5 (cloth : alk. paper)

ISBN 978-0-8047-6950-1 (pbk : alk. paper)

I. Kishik, David. II. Pedatella, Stefan, 1976–

III. Title. IV. Series: Meridian (Stanford, Calif.)

B3611.A43N8313 2010

195—dc22

2010022808

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neither graciousness nor reticence, but rather through a biological identity?

And yet, following the rule that stipulates that history never returns to a lost state, we must be prepared, with neither regret nor hope, to search—beyond both personal identity and identity without the person—for that new figure of the human. Or, perhaps, what we must search for is simply the figure of the living being, for that face beyond the mask just as much as it is beyond the biometric *facies*. We still do not manage to see this figure, but the presentiment of it suddenly startles us in our bewilderment as in our dreams, in our unconsciousness as in our lucidity.

## § 7 Nudity

1. On April 8, 2005, a performance by Vanessa Beecroft took place in Berlin's Neue Nationalgalerie. A hundred nude women (though, in truth, they were wearing transparent pantyhose) stood, immobile and indifferent, exposed to the gaze of visitors who, after having waited on a long line, entered in groups into a vast space on the museum's ground floor. The visitors, at once timid and curious, began to cast sidelong glances at bodies that were, after all, there to be looked at. After walking around them, as if they were conducting reconnaissance, the visitors began to distance themselves embarrassedly from the almost military ranks of the hostile, naked bodies. The first impression of those who attempted to observe not only the women but also the visitors was that this was a nonplace. *Something that could have and, perhaps, should have happened did not take place.*

Clothed men who observe nude bodies: this scene irresistibly evokes the sadomasochistic ritual of power. In the beginning of Pasolini's *Salò* (which more or less faithfully reproduces de Sade's *One Hundred and Twenty Days of Sodom*), four party-officials are about to lock themselves in their villa. While they remain fully clothed, the officials proceed to attentively inspect victims whom they compel to enter naked, so as to evaluate their merits and defects. Clothed, too, were the American soldiers standing in front of a pile of their tortured prisoners' naked bodies in the Abu Ghraib



prison. But nothing of the like happened in the Neue Nationalgalerie: in a certain sense the relationship here seemed to be inverted, since there was nothing more perfidious than the bored and impertinent gaze that especially the youngest girls seemed to be continuously casting toward the defenseless spectators. No: what was supposed to happen and did not happen could not have been, under any circumstance, a sadomasochistic *séance*, a prodrome of an even more improbable orgy.

It seemed as if everyone was expectant, as if they were in a painting of the Last Judgment. But, on closer observation, even here the roles were reversed: the girls in pantyhose were the implacable and severe angels that the iconographic tradition always represents as being covered by long dresses. The visitors, on the other hand—hesitant and bundled-up as they were at the end of that Berlin winter—personified the resurrected awaiting their judgment, whose depiction in full nudity even the most sanctimonious theological tradition has authorized.

What did not take place was, therefore, neither torture nor a

*partouze*: it was, rather, simple nudity. Precisely in this ample and well-illuminated space—where a hundred female bodies of various ages, races, and shapes were on display, which the gaze could examine with ease and in detail—there seemed to be no trace of nudity. The event that was not produced (or, assuming that this was the intention of the artist, the event that took place by *not* happening) called the very nudity of the human body unequivocally into question.

2. Nudity, in our culture, is inseparable from a theological signature. Everyone is familiar with the story of Genesis, according to which after their sin Adam and Eve realized for the very first time that they were naked: “And the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked” (Gen. 3:7). According to theologians this does not happen as a result of sin having erased their simple, previous unawareness. Though they were not covered by any human clothing before the Fall, Adam and Eve were not naked; rather, they were covered by clothing of grace, which clung to them as a garment of glory (the Jewish version of this exegesis, which can be found for example in the Zohar, speaks about “clothing of light”). It is this supernatural clothing that was stripped from the two after their sin. Denuded, they are first forced to cover themselves with a loincloth of fig leaves that they fashioned themselves (“they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves waistbands” [Gen. 3:7]). Later on, at the moment of their expulsion from Paradise, they put on clothes made from animal skins, which had been prepared for them by God. All this means that our progenitors were nude in earthly Paradise only at two points: the first, in the presumably very brief interval between perceiving their nudity and making their loincloths; the second, the moment when they take off their fig leaves and put on their new garments of skins. And even during these two fleeting instances, nudity exists only negatively, so to speak: as a privation of the clothing of grace and as a presaging of the resplendent garment of glory that the blessed will receive in heaven. Full nudity exists, perhaps, only in the bodies of the damned in hell, as they unremittently suffer





the eternal torment of divine justice. In this sense it can be said that in Christianity there is no theology of nudity, only a theology of clothing.

3. This is the reason why Erik Peterson, one of the rare modern theologians who has reflected on the question of nudity, entitled his article *Theologie des Kleides* (Theology of Clothing). The essential themes of the theological tradition are summed up in a few dense pages. First of all, there is the immediate connection between nudity and sin:

Nudity appears only after sin. Before the Fall there was an absence of clothing [*Unbekleidetheit*], but this was not yet nudity [*Nacktheit*]. Nudity presupposes the absence of clothing, but it does not coincide with it. The perception of nudity is linked to the spiritual act that the

Scriptures define as the "opening of the eyes." Nudity is something that one notices, whereas the absence of clothes is something that remains unobserved. Nudity could therefore have been observed after sin only if man's being had changed. This change, brought on by the Fall, must have entirely affected Adam and Eve's nature. There must have been, in other words, a metaphysical transformation, affecting man's mode of being, rather than merely a moral change.<sup>1</sup>

This "metaphysical transformation" consists, however, simply in denudation, in the loss of the clothing of grace:

The distortion of human nature through sin leads to the "discovery" of the body, to the perception of its nudity. Before the Fall, man existed for God in such a way that his body, even in the absence of clothing, was not "naked." The human body's state of "not being naked," despite its apparent lack of clothing, is explained by the fact that supernatural grace enveloped the human person like a garment. Man did not simply find himself in the midst of the light of divine glory: he was clothed in the glory of God. Through sin, man loses the glory of God, and so in his nature a body without glory now becomes visible: the nakedness of pure corporeality, the denudation resulting in pure functionality, a body that lacks all nobility since its ultimate dignity lay in the divine glory now lost.<sup>2</sup>

Peterson tries to articulate in precise terms this essential connection between the Fall, nudity, and the loss of clothing, which seems to make sin consist in a simple act of undressing and baring (*Entblössung*): "The 'denudation' of the bodies of the first humans must have preceded the awareness of their bodies' nudity. This 'discovery' of the human body, which allows its 'naked corporeality' to appear, this ruthless denudation of the body with all the signs of its sexuality, which become visible for the eyes that have now been 'opened' by sin, can only be understood if we presuppose that what was 'covered' before the Fall is now what is 'discovered,' that what was before veiled and dressed is now unveiled and undressed."<sup>3</sup>

4. At this point the meaning of the theological apparatus begins

to take shape, by situating the very possibility of sin in the relationship that it establishes between nudity and clothing. Peterson's text appears, at least at first sight, to entail some contradictions. The "metaphysical transformation" that results from sin is, in reality, only the loss of the clothing of grace that hid the "naked corporeality" of the first couple. Logically, this means that sin (or at least the possibility of sin) already existed in this "naked corporeality," which in itself is deprived of grace. It means that the loss of clothing now makes this "naked corporeality" appear in its biological "pure functionality," "with all the signs of its sexuality," as a "body that lacks any nobility." If already before sin there was a need to cover up the human body with the veil of glory, then the blissful and innocent paradisiacal nudity was preceded by another nudity, a "naked corporeality" that sin, by removing the clothes of grace, allows, mercilessly, to appear.

The truth of the matter is that the seemingly secondary problem concerning the relationship between nudity and clothing coincides with another problem that theologically is utterly fundamental: the link between nature and grace. "Just as clothing presupposes the body that must be covered," Peterson writes, "so grace presupposes nature, which must reach its fulfillment in glory. This is why supernatural grace is granted to man in Paradise as clothing. *Man was created without clothes*—which means that he had a nature of his own, distinct from divine nature—but *he was created with this absence of clothing in order to then be dressed in the supernatural garment of glory.*"<sup>4</sup>

The problem of nudity is, therefore, the problem of human nature in its relationship with grace.

5. Preserved in the Collegiate Church of San Isidoro in León is an eleventh-century silver reliquary, on whose sides scenes from the book of Genesis are sculpted in relief. One of the panels shows Adam and Eve shortly before their expulsion from Eden. According to the biblical narrative, they have just realized that they are naked and have covered their shame with fig leaves, held by their left hands. Before them stands their vexed creator, wrapped in a sort of toga, and making an inquisitive gesture to-



ward them with his right hand (which is clarified by the caption, "*Dixit Dominus Adam ubi es*" [God said to Adam, Where art thou?] [Gen. 3:9]). This gesture is mirrored by the right hands of the culprits, as they childishly attempt to make excuses for themselves: Adam points at Eve, and Eve points at the serpent. The next scene, which particularly interests us, illustrates the verse from Genesis 3:21: "*Et fecit Dominus Deus Adae et mulieri eius tunicas pelliceas et, induit eos*" (And God made for Adam and for his wife tunics of skins, and clothed them). The unknown artist represents Adam already dressed, with a posture revealing great sadness; but, with delightful inventiveness, he depicts Eve with her legs still naked, while the Lord appears to be putting the tunic on her by force. The woman, whose face we can just barely see above the neckline of the dress, resists this divine violence with all her might: this can be proved beyond all doubt not only by the unnatural torsion of her legs and the grimace of her



squinting eyes but also by the gesture of her right hand, which desperately grasps at God's garment.

Why does Eve not want to wear her "fur coat"? Why does she want to remain naked (it appears that she has either taken the fig leaf off or that, in the vehemence of the scuffle, she has lost it)? Of course, an ancient tradition, which can be traced back to Saint Nilus, Theodoret of Cyrus, and Jerome, conceives of garments made from animal skins—the Septuagint's *chitonai dermatinoi*—as a symbol of death (indeed, *pelliccia*, the Italian word for fur coat, which maintains a sinful connotation up to this day, derives from *tunicae pellicae*, the Vulgate's rendering of the same phrase). This is the reason why, after baptism, those tunics of skins are replaced by a garment made of white linen ("When, ready for the clothes of Christ, we have taken off our tunics of skins," Jerome writes, "we will then put on linen clothing, which has nothing to do with death, but is wholly white, so that, after having been baptized, we can gird our loins in truth").<sup>5</sup> Other authors, like John Chrysostom and Augustine, insist instead on the literal meaning of the episode. And it is probable that neither the maker of the reliquary nor its buyers intended to give a particular significance to Eve's gesture. Yet this episode acquires its proper sense only if we remember that this is the last moment of the couple's life in earthly Paradise, the last moment when our progenitors could still be naked, before being clothed in animal skins and expelled from Paradise forever. If this is indeed the case, then the slim, silvery figure that desperately resists being clothed is an extraordinary symbol of femininity. This woman is the tenacious custodian of paradisiacal nudity.

6. That grace is something like a garment (Augustine calls it *indumentum gratiae*)<sup>6</sup> means that, like all garments, it was an addition that can also be taken away. But for this very reason it also means that the addition of grace constituted human corporeality, originally, as "naked" and that its removal always returns anew to the exhibition of nudity as such. And since grace, in the words of the apostle, "was given to us in Christ before the beginning of



time," since it was, as Augustine never tires of repeating, "given when those to whom it was to be given were not yet in existence," human nature is always already constituted as naked; it is always already "naked corporeality."<sup>7</sup>

Peterson stresses the idea that grace is a garment while nature is a kind of nudity. Citing the proverb, "Clothes make the man" (or in its German version, "clothes make people" [*Kleider machen Leute*]), he explains that

not only people, but man as such is made by his clothes, since he is uninterpretable without them. Human nature, according to its very goal, is subordinate to grace, and is fully realized only through grace. Hence Adam is "clothed" with supernatural justice, innocence, and immortality, for only such clothing could bestow on him his dignity and thus make visible what God destined him for through the gift of

grace and glory. But this is not the only thing that the paradisiacal clothing helps us to comprehend. It also shows us that—precisely as is the case with clothes—justice, innocence, and immortality must be granted to Adam in order to make him complete. Finally, we also reach this ultimate truth: that just as clothes veil the body, so in Adam supernatural grace covers a nature abandoned by God's glory and left to itself. This is presented as the possibility of human nature degenerating into what the Scriptures call "flesh," the becoming visible of man's nudity in its corruption and putrefaction. There is therefore a profound significance to the fact that the Catholic tradition calls "clothing" the gift of grace that man receives in Paradise. Man can begin to be interpreted only through such clothing of glory that, from a certain point of view, belongs to him only exteriorly, just like any piece of clothing. Something very important is expressed in this exteriority of mere clothing: that grace presupposes created nature, its "absence of clothing," as well as the possibility of it being denuded.<sup>8</sup>

Genesis does not explicitly say anywhere that human nature was imperfect, "uninterpretable," or potentially corrupted and in need of grace. By asserting the necessity of grace, which, like clothing, must cover the nudity of the body, Catholic theology makes it a sort of ineluctable supplement that, precisely for this reason, presupposes human nature as its obscure bearer: "naked corporeality." But this original nudity immediately disappears underneath the clothing of grace, to then reappear as *natura lapsa* only at the moment of sin, that is, at the moment of denudation. Just as the political mythologeme of *homo sacer* postulates as a presupposition a naked life that is impure, sacred, and thus killable (though this naked life was produced only by means of such presupposition), so the naked corporeality of human nature is only the opaque presupposition of the original and luminous supplement that is the clothing of grace. Though the presupposition is hidden behind the supplement, it comes back to light whenever the caesura of sin once again divides nature and grace, nudity and clothing.

This means that sin did not introduce evil into the world but merely revealed it. Sin essentially consists, at least as far as its effects are concerned, in the removing of clothing. Nudity, "naked corpo-

reality," is the irreducible Gnostic residue that implies a constitutive imperfection in creation, which must, at all events, be covered up. Nevertheless, the corruption of nature, which has now come to light, did not exist before sin but was itself produced by it.

7. If nudity is marked in our culture by such a weighty theological legacy, if it is only the obscure and ungraspable presupposition of clothing, then one comprehends why it could not have helped but miss its appointment in Vanessa Beecroft's performance. To eyes so profoundly (albeit unknowingly) conditioned by the theological tradition, that which appears when clothes (grace) are taken off is nothing but their shadow. To completely liberate nudity from the patterns of thought that permit us to conceive of it solely in a privative and instantaneous manner is a task that requires uncommon lucidity.

In our culture one of the consequences of this theological nexus that closely unites nature and grace, nudity and clothing, is that nudity is not actually a state but rather an event. Inasmuch as it is the obscure presupposition of the addition of a piece of clothing or the sudden result of its removal—an unexpected gift or an unexpected loss—nudity belongs to time and history, not to being and form. We can therefore only experience nudity as a denudation and a baring, never as a form and a stable possession. At any rate, it is difficult to grasp and impossible to hold on to.

It is not surprising, then, that in the performance at the Neue Nationalgalerie, just as in all the preceding ones, the women were never completely naked but always bore some trace of clothing (shoes during the performance at the Gagosian Gallery in London, shoes and a sort of gauze mask at the Guggenheim Collection in Venice, a black *cache-sexe* at the Palazzo Ducale in Genoa). Strip-tease, that is to say, the impossibility of nakedness, is in this sense the paradigm for our relationship with nudity. As an event that never reaches its completed form, as a form that does not allow itself to be entirely seized as it occurs, nudity is, literally, infinite: it never stops occurring. Inasmuch as its nature is essentially defective, inasmuch as it is nothing other than the event of the lack of





grace, nudity can never satiate the gaze to which it is offered. The gaze avidly continues to search for nudity, even when the smallest piece of clothing has been removed, even when all the parts that were hidden have been exhibited in a barefaced manner.

If, at the beginning of the twentieth century, there spread from Germany to the rest of Europe movements preaching nudism as a new social ideal that could be reconciled with our human nature, it is no surprise that this was possible only by opposing the obscene nudity of pornography and prostitution with nudity as *Lichtkleid* (clothes of light), thereby unknowingly evoking the ancient theological conception of innocent nudity as clothing of grace. What those naturists displayed was therefore not nudity but rather clothing—not nature but rather grace.

An investigation that wishes to seriously confront the problem of nudity must first and foremost go back archaeologically to the source of the theological opposition between nudity and clothing, nature and grace. The aim here is not to tap into an original state prior to the separation but to comprehend and neutralize the apparatus that produced this separation.

8. Augustine's *The City of God* is, in every sense, a decisive moment for the construction of the theological apparatus of nature (nudity) / grace (clothing). Augustine had already developed the conceptual foundations for his view on the subject in the polemics against Pelagius that can be found in *On Nature and Grace*. According to Pelagius—one of the most integral figures among those whom the dogmatic orthodoxy ended up pushing to the margins of the Christian tradition—grace is nothing other than human nature just as God created it, with free will (*nullam dicit dei gratiam nisi naturam nostram cum libero arbitrio*).<sup>9</sup> As a result the possibility of not sinning inheres in human nature in an inseparable way (Augustine uses in his critique of Pelagius the word *inamissibile*, that which cannot be lost) and without the need for further grace. Pelagius does not deny the existence of grace but identifies it with Edenic nature, which he in turn identifies with the sphere of possibility or potentiality (*posse*) that precedes both will (*velle*) and action (*actio*). Adam's sin—which is a sin of the will—does not necessarily signify, therefore, the loss of grace, which is in turn passed on as a curse to the entire human race (*per universam massam*,” as Augustine writes). On the contrary, though it is a given that humans have sinned and continue to sin, it nevertheless remains true that, at least *de sola possibilitate*, every man—just like Adam in Paradise—is capable of not sinning.

It is this identification of nature with grace that Augustine rejects so tenaciously in his anti-Pelagian writings, affirming instead their irreducible difference. At stake in the difference between the two is nothing less than the discovery of the doctrine of Original Sin, which would be officially taken up by the Church only two centuries later, at the Second Council of Orange. It is enough for now to observe that the interpretation of the Edenic condition and Adam's Fall in *The City of God* is based on this opposition between nature and grace. Adam and Eve were created with animal rather than spiritual bodies, but their bodies were clothed with grace as if it had been a garment. Consequently, just as they knew neither illness nor death, likewise, they did not know the *libido*, that is, the uncontrollable excitation of their private parts (*obscenae*). *Libido*

is the technical term in Augustine that defines the consequence of sin. On the basis of a passage from Paul ("*Caro enim concupiscit adversus*" [Gal. 5:17]), *libido* is defined as a rebellion of the flesh and its desires against the spirit, as an irremediable split between flesh (*caro*—*sarx*—is the term by which Paul expresses the subjection of man to sin) and will. Augustine writes that before sin,

as the Scriptures say, "man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed." This was not because they did not see their nudity; rather, their nudity was not yet indecent, because the *libido* did not yet arouse their members against their will. . . . Their eyes were open, but not in order to recognize what was granted to them under the clothing of grace, since their members did not yet know how to rebel against their will. When this grace was stripped from them, in order to punish their disobedience with a commensurate punishment, a new impudence was awakened in the urges of their bodies. The consequence was that their nudity became indecent, thus making them aware of their condition and dismayed by it.<sup>10</sup>

The parts of the body that could once be freely exposed in their glory (*glorianda*) thus become something that had to be hidden (*pudenda*). Hence the shame that drives Adam and Eve to cover themselves with fig leaves, and which becomes from that day on such an inseparable element of the human condition that, Augustine writes, "even in the dark solitudes of India, even those who are accustomed to philosophize in the nude (and are therefore called gymnosophists), cover their genitals in order to differentiate them from the other parts of their body."<sup>11</sup>

9. At this point Augustine presents his surprising conception of Edenic sexuality, or at least what this sexuality would have been had humans not sinned. If the postlapsarian *libido* is defined by the impossibility of controlling the genitals, then the state of grace that preceded sin consists in the will's perfect control over the sexual organs:

In Paradise, if culpable disobedience had not been punished with another disobedience, marriage would not have known this resistance,

this opposition, this struggle between *libido* and will. On the contrary, our private parts, like all the other parts of the body, would have been at the service of the will. That which was created for this end would have sown the field of generation, as the hand sows the earth. . . . Man would have sown his seed and woman would have received it in her genitals, only when necessary, and to the degree necessary, as a result of the will's command, and not due to the excitation of the *libido*.<sup>12</sup>

To substantiate his hypothesis, Augustine does not hesitate to turn to a somewhat grotesque example of the will's control over those bodily parts that seem to be uncontrollable:

We know of men who set themselves apart from others, by their amazing ability to achieve with their body things other men are absolutely incapable of. There are those who can move their ears, one at a time or both together. Others are able to move their hairline, shifting their scalp back and forth at will. Still others can vomit on command everything that they have devoured by slightly pressing on their belly, as if it were a bag. Some can imitate the cries of birds and beasts, as well as the voices of other men, so perfectly that no difference can be detected. And finally, there are those who can voluntarily emit from their anus a variety of sounds without any unpleasant odor, to the effect that they appear to be singing from that region.<sup>13</sup>

It is on the basis of this not very edifying model that we must imagine Edenic sexuality under the clothes of grace. With a signal of the will, the genitals would have been aroused, just as easily as we might raise a hand, and the husband would impregnate his wife without the burning stimulation of the *libido*: "It would have been possible for man to transmit his seed to his wife without harming her physical integrity, just as now the flow of the menstrual blood can come forth from the womb of a virgin without compromising her integrity."<sup>14</sup>

This chimera ("At present," Augustine writes, "there is nothing that would enable us to demonstrate how this is possible") of a nature perfectly submissive to grace renders the corporeality of mankind after the Fall even more obscene. The uncontrollable



nudity of the genitals is the cipher of nature's corruption after sin, which humanity transmits through procreation.

10. It is worth emphasizing the paradoxical conception of human nature that lies at the foundation of the above claims. This conception is in agreement with the doctrine of Original Sin (even though the technical term *peccatum originale* is still missing) that Augustine espouses, contrary to Pelagius. Confirmed by the Council of Orange in 529, it would achieve its full elaboration only in Scholasticism. According to this doctrine human nature was corrupted by Adam's sin (through which "all have sinned," Rom. 5:12), and without the aid of grace human beings became absolutely incapable of doing good. But if we now ask ourselves what the nature that became corrupted is, the answer is not so simple. Adam was in fact created in grace, and therefore his nature, like his nudity, was cloaked with divine gifts right from the start. Because man abandoned God, after sin he was abandoned to himself and left entirely to the mercy of his nature. Nevertheless, the loss of grace does not simply allow a previous and, for that matter, unknown nature to appear. Instead, what appears is only a corrupted nature (*in deterius commutata*) that results from this loss of grace. With the removal of grace an original nature comes to light that is no longer original, because only sin is original, and so this nature has become merely a derivation of this sin.

It is not a coincidence that in his commentary on Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologica*, Thomas Cajetan (a perceptive theologian who opposed Martin Luther in 1518 at the behest of the Catholic Church) found it necessary to make use of a comparison with nudity in order to illustrate this paradox. The difference, he says, between a supposedly "pure" human nature (that was not created in grace) and an originally graceful nature that was then lost is the same as the difference between a nude person and a person who has been denuded (*expoliata*). This analogy is illuminating not only in regard to nature but also in regard to nudity, and it also clarifies the sense of the theological strategy that stubbornly links clothing with grace, nature with nudity. Just as the nudity

of a person who is simply nude is identical to—and nevertheless different from—the nudity of a person who has been denuded, so human nature, which has lost what was not nature (grace), is different from what it was before grace had been added to it. Nature is now defined by the non-nature (grace) that it has lost, just as nudity is defined by the non-nudity (clothing) that has been stripped from it. Nature and grace, nudity and clothing, constitute a singular aggregate whose elements are separate and autonomous, though—at least with regard to nature—they do not remain unchanged after their separation. But this means that nudity and nature are—as such—impossible: there is, instead, only baring, only corrupted nature.

11. The Bible nowhere states that Adam and Eve were unable to see their nudity before they had sinned because it was covered by the clothes of grace. The only thing certain is that in the beginning Adam and Eve were naked and felt no shame ("And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed" [Gen. 2:25]). After the Fall, by contrast, they felt the need to cover themselves with fig leaves. The transgression of the divine command entails, then, a passage from nudity without shame to nudity that must be concealed.

The nostalgia for nudity without shame, the idea that what was lost through sin is the possibility of being nude without blushing, forcefully resurfaces in the Gospels as well as in extracanonical texts (which we unreasonably continue to call "apocryphal," that is, "hidden"). In *The Gospel According to Thomas* we read: "His disciples asked: 'When will you reveal yourself to us, and when will we see you?' Jesus answered: 'When you undress without shame, when you take off your clothes and trample on them with your feet like children; then you will behold the Son of the living God, and you will have no fear.'"¹⁵

In the tradition of the Christian community of the first two centuries, the only occasion in which one could be nude without shame was the baptismal ritual, which was not usually performed on newborn babies but mainly on adults (the baptism of infants



became obligatory only after the doctrine of Original Sin was accepted by the entire Church). It entailed the immersion in water of the naked catechumen in the presence of members of the community (it is to this ritualistic nudity of the baptized that we owe the relative and otherwise unexplainable tolerance in our culture toward beach nudity). The *Catechetical Lectures* by Cyril of Jerusalem comments on this rite in the following way: "As soon as you enter, immediately take off your clothes, in order to signify the removing of the old man and his sins. . . . How Marvelous! They are nude in front of everyone's eyes, and they do not feel ashamed, since they are the image of Adam, the first-formed man, who was naked in Paradise and was not ashamed."<sup>16</sup>

The clothes, which the baptized trample on with their feet, are "the clothes of shame," heirs of the "tunics of skins" that our progenitors wore at the moment they were expelled from Paradise. These are the clothes that get replaced after baptism by the garment made of white linen. But what is decisive in the ritual of baptism is precisely its evocation of Adamic nudity without shame as a symbol and pledge of redemption. And it is for this nudity that, on the reliquary in San Isidoro, Eve feels nostalgia, as she refuses to put on the clothes that God is forcing her to wear.

12. "Like children": that infantile nudity is the paradigm of nudity without shame is a very ancient motif, not only in Gnostic texts like *The Gospel According to Thomas* but also in Jewish and Christian documents. Even though the doctrine according to which Original Sin is propagated through procreation implies the rejection of infantile innocence (hence—as we have seen—the practice of baptizing newborns), the fact that children are not ashamed by their nudity is often linked in the Christian tradition with paradisiacal innocence. As we read in a Syrian text from the fifth century, "when the Scriptures say that 'they were both naked, and were not ashamed,' this means that they were unaware of their nudity, just like children."<sup>17</sup> Though marked by Original Sin, children, insofar as they do not perceive their nudity, dwell in a sort of limbo, unaware of the shame that, according to Augustine, sanctions the appearance of the *libido*.

It is to this idea that we owe the practice (attested to—though not exclusively—by sources up to the sixteenth century) of reserving for boys (*pueri*) the privilege of singing during religious functions, almost as if their "white" voice (*voce bianca*) contained, in contrast to the "mutated" voices after puberty (*voces mutatae*), the signature of prelapsarian innocence. *Candida*, or white, is the color of the linen clothing that the baptized receive after they have removed the clothes that symbolized sin and death. "Wholly white," writes Jerome, "because it bears no trace of death, and so, after having been baptized, we can gird our loins in truth and cover all the shame of our past sins."<sup>18</sup> But already in the first century Quintilian uses the word *candida* to describe an attribute of the human voice (though, naturally, he does not refer to children's voices). Thus, in the history of sacred music we see the attempt to ensure the persistence of the young voice by means of the castration of the choirboys (*pueri cantores*) before they have reached puberty. The "white voice" is the cipher of this nostalgia for a lost, Edenic innocence—for something that, like prelapsarian nudity, we no longer understand.

13. A perspicuous example of theological categories persisting in places where we least expect to encounter them occurs in Sartre. In the chapter from *Being and Nothingness* dedicated to the relationship with the Other, Sartre deals with the subject of nudity in connection with obscenity and sadism. He does so in terms so closely resembling Augustinian categories that—were the proximity not explainable by noting the common theological inheritance that infuses our entire vocabulary of corporeality—we might conclude that the connection was intentional.

Desire, according to Sartre, is above all a strategy directed toward making the "flesh" [*chair* in French, *carne* in Italian] appear in the body of the Other. Impeding this "incarnation" (another theological term) of the body are not so much the material clothes and the makeup that usually conceal it but rather the fact that the body of the Other is always "in situation": it is always already in the process of completing this or that gesture, this or that move-

ment, with some goal in mind: "The Other's body is originally a body in situation; flesh, on the contrary, appears as the *pure contingency of presence*. Ordinarily, it is hidden by makeup, clothes, and so forth; but above all it is hidden by *movements*; nothing is less 'in the flesh' than a dancer, even if she is nude. Desire is an attempt to strip the body of its movements as of its clothes in order to make it exist as pure flesh; it is an attempt to achieve an *incarnation* of the Other's body."<sup>19</sup>

This being always already "in situation" of the Other's body is what Sartre calls "grace":

In *grace*, the body appears as a psychic being in situation. It reveals above all its transcendence, as a transcendence-transcended; it is in act and is understood in terms of the situation and of the end that it pursues. Each movement is apprehended in a perceptive process that goes from the present to the future. . . . It is this image of necessity and freedom in movement . . . that, strictly speaking, constitutes grace. . . . In grace the body is the instrument that manifests freedom. The graceful act, insofar as it reveals the body as a precision instrument, furnishes this body at each instant with its justification for existing.<sup>20</sup>

Even the theological metaphor of grace as clothing that impedes the perception of nudity appears at this point: "Facticity, then, is clothed and disguised by grace: the nudity of the flesh is wholly present, but it cannot be *seen*. Thus the supreme coquetry, the supreme challenge of grace, is to exhibit the body unveiled with no clothing, with no veil except grace itself. The most graceful body is the naked body whose acts surround it with an invisible garment, hiding its flesh entirely, though it is completely present to the spectators' eyes."<sup>21</sup>

It is against this garment of grace that the sadist directs his strategy. The special incarnation that he wants to bring about is "the obscene," which is nothing other than the loss of grace: "The obscene is a *species* of Being-for-the-Other which belongs to the *genus* of the ungraceful [*disgracieux*]. . . . The ungraceful appears . . . when one of the elements of grace is thwarted in its real-



ization . . . when the body adopts postures that entirely strip it of its acts and reveal the inertia of its flesh."<sup>22</sup> This is the reason why the sadist tries, in every possible way, to make the flesh appear, to force the body of the Other into incongruous positions that reveal its obscenity, that is, its irreparable loss of all grace.

14. Analyses that have deep—even if unintentional—theological roots are often very pertinent. In many countries a genre of sadomasochistic publications has recently spread, which first present the future victim elegantly dressed and in her usual context: smiling, strolling with her friends, or flipping through a magazine. Turning a few pages forward, the reader suddenly sees the same girl undressed, tied up, and forced to assume the most unnatural and painful positions, removing all grace even from the lineaments of her face, which are deformed and contorted by special instruments. The sadistic apparatus—with its straps, whips, and *poires d'angoisse*—is here the perfect profane equivalent of sin, which, according to theologians, removes the clothes of grace and brusquely liberates in the body the absence of grace that defines





"naked corporeality." What the sadist tries to seize is nothing other than the empty shell of grace, the shadow that the "being in situation" (the dressed girl in the photographs on the next page), or the clothing of light, casts on the body. But precisely for this reason the desire of the sadist—as Sartre does not fail to note—is destined for failure, since he never manages to truly grasp in both hands the "incarnation" that he mechanically tries to produce. Certainly, the desired result seems to be achieved: the body of the Other is now



entirely obscene and breathless flesh, docilely holding the position dictated by the torturer [*carnefice*]; it seems to have definitively lost both freedom and grace. But it is exactly this freedom that necessarily remains unobtainable: "The more the sadist persists in treating the Other as an instrument, the more this freedom eludes him."<sup>23</sup>

The nudity, the "ungracefulness" that the sadist tries to seize in his victim, is (like Adam's naked corporeality, according to theolo-





gians) nothing other than the hypostasis and the evanescent support of freedom and grace. Nudity is that thing that must be presupposed as prior to grace in order for something like sin to occur. Naked corporeality, like naked life, is only the obscure and impalpable bearer of guilt. In truth, there is only baring, only the infinite gesticulations that remove clothing and grace from the body. Nudity in our culture ends up looking like the beautiful feminine nude that Clemente Susini created in wax for the Grand Duke of Tuscany's Museum of Natural History. One can remove the layers of this anatomical model one at a time, allowing first the abdominal and pectoral walls to appear, then the array of lungs and viscera still covered by the greater omentum, then the heart and



the intestines, until finally, inside the womb, one can make out a small fetus. But no matter how much we open the wax model and scrutinize it with our gaze, the naked body of the beautiful, disemboweled woman remains obstinately unobtainable. Hence the impurity, almost the sacredness, that seems to inhere in this wax model. Like nature, nudity is impure because it is accessible only by the removal of clothes (grace).

15. In November 1981 Helmut Newton published a diptych in *Vogue* that would soon become famous under the title "They Are Coming." On the magazine's left page we see four completely naked women (apart from their shoes, which the photographer apparently could not do without) walking in a cold and stiff manner, like models in a fashion show. The facing page to the right displays the same models in the very same positions, but this time they are immaculately dressed in elegant clothes. The singular effect produced

by this diptych is that, contrary to all appearances, the two images are actually the same. The models wear their nudity in exactly the same way that, on the opposite page, they wear their attire. Even if it is not likely that the photographer had a theological intent, certainly the nudity/clothing apparatus seems to be evoked here and, perhaps unintentionally, called into question. All the more so when, republishing the same diptych two years later in *Big Nudes*, Newton reversed the order of the images so that the dressed women precede the nude women, just as in Paradise the clothing of grace precedes the denudation. But even in this reversed order the effect remains unchanged: neither the eyes of the models nor the eyes of the spectator have been opened; there is neither shame nor glory, neither *pudenda* nor *glorianda*. The equivalence of the two images is further enhanced by the faces of the models, which express—as is the convention among fashion models—the same indifference in both photos. The face—which in the pictorial depictions of the Fall is the place where the artist represents the sorrow, shame, and dismay of the fallen couple (one thinks, above all, of Masaccio's fresco in the Brancacci Chapel in Florence)—acquires here the same gelid inexpressiveness: it is no longer a face.

In any case the essential point is that in Newton's diptych, as in Beecroft's performance, nudity has not taken place. It is as if naked corporeality and fallen nature, which had functioned as the theological presuppositions of clothing, have both been eliminated, and so denudation no longer had anything left to unveil. The only thing left is the fashion clothing, that is, an undecidable element between flesh and fabric, nature and grace. Fashion is the profane heir of the theology of clothing, the mercantile secularization of the prelapsarian Edenic condition.

16. In Genesis the fruit that Eve gives to Adam comes from the tree of knowledge of good and evil and is meant, according to the tempting words of the serpent, to "open their eyes" and communicate to them this knowledge ("When you eat from it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" [Gen. 3:5]). And indeed, the eyes of Adam and Eve are opened

immediately afterward, but what they then come to know is designated by the Bible only as nudity: "And the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked." The only content of their knowledge of good and evil is, therefore, nudity. But what is this first object and content of knowledge, this thing that we call nudity? What do we come to know by knowing nudity?

Commenting on the biblical passage in question, Rashi writes: "What does it mean 'they knew that they were naked'? It means that they possessed a single precept from God, and they stripped themselves of it."<sup>24</sup> *Genesis Rabbah* explains that Adam and Eve were deprived of the justice and glory that came with the observance of God's commandment. According to the apparatus that should be familiar to us by now, the knowledge of nudity leads back, once again, to a privation: the knowledge that something invisible and insubstantial (the clothing of grace, the justice that comes with the observance of the commandments) has been lost.

It is possible, however, to offer a different interpretation of this absence of content of humanity's first knowledge. That this first knowledge is devoid of content can, in fact, mean that it is not the knowledge of something but rather the knowledge of pure knowability. It means that to know nudity is not to know an object but only an absence of veils, only a possibility of knowing. The nudity that the first humans saw in Paradise when their eyes were opened is, then, the opening of truth, of "disclosedness" (*a-letheia*, "unconcealment"), without which knowledge would not be possible. The condition of no longer being covered by the clothing of grace does not reveal the obscurity of flesh and sin but rather the light of knowability. There is nothing behind the presumed clothing of grace, and it is precisely this condition of not having anything behind it, this pure visibility and presence, that is nudity. To see a body naked means to perceive its pure knowability beyond every secret, beyond or before its objective predicates.

17. This kind of exegesis is not completely unfamiliar to Christian theology. In the Eastern tradition, represented by Basil the Great and John of Damascus, the knowledge of nudity (*epignōsis*



*tēs gymnotētos*) signifies the loss of the condition of ecstasy and the blissful ignorance of self that defined the Edenic condition, as well as the consequent emergence in man of his wicked yearning to "fill his deficiencies" (*tou leipontos anaplerōsis*). Before sin, the first human beings lived in a state of idleness (*scholē*) and fullness. The true significance of the opening of the eyes is the closing of the eyes of the soul and the perception of one's own state of fullness and beatitude as a state of weakness and *atechnia* (that is, a lack of applied knowledge). Sin, then, does not reveal a lack or a defect in human nature, which the clothing of grace covered up. On the contrary, sin consists in perceiving the fullness that defined the Edenic condition as a lack.

If man had remained in Paradise, Basil writes, he would have owed his clothes neither to nature (as animals do) nor to a technical ability but only to the divine grace that responded to the love he had for God. By compelling humans to abandon their blissful Edenic contemplation, sin plunges them into the vain search for the technical knowledge and the sciences that distract them from the contemplation of God. According to this tradition, nudity does not refer to corporeality, as it does in Augustine and the rest of the Latin tradition, but rather to the loss of contemplation—that is, the knowledge of the pure knowability of God—and its substitution by applied and earthly knowledge. In fact, when God makes Adam fall asleep in order to remove his rib, Adam enjoys a state of perfect contemplation that culminates in ecstasy ("Through ecstasy," Augustine writes, "he participated in the angelic court and, by penetrating the sanctuary of God, he understood the mysteries").<sup>25</sup> The Fall is therefore not a fall of the flesh but of the mind. At stake in nudity and the loss of innocence is not this or that other way of making love but the hierarchy and modalities of knowledge.

18. Nudity—or rather denudation—as a cipher of knowledge, belongs to the vocabulary of philosophy and mysticism. This is the case not only because it relates to the object of supreme knowledge, that is, "naked being" (*esse autem Deum esse nudum sine velamine*

*est*), but also insofar as it relates to the very process of knowledge. In medieval psychology the medium of knowledge is called an image, or "phantasm," or species. The process that brings about perfect knowledge is therefore described as a progressive baring of this "phantasm," which—passing from the senses to the imagination to memory—is stripped little by little of its sensible elements in order to present itself, once the *denudatio perfecta* has been completed, as an "intelligible species," a pure intention or image. Through the act of intellection, the image becomes perfectly nude, and—Avicenna writes—"if it were not already naked, it would at any rate become so, because the contemplative faculty strips this image in such a way that no material affection can remain in it."<sup>26</sup> Complete knowledge is contemplation in and about nudity.

In one of Eckhart's sermons this connection between image and nudity is further developed in a way that turns the image (identified with "naked essence") into something like the pure and absolute medium of knowledge: "The image is a simple and formal emanation that transfuses in its totality the naked essence, which is how it is conceived by the metaphysician. . . . It is a life [*vita quaedam*] that can be conceived as something that begins to swell and tremble [*intumescere et bullire*] in itself and by itself, without however thinking at the same time about its expansion outwards [*necdum cointellecta ebullitione*]."<sup>27</sup> In Eckhart's terminology *bullitio* signifies the trembling or the internal tension of the object in the mind of God or of man (*ens cognitivum*), whereas *ebullitio* signifies the condition of real objects outside the mind (*ens extra anima*). The image, inasmuch as it expresses naked being, is a perfect medium between the object in the mind and the real thing. As such, it is neither a mere logical object nor a real entity: it is something that lives ("a life"); it is the trembling of the thing in the medium of its own knowability; it is the quivering in which the image allows itself to be known. "The forms that exist in matter," writes one of Eckhart's pupils, "tremble incessantly [*continue tremant*], like an ebullient strait between two seas [*tamquam in eurippo, hoc est in ebullitione*]. . . . This is the reason why nothing about them can be conceived of as certain or stable."<sup>28</sup>



The nudity of the human body is its image—that is, the trembling that makes this body knowable but that remains, in itself, ungraspable. Hence the unique fascination that images exercise over the human mind. Precisely because the image is not the thing, but the thing's knowability (its nudity), it neither expresses nor signifies the thing. Nevertheless, inasmuch as it is nothing other than the giving of the thing over to knowledge, nothing other than the stripping off of the clothes that cover it, nudity is not separate from the thing: it is the thing itself.

19. An attempt to think about nudity in all its theological complexity and, at the same time, to move beyond the theological perspective is accomplished in Walter Benjamin's work. Toward the end of his essay on Goethe's *Elective Affinities*, he examines the relationship in beauty between the veil and the veiled, appearance and essence, in connection with the character of Otilia (whom Benjamin saw as a figuration of Julia Cohn, the woman whom he was in love with at the time). In beauty the veil and the veiled, the envelopment and the object that it envelops, are linked by a necessary relationship that Benjamin calls "secret" (*Geheimnis*). The beautiful, then, is that object for which the veil is essential. That Benjamin is aware of the theological depth of this thesis, which irrevocably links the veil to the veiled, is suggested by a reference to the "age-old idea" that the veiled is transformed by its unveiling, since it can remain "equal to itself" only underneath its envelopment. As a result beauty is in its essence an impossibility of unveiling; it is "non-unveilable" [*unenthüllbar*]:

Unveiled, the beautiful object would prove to be infinitely inapparent [*unscheinbar*]. . . . Thus, in facing whatever is beautiful, the idea of unveiling becomes the idea of its non-unveilability. . . . If only the beautiful, and nothing outside of it, can exist essentially as veiled and remain veiled, then the divine ground of beauty would lie in the secret. In beauty, appearance is just this: not the superfluous envelopment of things in themselves, but rather the necessary envelopment of things for us. Such veiling is divinely necessary at certain times, just as it is divinely established that an unveiling that takes place outside of

time leads the inapparent to vanish into nothing, whereupon revelation dissolves all secrets.<sup>29</sup>

This law that inseparably unites veil and veiled within the sphere of beauty comes up unexpectedly short precisely when it confronts human beings and their nudity. Due to the unity that is formed between the veil and the veiled, Benjamin claims that beauty can exist as essence only where the duality of nudity and clothing no longer exists: in art and the phenomena of naked nature [*bloßen Natur*]: "On the contrary, the more clearly this duality expresses itself in order to finally be confirmed at its highest level in the human being, the more it becomes clear that in nudity without veils the essentially beautiful has vanished, and the naked body of the human being achieves an existence beyond all beauty—the sublime—and a work that goes beyond all creations—that of the creator."<sup>30</sup>

In the human body, and particularly in Goethe's Otilia—who is, in the novel, the paradigm of this pure appearance—beauty can only be apparent. Hence, while in works of art and of nature the applicable principle is that of "non-unveilability," in the living body the opposite principle is implacably affirmed: "nothing mortal is non-unveilable."<sup>31</sup> Not only, then, does the possibility of being denuded condemn human beauty to appearance, but unveilability constitutes in some way its cipher: in the human body beauty is essentially and infinitely "unveilable"; it can always be exhibited as mere appearance. There is, however, a limit, beyond which exists neither an essence that cannot be further unveiled nor a *natura lapsa*. Here one encounters only the veil itself, appearance itself, which is no longer the appearance of anything. This indelible residue of appearance where nothing appears, this clothing that no body can wear anymore—this is human nudity. It is what remains when you remove the veil from beauty. It is sublime because, as Kant claims, the impossibility of presenting the idea through the senses is reversed at a certain point by a presentation of a higher order where what is being presented is, so to speak, presentation itself. It is in this way that, in nudity without veils,



appearance itself appears and displays itself as infinitely inapparent, infinitely free of secret. The sublime, then, is an appearance that exhibits its own vacuity and, in this exhibition, allows the inapparent to take place.

As a result, at the end of Benjamin's essay, it is precisely to ap-

pearance that "the most extreme hope" is entrusted, and the principle according to which it is absurd to desire the appearance of the good "suffers its unique exception."<sup>32</sup> If beauty, in its most intimate condition, was once secret—that is to say, the necessary relation of appearance and essence, the veil and the veiled—then here appearance unties itself from this knot and shines for a moment by itself as the "appearance of the good." Accordingly, the light from this star is opaque, to be found only in certain Gnostic texts: no longer a necessary and "non-unveilable" envelopment of beauty, it is now appearance, *to the extent that nothing appears by means of this appearance*. The place where this inappearance—this sublime absence of the secret of human nudity—most prominently leaves its mark is the face.

20. At the end of the 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s Benjamin associated with a group of very attractive female friends. Among them were Gert Wissing, Ola Parem, and Eva Hermann, whom he thought all shared the same special relationship to appearance. In the diaries he kept during his stay on the French Riviera between May and June of 1931, Benjamin sought to describe this relationship, linking it with the theme of appearance that he had confronted some years before in his essay on Goethe's novel. "Speyer's wife," he writes,

reported this astounding statement by Eva Hermann, from the period of her greatest depression: "The fact that I am unhappy doesn't mean that I have to run around with a face full of wrinkles." This made many things clear to me, above all that the rudimentary contact that I have had in recent years with these creatures—Gert, Eva Hermann, and so on—is only a feeble and belated echo of one of the most fundamental experiences of my life: the experience of appearance [*Schein*]. I spoke yesterday with Speyer about this, who for his part also contemplated about these women and made the curious observation that they have no sense of honor, or rather that their code of honor is actually to say everything they think. This is a very true observation, and it proves the profundity of the obligation they feel toward appearance. For this "saying everything" is meant above all to destroy what has been said; or



rather, once it has been destroyed, to turn it into an object. Only insofar as it is apparent [*scheinhaft*] are they able to assimilate it.<sup>33</sup>

One could define this attitude as the "nihilism of beauty," common to many beautiful women, which consists in reducing one's own beauty to pure appearance and then exhibiting this appearance with a sort of remote sadness, stubbornly denying the idea that beauty can signify something other than itself. But it is precisely the very lack of illusions about itself—this nudity without veils that beauty thus manages to achieve—that furnishes the most frightful attraction. This disenchantment of beauty, this special nihilism, reaches its extreme stage with the mannequins or the fashion models, who learn before all else to erase all expression from their faces. In so doing, their faces become pure exhibition value and, as a result, acquire a particular allure.

21. In our culture, 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. Corresponding to this asymmetry is the primacy of the head, which may be expressed in many ways but remains more or less constant in all fields: from politics (where the highest power is usually called the "head") to religion (Paul's cephalic metaphor of Christ), from art (where one can represent in a portrait the head without the body but not, as is evident from "nude" depictions, the body without the head) to everyday life, where the head is the locus of expressiveness par excellence. This last point seems to be confirmed by the fact that while the bodies of other animals often exhibit very lively and expressive signs (the pattern of the leopard's skin, the fiery colors of the mandrill's sexual organs, but also the butterfly's wings and the peacock's plumage), the human body is singularly devoid of any expressive features.

This expressive supremacy of the face finds its confirmation, as well as its point of weakness, in the uncontrollable blushing that attests to the shame we feel at being nude. This is perhaps the reason why the assertion of nudity seems to call the primacy of the face into question. That the nudity of a beautiful body can

eclipse the face, or make it invisible, is stated with great clarity in *Charmides*, the dialogue Plato dedicates to the subject of beauty. Charmides, the young man who lends his name to the dialogue, has a beautiful face, but, as one of the interlocutors comments, his body is so beautiful that "if he were to undress, you would believe that he had no face" (that he would be literally "faceless," *aprosôpos*, 154d). The idea that the nude body can contest the primacy of the face, to then offer itself as a face, is implicit in the response the women accused of witchcraft gave to those who wondered why they had kissed Satan's anus during the Sabbath: their defense was that even there, there is a face. Similarly, in the first stages of erotic photography, models had to affect a romantic and dreamy expression, as if the unseen lens had surprised them in the intimacy of their boudoir. But in the course of time this procedure was inverted, to the effect that the face's only task became the expression of the shameless awareness that the naked body was being exhibited to the gaze. Barefacedness [*sfacciataggine*, etymologically, the loss of the face] is now the necessary counterpart to nudity without veils. The face, now an accomplice of nudity—as it looks into the lens or winks at the spectator—lets the absence of secret be seen; it expresses only a letting-be-seen, a pure exhibition.

22. A miniature in one of the manuscripts of the *Clavis physicae* by Honorius of Autun shows a character (perhaps the author) holding a ribbon on which is written: "*Involucrum rerum petit is sibi fieri clarum*" (He who tries to clarify the envelopment of things).<sup>34</sup> One could define nudity as the envelopment that reaches a point where it becomes clear that clarification is no longer possible. It is in this sense that we must understand Goethe's maxim, according to which "beauty can never clarify itself."<sup>35</sup> Only because beauty remains to the end an "envelopment," only because it remains "inexplicable" [etymologically, that which cannot be unfolded], can appearance—which reaches its supreme stage in nudity—be called beautiful. That nudity and beauty cannot be clarified does not therefore mean that they contain a secret that cannot be brought to light. Such an appearance would be mysteri-



ous, but precisely for this reason it would not be an envelopment, since in this case one could always continue to search for the secret that is hidden within it. In the inexplicable envelopment, on the other hand, there is no secret; denuded, it manifests itself as pure appearance. The only thing that the beautiful face can say, exhibiting its nudity with a smile, is, "You wanted to see my secret? You wanted to clarify my envelopment? Then look right at it, if you can. Look at this absolute, unforgivable absence of secrets!" The matheme of nudity is, in this sense, simply this: *haecce!* there is nothing other than this. Yet it is precisely the disenchantment of beauty in the experience of nudity, this sublime but also miserable exhibition of appearance beyond all mystery and all meaning, that can somehow defuse the theological apparatus and allow us to see, beyond the prestige of grace and the chimeras of corrupt nature, a simple, inapparent human body. The deactivation of this apparatus retroactively operates, therefore, as much on nature as on grace, as much on nudity as on clothing, liberating them from their theological signature. This simple dwelling of appearance in the absence of secrets is its special trembling—it is the nudity that, like the choirboy's "white" voice, signifies nothing and, precisely for this reason, manages to penetrate us.

## § 8 The Glorious Body

1. The problem of the glorious body, that is to say, the nature and characteristics—and more generally the life—of the body of the resurrected in Paradise, is the paramount chapter in theology, and is classified in the literature under the rubric *de fine ultimo*. Nevertheless, the Roman Curia, in order to settle on its compromise with modernity, decided to close in a rather hasty manner the eschatological door that leads to the discussion concerning "last things," or rather, it froze this—if not obsolete, then at least certainly cumbersome—discussion. But as long as the dogma of the resurrection of the flesh persists as an essential part of the Christian faith, this impasse cannot but remain problematic. In the pages that follow we will revive this frozen theological theme and thus examine a problem that is equally inescapable: that of the ethical and political status of corporeal life (the bodies of the resurrected are numerically and materially the same as the ones they had during their earthly existence). This means that the glorious body will serve as a paradigm that will allow us to meditate on the figures, and the possible uses, of the human body as such.

2. The first problem that theologians have to confront is the identity of the resurrected body. Supposing that the soul will have to take on the same body once again, how then can its identity and integrity be defined? A preliminary question involves the

## Chapter 3

1. Franz Kafka, *The Trial*, trans. B. Mitchell (New York: Schocken, 1998), 3.
2. Davide Stimilli, "Kafka's Shorthand," a conference paper delivered at the Warburg Institute in London, May 20, 2006.
3. Kafka, *The Trial*, 14: "I can't report that you've been accused of anything, or more accurately, I don't know if you have."
4. *Ibid.*, 224.
5. Franz Kafka, *The Great Wall of China and Other Pieces*, trans. W. Muir and E. Muir (London: M. Secker, 1933), 245–46.
6. Kafka, *The Trial*, 213.
7. *Ibid.*, 94.
8. Franz Kafka, *The Castle*, trans. M. Harman (New York: Schocken, 1998), 252.
9. Kafka, *The Trial*, 106.
10. Franz Kafka, *Dearest Father: Stories and Other Writings*, trans. E. Kaiser and E. Wilkins (New York: Schocken, 1954), 308.
11. Franz Kafka, *Letters to Milena*, trans. P. Boehm (New York: Schocken, 1990), 214–15.
12. *Ibid.*, 201.
13. *Ibid.*, 198.
14. Franz Kafka, *The Complete Stories*, ed. N. Glatzer (New York: Schocken, 1988), 156.
15. *Ibid.*, 150.
16. *Ibid.*, 145.
17. *Ibid.*, 165.
18. Kafka, *The Trial*, 226.
19. *Ibid.*, 230.
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*, 213.
22. Kafka, *Dearest Father*, 87.
23. Kafka, *The Trial*, 215.
24. *Ibid.*, 215, 217.
25. *Ibid.*, 216.
26. Hyginus Gromaticus, "De limitibus constituendis," in *Die Schriften der römischen Feldmesser*, vol. 1, ed. F. Blume, K. Lachmann, and A. Rudorff (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1848), 166.
27. Kafka, *The Castle*, 8.
28. *Ibid.*, 4.

29. Franz Kafka, *The Diaries of Franz Kafka*, vol. 2, ed. M. Brod (New York: Schocken, 1949), 202.
30. *Ibid.*, 202–3.
31. *Ibid.*, 218–19.
32. Kafka, *The Castle*, 59: "The boundaries of our small holdings have been marked out, everything has been duly registered."
33. Isidore of Seville, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, ed. S. A. Barney and W. J. Lewis (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 311.
34. *Ibid.*
35. *Ibid.*, 172.

## Chapter 4

1. Manfredo Tafuri, "Le forme del tempo: Venezia e la modernità," in *Università IUAV di Venezia, Inaugurazioni accademiche, 1991–2006* (Venice: IUAV, 2006).
2. Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, trans. H. V. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 358.

## Chapter 5

1. Translators' note: We follow here Daniel Heller-Roazen's more precise but less natural renditions of *potenza* as "potentiality" and *impotenza* as "impotentiality," though it is helpful to bear in mind the simpler notions of "power" and "powerlessness."

## Chapter 6

1. Epictetus, *The Handbook*, trans. N. P. White (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983), 16.
2. Epictetus, *The Discourses*, trans. R. Dobbin (London: Penguin, 2008), 72.
3. Translators' note: Although Daniel Heller-Roazen's rendering of *nuda vita* as "bare life" is certainly warrantable, we translate it hereafter as "naked life" for reasons that the next chapter will make clear.

## Chapter 7

1. Erik Peterson, "Theology of Clothes," *Selection*, vol. 2, ed. C. Hastings and D. Nicholl (London: Sheed and Ward, 1954), 54–55.



2. Ibid., 56.
3. Ibid., 55.
4. Ibid., 57–58.
5. Saint Jerome, Epistle 64.19; see Jonathan Z. Smith, “The Garments of Shame,” in *Map Is Not Territory* (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 17.
6. Saint Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans*, ed. R. W. Dyson (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 615.
7. 2 Timothy 1:9; Saint Augustine, *Christian Instruction*, in *The Fathers of the Church: Augustine*, vol. 4, trans. J. J. Gavigan (New York: CIMA, 1947), 159.
8. Peterson, “Theology of Clothes,” 56–57.
9. “The grace of God is nothing at all except our own nature with free will” (Saint Augustine, *Four Anti-Pelagian Writings*, trans. J. A. Mourant and W. J. Collinge [Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1992], 154).
10. Saint Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans*, 615.
11. Ibid., 617.
12. Ibid., 624–26.
13. Ibid., 626–27.
14. Ibid., 629.
15. *The Gospel According to Thomas*, trans. A. Guillaumont et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 23.
16. Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, “Mystagogical Lectures,” in *The Works of Saint Cyril of Jerusalem*, vol. 2, trans. L. P. McCauley and A. A. Stephenson (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1970), 161–62.
17. Theodore of Mopsuestia; quoted in Smith, “The Garments of Shame,” 19.
18. Quoted in Smith, “The Garments of Shame,” 17.
19. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology*, trans. H. E. Barnes (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 506.
20. Ibid., 519.
21. Ibid., 520.
22. Ibid., 519–20.
23. Ibid., 525.
24. *Pentateuch with Rashi's Commentary: Genesis*, ed. A. M. Silbermann (Jerusalem: Routledge, 1973), 13.
25. Saint Augustine, “The Literal Meaning of Genesis,” in *On Genesis*, trans. E. Hill (New York: New City Press, 2002), 396–97.

26. Avicenna, *Liber de anima, seu, Sextus de naturalibus*, vol. 1, ed. S. van Riet (Louvain: Peeters, 1972), 94–95.
27. Meister Eckhart, *Die deutschen und lateinischen Werke: Die lateinischen Werke*, vol. 3 (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1994), 425–26 (Latin Sermon 49).
28. See Vladimir Lossky, *Théologie négative et connaissance de Dieu chez Maître Eckhart* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1973), 117n73.
29. Walter Benjamin, “Goethe's Elective Affinities,” in *Selected Writings*, vol. 1, ed. M. Bullock and M. W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 351.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid., 353.
32. Ibid., 355.
33. Walter Benjamin, “May-June 1931,” *Selected Writings*, vol. 2, part 2, ed. M. W. Jennings, H. Eiland, and G. Smith (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 480.
34. Honorius Augustodunensis, *Clavis Physicae*, ed. P. Lucentini (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1974), illustration 1.
35. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Maxims and Reflections*, trans. E. Stopp (London: Penguin, 1998), 29.

### Chapter 8

1. Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 5 vols. (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1981), 5:2887.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., 2897.
4. Ibid., 2899.
5. Ibid., 2906.
6. Ibid., 2907.
7. Ibid., 2891–92.
8. Ibid., 2882.
9. Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Das Ideal des Kaputten* (Bremen: Wassmann, 1990).
10. Vitus de Broglie, *De fine ultimo humanae vitae* (Paris: Beauchesne et ses fils, 1948), 285.
11. Ibid., 293–94.