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## Re-thinking Pornography: Sontag's retrieval of a post-religious Hegel

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**Abstract:** When Susan Sontag addresses the problem of pornography and relates it to Hegel, she is not merely describing a path in European philosophy aimed to construct a new language, but she is also committing this aim to the importance of re-reading culture. The fashion in which pornography describes reality is meaningful when we are trying to approach Hegel in his aim to construct a post-religious language that finally will make ready-to-hand life as life. Politics, and society, being two essential elements to understand reality, become singularly interesting when analyzed through the gaze of Sontag in combination of Hegel's philosophy. The conservative morals that reign over what we understand as pornography, and the cultural moment of Europe since the most progressive moments of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, describe a fatalist landscape for the future of society and politics. Yet, the learnings from Hegel remain meaningful. In this paper I examine how a post-religious philosophy, aimed long ago by Hegel's contribution to philosophy, can serve to the understanding of a post-pornographic society: a society that is able to learn from the contributions of Frankfurt's school with regards to an efficient cultural tissue, and defeat the old religious morals that are inserted in the backbone of politics and philosophy still today.

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## 1. A return to Hegel via Susan Sontag

Susan Sontag, in her interesting piece “The Pornographic Imagination” (1962), makes a surprising reference to Hegel:

Hegel made perhaps the grandest attempt to create a post-religious vocabulary, out of philosophy, that would command the treasures of passion and credibility and emotive appropriateness that were gathered into the religious vocabulary. But his most interesting followers steadily undermined the abstract meta-religious language in which he had bequeathed his thought, and concentrated instead on the specific social and practical failure lies like a gigantic disturbing hulk across the intellectual landscape. And no one has been big enough, pompous enough, or energetic enough since Hegel to attempt the task again. (Sontag 1962, 231)

By quoting Hegel, even in a light manner, in a piece dedicated to discussing pornography and literature is at least rare, if not really revealing. How are Hegel and pornography related?

The main idea for us is that Hegel gave to philosophy a peculiar sense, a new radical language. Hegel revolutionized philosophy in a manner that maybe only Nietzsche did before, in an even more radical fashion than Nietzsche. Hegel rescued philosophical language that was kidnapped by the academics at the time, and gave it to the people. As Hegel said in the beginning of the *Differenzschrift* (Hegel 1801), it was about gathering philosophy again (which was completely lost in abstract discussions) and life (which had lost its connection with philosophy). Hegel’s movement, in this sense, is literally revolutionary. Following Hegel, natural consciousness is progressively going to be transformed, throughout phenomenological transition, into inverted consciousness—unhappy, ethical, moral, religious—until the arrival into a promised land that Hegel names as absolute consciousness, and from it is derived a completely new life, post-religious, even post-philosophical, which Hegel calls *logic*.

This rescues again the idea of bringing *life* to the center of attention, to recover the concrete *life* of human beings as the central object of philosophy. *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (1807) is the guide for this path of *natural consciousness* to the real philosophy, to life itself.

In another part of the same book on pornography, Sontag discusses the movement made by Sartre on Genet in the book “Saint Genet, Comédian et Martyr” (1952). Sontag insists that how Sartre understands Genet as a Hegelian that goes through the fundamental figures that later Hegel will discover in his *Phänomenologie* in a radical effort of self-realization. Genet, in his daily routine and in his personal life (which refers to the same activity), follows a certain uncanniness of a reason that guides him, one of the same kind that guided Ulysses to Ithaca. The same thing happens to Derrida’s Genet in “Glas” (Derrida, 1974). The fact that Derrida posits Genet, page after page, in a frontal confrontation with Hegel, should force us to repeat and rethink the Sartrean exercise, even from a different aspect.

The second lesson that we extract from Sontag’s reference is that not even the followers of Hegel have been able to understand the radicalness of Hegel’s thought. After Hegel passed away, his work decayed into a vague and equalizing historicism. This very idea of the incapacity of Hegel’s followers to understand his mentor has been mentioned by many authors, such as Gadamer, who would say that “we have to read Hegel literary [*buchstabieren*] again, that is to say, without prejudices” (Gadamer 1980). Adorno would claim in the same direction that “whoever that has the task to understand Hegel finds himself alone, the gigantic literature about the philosopher is useless” (Adorno 1971); or Žižek who will say that “we need to reformulate the theoretical basis of philosophy” (Žižek 2012). The fact that Hegel remained so difficult to understand, it is not a problem for Hegel, but for us; it is not necessary to write Hegel again to understand it today, but more about learning how to read him. We remain orphans philosophically because we have killed the father—someone called him a “dead dog”—but we have not been able to take advantage of his inheritance.

Hegel is much more than just another philosopher. Paraphrasing Adorno, we can affirm that in the same way that Beethoven was all of music—all the history of music—Hegel was therefore all of philosophy. Hegel digests all of Europe’s cultural legacy and opens a new dimension, a new cultural horizon without any turning point. After him, one only can depart

from him. He “realizes” philosophy. Hegel is a philosopher that attempted to elevate (or lower) the philosophical language—trapped within the religious imaginary—“explaining” its content. History punished him with the obliteration of his figure. However, the denial of the truth forces the human beings to repeat what it was long considered overcome. This likewise is the reason we cannot understand Marx: he is only understandable from Hegel. So when some uselessly pretend that Marx had overcome Hegel, we could simply forget Hegel.

## 2. Re-reading Hegel

Nevertheless, what is the goal of a *postreligious* language? What Hegel taught us is to read History, to ask ourselves about the meaning of history, even before Nietzsche. Hegel illustrated how fundamentally re-read Greek philosophers, the Greek tragedy, but also to revisit Plato and Aristoteles. Accordingly, Hegel opened the possibility to re-read modern and medieval History, which traditionally underpinned a strong and subsumed religious face, which no author before him had been able to unearth the deepest sections of this layer. Hegel has showed us that it is possible and necessary to search for a new language that is able to express obscure contents and boil them down to what they really are: moments of life itself. Hegel found the optimal language to return the religious contents to its origins, which are life itself. And, in the same direction, he found the key to mimicking this process with other contents, in the arts, in politics, sciences—and pornographic as well. What is valid for other central contents, is likewise valid for pornography and life. Hegel’s most important lesson makes us realize that it is religion what is at life’s service and not vice versa. The same thing happens to science: the big crisis of the sciences of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, which will be later announced by Husserl, was already anticipated by Hegel. However, it is religion what is located in conflict with the natural space of life at the time Hegel is writing his work. In this sense, Hegel elaborates a post-religious language, that is able to relocate life in the position it naturally deserves, and thus is accordingly announced in the beginning of his *Differenzschrift*. After this, his job will consist in developing a new language that will be implicit in a subsequent philosophical system. This is the main task Hegel will ultimately complete during what is called his Jena period.

In this direction, what Hegel inherits as a philosophical task is the development of the basic idea that philosophy is at service of life. Despite the differences, the fundamental

movement that we find in Sartre, Derrida, or Sontag is always the same: the search for a language to talk about contents that, in another way, are left behind in hands of fake merchants that are able to exploit them shamelessly, that is to say, even against life itself. And in this fraudulent use of the real contents of life we can find individuals moved by religious or capitalist interests. It is necessary, therefore, to unmask their hidden interests and bring back pornography to the scenario it deserves, which is life itself.

In sum, Hegel was able to developed a language that expresses a rich religious imaginary—so rich in metaphors, innuendos and propositions—without subsuming it to religious ends. The baroque traditions come directly from European culture, as Benjamin taught us, and is an imaginary full of life, full of human motives, a rich world full of passion, forms, chromatic diversity, a world that is worth saving for the moment the Messiah returns to judge us. We need an adequate language for that world. For example, El Bosco in his *Garden of Earthly Delights* (1490-1510) did find a pictorial language to express that obscure world (Figure 1). In the center of three panels, there is a placid world where individuals enjoy, without any concern, the pleasures that life offers them. Hell is present evidently, since the painting is strongly charged with the imaginary of its historical period.



Figure 1. El Bosco “The Garden of Earthly Delights” (1490-1510)

The word became flesh with Hegel—and later with Freud, we might add. Hegel could be the Promethean figure that stole the divine fire and gave it (back?) to human beings. From the religious imaginary, European culture blooms especially in medieval times, and became a human standard. This is the reason why History appears in the first and third panel of painting. History determines the development of life. The rise (bloom) and end (death) become from then on the extremes where life is going to develop, the central panel of El Bosco's painting.

### 3. The Post-Religious Hegel

Sontag, coming back to her quote on pornographic imagination, correctly says that Hegel began “perhaps the grandest attempt to create a post-religious vocabulary.” This sentence makes clearest sense if we locate it within Fichte's philosophy, more concretely, the later Fichte. During this period, Fichte addresses his thought to “life” in a religious sense. This happens around 1800 and especially from 1810 to 1814, when Fichte dies. Fichte tries to deepen into his own philosophy, focusing on the theological message of John the Evangelist, who Fichte identified as the figure with the purest Christian expression coincident with his own deepest philosophical speculation. According to José Manzana, Fichte was likely trying to find a summarizing element of his own former philosophical positions, a clear and unequivocal center, not reached before, from which a simple and uniquely totalizing glimpse could dominate his philosophical inquiry, of the scientific doctrine: “One has the impression that in the latest communications of the Doctrine of Science one can reach a supreme position within the speculative dynamism that ascends and quiets down strongly and dominates ‘from above’ all the subjective and material moments of human existence” (author's translation, Manzana 2018).<sup>1</sup> The fact that is “love” becomes the last hinge element of philosophical closure opens the window for a post-Kantian philosophical perspective unknown before this moment, the possibility for a completely new approach.

Hegel will follow a different path, since he declares his separation from Fichte already in his first published work, *Differenzschrift*. Hegel is searching a new path for philosophy, which

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<sup>1</sup> “Se tiene la impresión de que en las últimas exposiciones de la Doctrina de la Ciencia se alcanza una posición suprema en que el dinamismo de la energía especulativa ascensional se remansa soberanamente y domina `desde arriba` todos los momentos subjetivos y materiales de la existencia humana”.

will take him in Jena to the *Phänomenologie des Geistes*. With his contribution Hegel wants to overcome all the previous philosophical positions, including Fichte's and Schelling's.

We could state that whilst Fichte was trapped in a religious language, Hegel goes beyond this language. Hegel, after a long and intense effort, is going to find during latest years of Jena period his own path. For that, he will develop an own logic, which is the basis of his own philosophical project. This new philosophy will be absolute. This will include all the different philosophical areas, including the religious one, which will remain anchored to the system Hegel designs. Therefore, Hegel's will be a strictly post-religious philosophy, and we could add that it will be also a post-pornographic philosophy. Maybe, the real problem, as Sontag insinuates, is that we have not reached Hegel yet.

#### **4. Sontag on Pornography**

According to Siri Hustvedt, Susan Sontag defines pornography in a non-conventional manner: "She emphasizes that her adjective 'classical' for pornography is something of a joke and that her definition of porn is unconventional: *as a literary form it must embody the idea that lustful acts are inherently immoral*" (Hustvedt 2014). Sontag warns us about the proximity between the religious and pornographic spheres when she affirms that when using as bibliographical references a series of literary works (Sade, Bataille, *Historie d'O*, among others) there is a fundamental element that is related to pornography according to her, which is death. Death, Sontag states, is the essence of pornography. What pornography tries to elucidate and understand is death itself, search for it, experience it and make it its own end:

One reason that *Historie de l'oeil* and *Madame Edwarda* make such a strong unsettling impression is that Bataille understood more clearly than any other writer I know of that what pornography is really about, ultimately isn't sex but death. I am not suggesting that every pornographic work speaks either overtly or covertly, of death. Only works dealing with that specific and sharpest inflection of the themes of lust, 'the obscene', do. It's toward the gratifications of death, succeeding and surpassing those of Eros, that every truly obscene quest tends," (Sontag 1962, 224)

Death presents itself as something substantial in pornography. Why is that? The pornographic element includes a degree of negation, of the dissolution of the subject, a death drive that is substantial to the human being, as Freud made it clear. This fatal attraction is necessary in order to articulate in a dialectical fashion the double sense of life. “Historie d’O” presents a woman that gives herself away “simultaneously as a human being and as a sexualized fulfilled being” (author’s translation).<sup>2</sup> In this book we can read how “both this flogging and the chain—which when attached to the ring of your collar keeps you more or less closely confined to your bed several hours a day—are intended less to make you suffer, scream, or shed tears than to make you feel, through this suffering, that you are not free but fettered, and to teach you that you are totally dedicated to something outside yourself” (Réage, 2013). What is he talking about when he mentions this “something outside yourself” that is crucial to become fully a sexual being? In an interview published in *Die Zeit* in 1976 Sontag explains this very contradiction in *Story of O* in the following terms:

My interest in this book was based and is based yet in the candor at the time of dealing with the diabolic part of the sexual fantasy. The terrible unconditionality of the fantasy that the book tackles the question (and which never betrays), cannot be encompassed with the optimistic and rational way of thinking that dominates feminism. The utopic thought of pornography points out to a negative utopia, as it does the majority of science-fiction literature” (author’s translation)<sup>3</sup>. And right after this critique both to the rationalist hegemonic optimism and to, in Sontag’s opinion, feminism, she continues saying that “as it presents itself the sexual pulsion seems to have something defective or frustrating. It seems to me that the full development of our sexual essence does not get along with the full development of our consciousness. Instead of supposing that all our sexual uneasiness is a part of the price that the sexual culture demands, it is probably easier to depart from the idea that we are naturally sick and that precisely our

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<sup>2</sup> “gleichzeitig auf ihre Auslöschung als menschliches Wesen und ihre Erfüllung als geschlechtliches Wesen”.

<sup>3</sup> “Mein Interesse an dem Buch beruhte und beruht noch immer auf dem Freimut, mit dem es sich der dämonischen Seite der sexuellen Phantasie annimmt. Die grausame Unbedingtheit der Phantasie, für die es Partei nimmt (und die es keineswegs beklagt), ist mit der optimistischen und rationalistischen Denkweise nicht zu vereinbaren, die im Feminismus vorherrscht. Das utopische Denken der Pornographie ist auf eine negative Utopie aus, wie die meiste Science-fiction-Literatur”



animal status, as Nietzsche called it, is what makes us animals that produce culture. This innate contradiction between sexual fulfillment and individual consciousness became more serious with the fact that in the modern universal culture sexuality plays a bigger role.” (author’s translation)<sup>4</sup>

In sum, Sontag understands that there is an unbearable contradiction (by nature) that makes “wild animals” out of human beings.

Western culture ultimately had the desire to operate within the rational, theoretical, abstract, triumphalist dimensions, leaving behind a powerful level of human potentiality, and this takes us to Adorno’s and Horkheimer’s dialectics. The key is to articulate both extremes of these dialectics: life and death. And it is precisely at this point that Western culture has failed. Ernst Bloch (Bloch 1949) talked about a leftist Aristotelian current in the beginning of the Western philosophy that was cornered by another current that appears and disappears like a hide-and-seek game (with authors like Maimonides, Averroes, Spinoza, or Hegel himself). Against a triumphalist philosophy we can find these other currents that affirm the stain of consciousness. After all, Freud will remark that it is this repressed side that is most fundamental, most basic, most primal. The former will be the secondary one, the one that creates the repressed one.

## **5. Sartre, Genet and the Discontent of Culture**

We can affirm that Jean-Paul Sartre and Jacques Derrida, along with Jean Genet, return to the most carnal Hegel, the most material and real one of the possible worlds. Sartre, in “Saint Genet, Comedian and Martyr” (1952) develops this approach, and Derrida does a similar thing in “Glas” (1974).

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<sup>4</sup> “Wie sich der Geschlechtstrieb im Menschen auswirkt, scheint mir etwas von Grund auf Fehlerhaftes oder Frustrierendes an sich zu haben. Es scheint, daß sich die volle Entwicklung unseres sexuellen Wesens nicht mit der vollen Entwicklung unseres Bewußtseins verträgt. Anstatt anzunehmen, daß alle unsere sexuelle Unzufriedenheit ein Teil des Preises dafür ist, den die Kultur der Sexualität abverlangt, ist es vielleicht richtiger, davon auszugehen, daß wir zunächst von Natur aus krank sind – und daß unser Status als "kranke Tiere", wie Nietzsche es nannte, uns erst zu Tieren macht, die die Kultur hervorbringen. Dieser angeborene Widerspruch zwischen sexueller Erfüllung und individuellem Bewußtsein wird noch dadurch verschlimmert, daß in der modernen, verweltlichten Kultur die Sexualität eine größere Rolle spielt”.

In this direction, Sartre envisions in Genet a mystic hero, who celebrates the Eucharist of the mystery of the world, nature, and human redemption. For Sartre, Genet is the actual Christ. Genet's suffering is the suffering of someone that does not achieve the desired perfection, the one that holds all the world's pain and who wants to redeem it. Genet, in Sartre's words, is a martyr of his time that tries to redeem himself with his own sacrifice, with his unconditional immolation. Sartre walks a parallel path with Hegel's *Phänomenologie* and Genet's discourse on life. Along with his extended bibliography in several topics, Sartre somehow is able to incorporate Genet to the Western philosophy. And with this movement also tries to save philosophy itself, making it a partner in crime of Genet's life. Sartre, who took some courses on Hegel by Alexandre Kojève, reads Genet throughout the figures that Hegel describes in his *Phänomenologie*, which are summarized as the turning points of Western History. What is the uncanniness of Sartre? Where do Hegel and Genet meet each other?

Genet, for Sartre, is the absolute artist, greater even than Baudelaire, to whom Sartre dedicated one of his works years before, which at the same time can be considered the direct predecessor of the one dedicated to Genet. The difference between both is clear for Sartre: Genet, contrary to Baudelaire, is at the very center of European culture, which he redeems and makes "flesh" out of it. The word becomes "flesh" in Genet's life and works. Sartre and Genet were good friends (at least until Sartre wrote this book on him). This fact makes much more direct, almost obscene, the relationship between the two. Sartre seems to adventure himself in Genet's world, and melt his being into this reality that Genet builds up. Sartre somehow whispers something like "this character embodies my philosophy" when he is talking about Genet. Sartre explains and develops and creates philosophically what is in the backstage of Genet's literary universe. And it is at this point that Sartre encounters the figures present in the *Phänomenologie des Geistes*. Genet is not resolved as a marginal figure but as a central figure in European culture. It is not Sartre's task to redeem Genet, but to the contrary: Genet shows us the path, Genet can redeem us because his word is not empty, it is not settled within the Western academic comfort zone. Genet took the risk and has learnt in the process. Genet has made his life his intellectual production. There is no distance between his life and his intellectual contribution. Genet's word is flesh now.

With the introduction of Genet, Sartre tries to amend his own philosophy, give a more materialist and carnal content to it. Genet, for Sartre, is crude life in its helplessness. Genet is a body in flesh, a body exposed to its environment, a body that rejects the academic absence of risk and its classist syndrome. Again, there is no distance between his life and his own intellectual oeuvre. This is the reason for Sartre to put Genet in the beginning of a new philosophical advent, derived from the crisis that existentialism will endure, since Sartre understands his dialectic as a radicalization of his own existentialism, as an overcoming [*Aufhebung*] of it.

Sartre becomes himself Genet when he writes “Saint Genet.” Genet is the mirror where his image becomes an unruly writer that does not make any concessions to the reader. Brutality is a characteristic that is obvious to everyone, but in Sartre it is a brutality that identifies itself with life. It deals with a titanic effort of sincerity, which leaves the pornographic nudity of reality accessible to everybody, without any remorse, without any reserve. Therefore, Sartre’s text on Genet opens the possibility to a reconciliation with an obscure level of life, with death itself, with nature, and it celebrates its orphic mysteries. God becomes a man and dwells among us is the message, laic from now on, the very theological message of Apostle John that was appropriated by Fichte, without being capable of avoiding the religious imaginary that Hegel was able to disclose. For Hegel the substance is the subject, and it is in this fashion that it is given the carnal life to it. The “absolute spirit” in Hegel is no more than reality made (living) life reality, concrete, which makes time its own time, which makes out of life its own life -which makes out of abstract universal its own concrete universal-. It is indeed the immanence of life, as Deleuze would have put it, although Deleuze in a Hegelian manner brought it against Hegel. But the immanent transcends, not the enclosed immanence. It is this language, the one that rescues the religious level for life itself, and therefore transcends what is religious as something that is beyond the not-religious, that goes beyond what he called the “unhappy consciousness,” making a genealogy of itself, searching for its limits. Only in this manner what is finite and infinite become one, unique: life itself.

Following this argument, Sontag articulates a radical critique of American culture, in the direction both Adorno and Horkheimer did. Puritan morals make difficult, but urgent, the need to

face this critique. Sontag points out to two essential authors: Marcuse and his *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (1955 and 1966); and more notoriously Norman O. Brown and his *Life against Death* (1959). What connect these two authors is their critique of revisionist tendencies in interpreting psychoanalysis, and their materialist interpretation of Freud.

What Freud will highlight is the importance of the body. We need to focus on the body and its work, something that pornography does all the time. Moreover, these two authors recall the political dimension of Freud's perspective. Psychoanalytic categories, therefore, are political categories: "The truth is that love is more sexual, more bodily than even Lawrence imagined. And the revolutionary implications of sexuality in contemporary society are far from being fully understood" (Sontag 2013, 178). For Sontag, psychoanalysis in the manner that is practiced in America, is something "understood as anti-Utopian and anti-political—a desperate, but fundamentally pessimistic, attempt to safeguard the individual against the oppressive but inevitable claims of society" (Sontag 2013, 179). In the previously mentioned interview in *Die Zeit* Sontag affirms that "the fanciful representation of a sexual apocalypses is widely extended. It is without hesitation a way to elevate sexual desire. And this convenes us on the inhuman nature of the intensive desire that is ignored by the Freudian humanist and revisionist school, which minimizes the unleashed forces of the unconscious or irrational feelings, and that the vast majority of feminists cope with" (author's translation)<sup>5</sup>. American intellectuals defend themselves against psychoanalysis in the same manner they used to avoid Marxism. Both psychoanalysis and Marxism, are crucial ingredients for any critical intellectual program. Psychoanalysis cannot be reduced to a method to treat neurosis and personal dissatisfactions, but instead as a plan to transform society in a radical way that causes these neurosis. "We are just bodies" says Brown (Brown 1985, 93). This means that neurosis consists in an incapability of the body, and in a sexual fashion indeed. Everybody will admit now that Freud maintained an ambivalent position towards society and culture, which has evolved into some conservative and revisionist positions in some of his followers. But it is clear too that Freud had talked about

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<sup>5</sup> "Die Phantasievorstellung einer sexuellen Apokalypse ist jedoch weit verbreitet – zweifellos ist sie ein Mittel zur Steigerung der sexuellen Lust. Und was uns das über den sozusagen inhumanen Charakter intensiver Lust mitteilt, wird von dem humanistischen "revisionistischen" Freudianismus ignoriert, der die unbändigen Kräfte der unbewußten oder irrationalen Gefühle minimalisiert und mit dem sich die meisten Feministinnen zufrieden geben".

“love,” but he clearly talked about “sexuality,” which is pointing out to the body always already, to its drives, to the material factor of these obscure forces.

Sontag does not hesitate to contrast this tendency she criticizes in American scholars with the one maintained in France. As we have pointed out above, her main intellectual references are French as well. We could affirm that France has been the real successor in the critical program inaugurated in Germany with Benjamin, Marcuse, Adorno, and Horkheimer among others. Nowadays we find that Deleuze, Badiou, or Derrida are the heirs somehow of the Frankfurt School (including of course Sartre, Beauvoir, Lacan and Althusser, who opened this new path or paradigm). Meanwhile in Spain, culture traditionally has been controlled and manipulated by the Catholic Church for centuries, closing any possibility for any “noxious” influence coming fundamentally from France. Starting with the *Reyes Católicos* dynasty, Spain was isolated *manu militari* to any heterodox current that was not coming from the Catholic authority itself. In the same direction, the Spanish Inquisition functioned effectively to stop any disagreement, real or suspicious, with that very authority, which operated inside and outside Spain, mainly in the colonies that were recently “discovered.” This regime has endured till our days (with the significant exception of the two Republic regimes in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century). A good example of this can be some of the Goya’s paintings, and one of the most known daguerreotypes *La Lucha de los Mamelucos* (1814) which represents the war against the French, or also against modernization of the entire country. We can affirm that it is the *Generación del ’98*—the first generation of intellectuals—that tried to elevate Spanish culture to a European level. In this process they had to face, among others, the neocatholics and also the liberals (mainly Krausism) in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Miguel de Unamuno and José Ortega y Gasset were key figures in this attempt to modernize Spain. However, the coming of Franco’s fascist regime was a total scolding for this movement. Meantime, Europe (mainly France and Germany, each of them trying their own formulas) kept in their advance, and Spain remained trapped in its own arrogant ignorance. Immanuel Kant, in his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798) referring to Spanish man writes, “He does not learn from foreigners; does not travel in order to get to know other peoples; g remains centuries behind in the sciences; resists any reform; is proud of not having to work; is of a romantic temperament of spirit, as the bullfight shows; is cruel, as the former *Auto da Fe* proves; and shows in his taste an origin that is partly non-European” (Kant 2006, 218). Franco’s dictatorship restored a strict censorship on pornography that was introduced mainly

from France into Spain. Sexuality only could find then its place in trashy comedies and movies that will understand sex as an object of irony and mocking, and in any case would face it as a serious level of life. Even in contemporary times in Spain there is a residual reluctance towards this topic. Contemporary intellectuals prefer to exploit their well-paid privileges rather than face a profound cultural renewal that the current situation demands. Many of these intellectuals have made a turn into more conservative right-wing positions, showing a lack of capabilities for the elaboration of a critique of culture that would rescue Spain from the pit of ignorance where now raves about.

There is a book that was published in 2016 that has gone unnoticed for a majority of scholars. Ignacio Sánchez-Cuenca is the author, and it is titled *La desfachatez intelectual. Escritores e intelectuales ante la política* [*The Intellectual Impudence. Writers and Intellectuals Facing Politics*]. The author of the book defends what he calls intellectual impudence as a widely extended vice among the Spanish intellectuals. These intellectuals—writers and educated men, some of them recognized scholars—have come to light in the country’s political debates, but with superficial and frivolous ideas, and they presented them in a presumptuous and insulting manner. Most of them defined themselves as left-wing thinkers in their youth, and they have developed more conservative (even reactionary) ideas later in their lives. This book provides with numerous examples of this phenomenon. According to it, the principal topics of the national-level debate (such as nationalism as such, terrorism, etc.) are considered by these people with minimal critical perspective, and baseless arguments, both from the point of view of the argumentative logic or the facts themselves, as the author rightly explains. Following the argumentation of the book, in the end what is missing in Spain is a culture of critique, a culture that is able to face with authority the impudence of the intellectuals mentioned above that dare to throw their last occurrence in the profitable newspapers columns or television debates. This conforms a democratic deficit that is the cradle for contemporary sophists. Among others, the names that are mentioned in the book are Fernando Savater, Jon Juaristi, Félix de Azúa, Antonio Muñoz Molina, etc.. What is surprising is that all of them are experts in French culture but they do not seem to be ready to transmit it in Spain.

## 6. Conclusions

In his *Studies on Hysteria* (1895) Freud and Breuer find the keys to accessing the deepest levels of human consciousness. The crucial element is always language. Neither hypnosis nor any other method is valid for the subject to find *das ding* [the thing]. However, the key cannot be any given language. According to their studies, it is crucial for the subject to adopt a language that will permit her to re-build the gap between the language itself and *das ding*. Once this bridge is established, and although might be eventually destroyed, it is possible to have access to the “truth” of the problem. Once the patient is able to articulate within this language what is disturbing, the problem vanishes, and the “truth” is reinstalled. This process has mainly two general consequences. First, that philosophy at the current historical period has lost its capacity to establish this connection with *das ding* and that it is philosophy’s task to rebuild this link. Second, that psychoanalysis in the 21<sup>st</sup> century can return philosophy its original identity, since we can articulate in psychoanalysis what philosophy is not able to complete.

The strength of language is the only possibility we have to reach the essence of human soul. In this direction, we can recall the infamous words of Lacan who at some point will affirm that “For the moment, I am not fucking, I am talking to you. Well! I can have exactly the same satisfaction as if I were fucking. That’s what it means. Indeed, it raises the question of whether in fact I am not fucking at this moment.” (Lacan 1978, 165-166). In short, psychoanalysis from the very beginning discloses the task as work that needs to happen in language itself, that is to say, as a necessarily philosophical path. But this is a path that in return will demand as a critical work the restitution and recovery of a language that will open the door to the real problems of the subject, that is to say, the world.

When Sontag evokes the post-religious Hegel (the post-pornographic one for us) she is evoking the power of language that is able to go through the superficial layer of the empiric level and reach to the heart of what is beyond it. The languages that Sontag refers to—Sade, Bataille, Sartre, Genet among others—are forms that break the surface in order to descend into the abysmal levels of the subject. In this direction, psychoanalysis an optimal ally to achieve this task successfully.

As post-pornographic we understand a language that is able to submerge into the social contradictions that bloom after the superficial and popular contents and pornographic methods that are so successful in our (Western) society. Therefore, this language has a significant political content because it is coined in the very heart of the pornographic society, unmasking the hypocrisy that manipulates and intoxicates the subject nowadays. For that, we need to look into the eyes, as Susan Sontag proposes, to the mentioned contents and do not avoid them as morally disturbing. This position, the one that reflects these contents, and which is popular in some puritan intellectual circles, is rightly criticized by Sontag in several articles and in her book *Against Interpretation* (1966).

Beyond a conservative and bourgeois space that imposes a unique scenario with a cynical moral—pornography itself is after all morally reprehensible but also very profitable—it is necessary to construct new scenarios: it is necessary to find new languages that will open new possibilities that will remain emancipatory with regards to the subjects trapped in uncomfortable jails, already unbearable by the pain they provoke. But this is the real task. It is, therefore, to rethink pornography again. Here philosophy, psychoanalysis, art, and politics meet in the search for an emancipated society. For that, it is necessary to elaborate a common program of action that will trespass the local burdens of each discipline.

Adorno's and Horkheimer's program on critical theory points out in this direction. Marcuse, in this sense, is a solid ally for these purposes. The best of contemporary French philosophy (resembled in authors like Lacan, Badiou, Deleuze and others) is unthinkable without the former. These French authors are the real heirs of the theories of the Frankfurt School. Accordingly, yet others actually work out their positions taking up this line, with Žižek or Butler, as just the most notorious ones. These authors elaborate with Ernesto Laclau a program that pretended to mark a new beginning in the year 2000 with a work named *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*. However, it is necessary to keep working in these ideas in the future.

Žižek rightly claims to reread Hegel. Hegel departs from his *Phänomenologie* how the subject rests in modernity, isolated from the almighty capitalist society that draws it, and Hegel



at this point is showing the path for this subject to build up the “We”. Kant already states that only the critical path is practicable. Hegel will radicalize Kant’s intuition, and take it to its latest consequences. The only practicable path, paraphrasing Kant, is the one that goes from the “I” to the “We”. And this notion of “We” is anchored unconditionally to what we share in common, in our society and in politics.

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