FROM NIETZSCHE TO BAUDRILLARD

FROM NIETZSCHE TO BAUDRILLARD:
SEMIOLOGICAL ABSORPTION
AND SEDUCTIVE ATTUNEMENT

By

SAULIUS GENIUSAS, B.A.

A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies

in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Arts

McMaster University

MASTER OF ARTS (2002) McMaster University
(Philosophy) Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: From Nietzsche to Baudrillard: Semiological Absorption and Seductive Attunement

AUTHOR: Saulius Geniusas, B.A. (Vilnius University)

SUPERVISOR: Professor B. Sassen

NUMBER OF PAGES: viii, 164

Abstract

In contrast to the plethora of sociological interpretations that read Baudrillard's corpus of works through the themes that he analyzed in the late '60s and '70s, this work attempts to re-read Baudrillard through his recent publications. Sociological approaches center on a Marxist critique of capitalism and on the themes of simulation and simulacra. They therefore tend to see Baudrillard's recent work as "unreadable," for the latter does not offer an alternative social position. A philosophical reading of Baudrillard through his latest work does not presuppose that Baudrillard is to offer an alternative social position, hence this reading is capable of questioning the basis of sociological approaches to Baudrillard.

This reading attempts to disclose the themes of simulation and seduction as *a critique of perspectivism* that brings forth *semiological and seductive forms of post-perspectivism*. The uncovering of the grounds of perspectivism goes hand-in-hand with interpreting semiological and fatal strategies not as historical but as *genealogical undertakings*. This approach presupposes a re-placement of Baudrillard's body of works from a Marxist to *a Nietzschean context*. Within this context *fatal strategy is* no longer seen as a reversal of the semiological strategy or a form of *ressentiment* directed at "subjective" strategies, but rather as *a further genealogical "archaeology" of simulacra*. When Baudrillard's recent works are seen as "*raw phenomenology*," they are capable of offering new conceptions of subjectivity, reduction, reference, and meaning. However, a phenomenological reading of fatal strategy calls for the abandonment of the Baudrillardian "wager" that only opposes the appearance of an event to its meaning. Instead of a mere opposition, fatal strategy is to uncover *non-meaning as the fundamental presupposition of meaning*. If this step is taken, fatal strategy is no longer an alternative social position or a reversal of "metaphysics of presence," but rather a form of thinking that comes to terms with the *infinity and anonymity of language*.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To Geraldine who makes the themes of Seduction, Objectivity and Otherness so meaningful and true.

To my parents for showing great interest and support notwithstanding the thousands of miles between us.

To Brigitte Sassen, Gary Madison and Jay Lampert for giving me the freedom to approach these themes independently; for showing interest, encouragement and support in the development of this work; for pointing out ambiguities and for disclosing other contexts within which the same themes lead a different existence; for pointing to other interpretations and for revealing other possibilities of approaching these themes, which definitely enriched this work.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

NIETZSCHE

BGE *Beyond Good and Evil*, R.J. Hollingdale, trans. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973.

D *Daybreak: Thoughts and Prejudices of Morality*, Maudemarie Clark and Brian Leiter, ed. R.J. Hollingdale, trans. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

GM *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale, trans. New York: Vintage Books, 1969.

GS *Gay Science; With an Prelude in Rhyhmes and an Appendix in Songs*. Walter Kaufmann, trans. New York: Vintage Books, 1974.

TL "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense", *The Portable Nietzsche*. Walter Kaufmann, ed. New York: Viking Press, 1954.

WP *The Will To Power*. Walter Kaufmann, trans. New York: Vintage Books, 1968.

BAUDRILLARD

BL *Baudrillard Live: Selected Interviews*. Mike Gane, Ed. London: Routledge, 1993.

EC *The Ecstasy of Communication*. Bernarde and Caroline Schutze, trans. New York: Semiotext(e), 1988.

FC *For A Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*. Charles Levin, trans. St Louis: Telos Press, 1981.

FF *Forget Foucault*. New York: Semiotext(e), 1987.

FS *Fatal Strategies*. Philip Beitchman and W.G.J. Niesluchowski, trans. New York: Semiotext(e), 1990.

GWD *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*. Paul Patton, trans. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995.

IE *Impossible Exchange*. Chris Turner, trans. New York: Verso, 2001.

PWL "Photography, Or the Writing of Light." *Ctheory* A083 (4/12/2000): n. pag. Online. Internet. Francois Debris, trans. 6/13/2002.

RT "Radical Thought." *Ctheory* A025 (4/19/1995): n. pag. Online, Internet. Francois Debris, trans. 6/13/2002.

S *Simulations*. Paul Foss, Paul Patton and Philip Beitchman, trans. New York: Semiotext(e), 1983.

SE *Seduction*. Brian Singer, trans. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990.

SED *Symbolic Exchange and Death*. I.A. Grant, trans. London: Sage Publications, 1993.

SSM *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities*. Paul Foss, John Johnston and Paul Patton, trans. New York: Semiotext(e), 1983.

VI *The Vital Illusion*. Julia Witwer, ed. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000.

TE *The Transparency of Evil*. James Benedict, trans. New York: Verso, 1996.

The man I am proposing is created externally; he is inauthentic in his very essence, for he is never himself and he is defined by a form which comes into being between men. Man is the eternal actor, certainly, but he is also a natural actor, in the sense that his artifice is congenital — this being, indeed, one of his defining human characteristics...To be a man means to be an actor, to be a man means to simulate man, to behave like a man, while not being a man deep down: this sums up humanity...It is not a matter of urging man to cast aside his mask (behind which there is in any case no face), but what one can ask of man is that he should become aware of his artificial state, and confess it.
If I am condemned to artifice...
If it is not given to me to be myself... (Gombrowicz)

INTRODUCTION

We know of many different Baudrillards. One of them is a literary critic whose frequent publications on Calvino, Styron and Uwe Johnson appeared in Sartre's *Le Temps Modernes* in the early '60s. Another one is the Marxist Baudrillard who in the late '60s and the early '70s extended the Marxist critique of capitalism to the areas that lie beyond the scope of the orthodox Marxist analysis of the mode of production. There is also the anti-Marxist Baudrillard who sees his task in locating and taking apart the Marxist prejudices and uncovering the semiological framework that this analysis presupposes. And then, there is the Baudrillard of simulations and simulacra — the Baudrillard who has more affinities with poststructuralists like Foucault and Derrida than with Marx himself. While the Baudrillard of simulations is best known in the English-speaking world, there is also the anti-Foucaultian Baudrillard whose celebrated *Forget Foucault* led to his exclusion from, as Mike Gane has it, "sectors of academic influence under the

increasing patronage of the Professor at the Collège de France" (BL, 1). As well, there is Baudrillard the "fatalist," the Baudrillard of *Seduction* and *Fatal Strategies* — in a sense an "anti-semiological" Baudrillard who searches for that which interrupts the semiological sphere, for that which is most radically opposed to the sphere of simulacra. And there is the metaphysical Baudrillard — the Baudrillard of the late '90s whose task is to uncover, in the form of raw phenomenology, the impossible exchange as the fundamental presupposition of all the systems of exchange. And we should not forget Baudrillard the publicist, whose writings on the Gulf War, on the Balkan war, and most recently on terrorism, as well as an extensive list of polemical articles against the Left, have constantly appeared in popular French journals, pamphlets, and newspapers. Moreover, there is Baudrillard the traveler — the Baudrillard of *America* and *Cool Memories*; Baudrillard the structuralist; Baudrillard the situationist; Baudrillard the phenomenologist; Baudrillard the poet; even Baudrillard the photographer; and definitely, Baudrillard the "new McLuhan."

This plethora of themes, narratives and analyses is accompanied with a no less rich and conflicting critical literature on Baudrillard. We can speak of Baudrillard's legacy in media studies, in philosophy of technology, in theory of communication. However, Baudrillard's influence has been felt most notably in sociology and cultural studies. Douglas Kellner, for instance, places Baudrillard's work within the realm of social criticism and sees it as a form of failure of French ultra-radicalism to bring about significant social change — a failure that is accompanied with a subsequent turn to

apolitical cynicism.[1] Mike Gane, by contrast, places Baudrillard's work on the margin of social analysis: he presents Baudrillard's odyssey as a passage from social criticism to a rich mix of metaphysics, ethics, literature, and poetry, as well as cultural criticism. Cultural analysis, however, plays the most important role in Gane's interpretation of Baudrillard: The "double spiral" — the movement along the two threads of the symbolic and the semiotic — is presented as an alternative between the symbolic and the mass *cultures*.[2] Charles Levin places Baudrillard's work within a Marxist context seeing all of Baudrillard's work as a meditation on Marx's theory of commodity fetishism. This is said to make Baudrillard a critical theorist, although it does not give him a sense of counterpraxis — of an alternative social position .[3] Roy Porter places Baudrillard within the history of capitalism and insists that Baudrillard is best seen as an analyst of the consumer society, as a diagnostic of late capitalism.[4] Chris Rojek approaches even the later works of Baudrillard as representative of a political position, as a manifestation of the radical "politics of the Left." Dean and Juliet MacCannells approach Baudrillard's works as a form of new sociology. Zygmunt Bauman argues that it is a mistake on the part of the critics to approach Baudrillard's universe as an alternative sociology. If the sociological universe is Dionysian, Bauman argues, Baudrillard's is Apollonian. That is

---

[1] See Douglas Kellner, *Jean Baudrillard: From Marxism to Postmodernism and Beyond.*

[2] See Mike Gane, *Baudrillard: Critical and Fatal Theory.*

[3] See Charles Levin, "Baudrillard, Critical Theory and Psychoanalysis".

[4] See Roy Porter, "Baudrillard: History, Hysteria and Consumption".

to say, Baudrillard's work is anti-sociological.[5] This list could be infinitely prolonged.

I am in full agreement with Bauman that Baudrillard's works are anti-sociological. Indeed, the common dissatisfaction with Baudrillard's works among sociologists in the mid-'80s is indebted not to a certain failure on the part of Baudrillard, but rather to a false context in which his critics place his works. Here lies the fundamental weakness of any sociological approach to Baudrillard's corpus of works: While Baudrillard of the '70s places the social sphere within the semiological realm, while he insists that the questions of identity, power, class, fetishism and value are enwrapped in semiological structures, the fundamental issue in his later works is that of what escapes, what interrupts, what transcends the semiological universe most radically. The answer to this question, however, cannot be encountered in the social sphere, for the latter is subsumed by semiological structures. Hence the distinction between simulacra and seduction is fundamentally different from the distinction between the semiological and the symbolic that we encounter in Baudrillard's early works. While the latter distinction is sociological, the former lies beyond sociological reach. It requires a new framework of thought — that framework which Baudrillard entitles "fatal strategy." The Procrustean bed of sociology is too short for Baudrillard's body of works.

The infamous distinction between the Marxist and the anti-Marxist Baudrillard does not stem from Baudrillard's works but rather from his sociological critics. Indeed, the placement of Baudrillard in a sociological context does not even allow for the

---

[5] See Zygmunt Bauman, "The Sweet Scent of Decomposition".

question, "What binds together all these different Baudrillards?" To be sure, to ask this question does not mean avoiding all the detours and dead-ends that we encounter in Baudrillard's works, nor does it mean avoiding the "play of masks" that Baudrillard's style of writing and the themes of his analyses express. As Gane rightly points out, Baudrillard's style of writing is obsessed with signs, styles, and modes in an attempt to challenge and seduce the reader. Baudrillard "wishes...to collect persona, but also to provoke: he is the semiologist, the sociologist, economist, anthropologist..." (*Baudrillard's Bestiary*, 211). To ask the question of unity, of linkage in Baudrillard's work is rather to take this play of masks as well as the numerous dead-ends seriously. It is an attempt to account for the logic that drives Baudrillard's work. This is the question I shall take up in detail in this work.

Along with the numerous strategies and themes that we encounter in Baudrillard's writing — strategies and themes that emerge as a critique and destructuring of the earlier positions to which Baudrillard adhered — we encounter one theme, or one motif, that extends through all of his work. Instead of attempting to capture this theme in a nutshell and hence inevitably fall into a reductive narrative, let me give this motif a metaphorical name: *analog is having a burial and digital is dancing on its grave.*

Consider the following story:

> "It will be a surreal burial. The Bettmann archive, the quirky cache of pictures that Otto Bettmann sneaked out of Nazi Germany in two steamer trunks in 1935 and then built into an enormous collection of historical importance, will be sunk 220 feet down in a limestone mine situated 60 miles northeast of Pittsburgh, where it will be far from the reach of historians. The archive, which is estimated to have as many as 17 million photographs, is a visual record of the 20th century. Since 1995

> it has belonged to Corbis, the private company of Microsoft's chairman, William H. Gates.
>
> The Bettmann archive is moving from New York City to a strange underworld. Corbis plans to rent 10,000 square feet in a mine that once belonged to U.S. Steel and now holds a vast underground city run by Iron Mountain/National Underground Storage. There Corbis will create modern, subzero, low-humidity storage areas safe from earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes, vandals, nuclear blasts and the ravages of time.
>
> But preservation by deep freeze presents a problem. The new address is strikingly inaccessible. Historians, researchers and editors accustomed to browsing through photo files will have to use Corbis's digital archive, which has only 225,000 images, less than 2 percent of the whole collection.
>
> Some worry that the collection is being locked away in a tomb; others believe that Mr. Gates is saving a pictorial legacy that is in mortal danger...
>
> When the move is done, Corbis's New York office will contain nothing but people and their computers, plugged into a digital archive. No photographic prints, no negatives, no rotting mess. Analog is having a burial and digital is dancing on its grave."
>
> Sarah Boxer, New York Times, April 15, 2001

In all of his work Baudrillard aims to show that no adequate analysis of the systems of representation can refer to the "real" world as if it were unproblematic. The problematization of the concept of the "real" — this is what the story of hygienic and sterilized images (images that are indebted to their burial for still being images) is all about. Any discussion of the concept of the "real" should center on the emergence of the very conception of the real world, and this is what this story is about — a story about unseen and untouched images that are indebted to the digital code for still being images. However, the story goes further than that: Just like Baudrillard's narrative, this fable is not merely a matter of problematizing the real, but is also a description of the

disappearance of the real. Lying beyond the contamination of time and history, safely kept at a distance from human conduct, the buried images are encountered "as if seen from another planet," hence encountered as images that are no longer seen as real, but rather as illusions. No one else has described the death of the images and the birth of their digital "double" better than Baudrillard. Indeed, it is Baudrillard's narrative that can give this story its full voice.

If to speak of the burial of the analog is to argue that images lie beyond representation, we can take this fable as the finest allegory of the world which Baudrillard depicts in his works. Indeed, in all of his writings Baudrillard offers a critique of representational thought. As it has been so often noted, a representational framework presupposes a metaphysical duality between things-in-themselves and appearances. To criticize representation is precisely to reject this duality. Without a doubt, Baudrillard is not the first to insist that images can no longer be understood *analogically*, as simulacra or counterfeits of "nature."

We have learned from Nietzsche that representation is not primary, that any representational givenness presupposes a perspectival givenness, and that the latter overcomes the distinction between things-in-themselves and appearances in one stroke by rendering this dichotomy meaningless. Hence to criticize representation does not necessarily mean to insist that phenomena can no longer be explained analogically, that, for instance, a photograph can no longer have meaning as a resemblance or a counterfeit of events. The critique of representation is a genealogical undertaking; it is an attempt to

uncover those structures which the representational framework presupposes. Metaphorically speaking, the burial of the image is not necessarily an unfortunate event; the placement of the photographs 220 feet down the mine is rather a call for a new undertaking — a genealogical, or an *archaeological* one. It is a call for the necessity of uncovering the *arche* and the *logos* that representational systems presuppose.[6]

However, it is not merely the death of the analog that the story illustrates. While it was Nietzsche's task to uncover those presuppositions that underlie representational thought, Baudrillard's task is to uncover those presuppositions that underlie perspectival structures. That is to say, just as the burial of the image is a critique of representational thought, so it is a critique of perspectivism. Indeed, philosophy can speak of everything and anything *so far as it takes into account the fact that it is speaking*. In Chapter 1, I offer four readings of Nietzsche's perspectivism with the aim of showing that this act of speaking is taken for granted by Nietzsche, that perspectivism can explain everything except its own role. My critique of Nietzsche's perspectivism follows the path opened up by the late Merleau-Ponty's and the early Heidegger's criticisms of intentionality. Just as the self-transcendence of Dasein underlies the intentional structure of consciousness, just as reflection (or intentionality) is a call for a new operation — that of hyperreflection (and ultimately a call for a new ontology) — so perspectivism is a call for post-perspectivism, for it fails to account for how different centers relate to each other as well as how the

---

[6] This "archeology," however, is to be performed in a post-metaphysical light — it is an infinite task that never assumes the pretense of lifting the last veil.

center of interpretation relates to the periphery. I take post-perspectivism to be precisely an attempt to question the latter two difficulties that perspectivism faces. Hence, instead of following the critique of perspectivism that Baudrillard offers, in Chapter 1 I attempt to disclose how perspectivism reaches its own limits.

However, my placement of Baudrillard in a Nietzschean context does not square well with the mainstream approach to Baudrillard's corpus of works. It has become an unfortunate custom to approach the early Baudrillard as a Marxist and the later Baudrillard as a fatalist. Although this common position can easily explain the differences between the two Baudrillards, it fails to offer a satisfactory explanation of what the early and the later Baudrillards share. Furthermore, this position directly contradicts numerous indications by Baudrillard himself, who quite often insists that it is wrong to approach his works within a Marxist context, for it has *always* been his task to deconstruct this context.[7] We encounter four Nietzschean themes in both the early and the later works of Baudrillard: the themes of the interpreted nature of subjectivity, of subjectivity as multiplicity, of the distinction between bipolarity and duality, and the distinction between textual and genealogical analysis. It is my contention that by elaborating on these intuitions, the later Baudrillard turns against the conclusions of his earlier works, for the latter still presuppose the context of subjectivist thought. Hence, while Baudrillard's placement within a Marxist context reveals the irreconcilable differences between the early and the later Baudrillard, the placement of Baudrillard in a

---

[7] See Mike Gane's and Monique Arnaud's interview with Baudrillard (1993) in *Baudrillard Live*, p. 19-25.

Nietzschean context reveals what the early and later Baudrillard share. These are the themes I approach in Chapter 2.

But let us turn back to the story, for its mystery has not been untangled yet: The secret of this fable lies in the question of the code. *Analog is having a burial and digital is dancing on its grave* means: When the image reaches the digital stage, it is not a new double of the image that is in question. Indeed, the story centers on images that do not simply have a digital double, but rather on images whose digital double is built on their grave — precisely here, Baudrillard argues, lies the specificity of our images. Hence there is nothing surprising about the fact that Arthur Kroker — the Canadian writer whose works, in the words of Madan Sarup, "in many ways attempt to out-Baudrillard Baudrillard" (Sarup, 167) — makes this story into the leitmotif of his "The Image Matrix." "Because the code is what this story is really about," writes Kroker, "and it is just when we disentangle the double helix of the digital code, that twisting spiral of analog and digital logic as they intersect and implode that we can begin to understand the serious cultural implications of this story for the future of the image in the new century" (Kroker). Baudrillard has presented this intersection and implosion of the digital and the analog while uncovering the twisting spiral of the three orders of the image. In Chapter III, I approach the orders of counterfeit, production, and simulation as genealogical. Indeed, to my mind, neither Baudrillard nor his critics have offered a satisfactory explanation of how simulation should be thought of as both the final stage of the image

and that which precedes the other two orders.[8] Furthermore, a genealogical analysis can explain both the divergence as well as the convergence between the semiological and the fatal orders — yet another question that has so far remained unexplained. Thirdly, a genealogical inquiry explains how there can be two forms of post-perspectivism in Baudrillard's writings: (1) a post-perspectivism that we encounter in the third order of the image, for the latter signifies the replacement of the perspectival structures by the circulation of the code; (2) a post-perspectivism that we encounter in the fatal order, for the latter signifies the birth of the Object as well as the abandonment of all possible exchange and of subjectivity as its underlying foundation.

These are the implications that Kroker sees in the fable:

> Consequently, it is our future to disappear into images. Not only into those external image-screens-cinema, TV, video, digital photography-but also into those image-matrices that harvest human flesh: MRI, CT scans, and thermography. The future of the media? That's the unseen cameras of automatic bank machines, the unhearing machines of automatic eye scans, the unknowing machines of planetary satellite photography. Sliced through and diced, combined and recombined, the body is an image matrix. The body desperately needs images to know itself, to measure itself, to reassure itself, to stimulate its attention, to feed its memory channels, to chart its beauty lines, to recognize its gravity flaws, age marks and flaring eyes. (Kroker)

What contempt behind this interpretation! Not a single query about the actual relation between the analog and the digital. Mystified, the digital is not even allowed its

---

[8] Mike Gane approaches Baudrillard's writings of the '70s as genealogical, but he does not explicate the philosophical implications of this interpretation. For Gane, to say that Baudrillard's writings are genealogical is to say that his genealogy rivals Foucault's *The Order of Things*, for if Foucault's ambition is to elaborate the theoretical modes of production, Baudrillard aims at elaborating the modes of simulation. See, Mike Gane, *Baudrillard's Bestiary*.

own behavior, as if representation and simulation were the only rules of the game. Small wonder Kroker's interpretation did not have to wait long for criticism, it was soon followed by Chris Chesher's "Why the Digital Computer is Dead." Indeed, the digital that has no relation whatsoever to the analog is dead, for it has always been merely the vagary of reflection. As phenomenologists have argued all along, there is no digital explanation of the genesis of meaning. If meaning is an accident that befalls a digital explanation, it is by far not an accident that befalls images themselves. Kroker is wrong when he writes: "A natural charlatan, the image maintains the pretense that it has something to do with the history of the eye precisely because its real electro-optical history focuses on the shutting down of the eye of the flesh and the opening up of the cynical eye of dead code" (Kroker). The fable of the death of the analog and the dance of the digital does not signify the shutting down of the eye of the flesh, for it is still the eye of the flesh that encounters digital images and it is in this relation that images become what they are: *images*.

It is precisely while talking of the photographic images that Baudrillard calls for the establishment of *raw phenomenology*. The task of the latter is to disclose how images transcend the order of meaning. However, this transcendence is neither of the "Platonic" kind, nor of the kind of which Kroker spoke of in "The Image Matrix." According to Baudrillard, images transcend the order of meaning by their radical immanence. It is precisely because "they do not have the time" to become meaningful, do not have the time to enter into an orderly relation with each other, that Baudrillard argues for the

disappearance of intentional explanation. The relation between raw and classical phenomenologies is the subject of analysis of the final chapter. By asking the questions of subjectivity, meaning, reference and reduction I attempt to disclose how raw phenomenology interrupts classical phenomenology and vice versa, how the major postulates of classical phenomenology cause tension and ultimately are presupposed by Baudrillard's analysis. This tension can be resolved only by abandoning Baudrillard's wager. In "Radical Thought" Baudrillard writes:

> In contrast to the discourse of reality and rationality, which bets on the fact that there is something (some meaning) rather than nothing, and which, in the last analysis, wants to be built on the preservative notion of an objective and decipherable world, radical thought bets on the illusion of the world. This thought wants to be illusion, restituting non-veracity to the facts, non-signification to the world, and formulating the reverse hypothesis that there may be nothing rather than something, tracking down this nothingness which runs under the apparent continuation of meaning. (RT)

There is no clear reason why the wake of the seductive order requires the abandonment of the order of meaning. As far as Baudrillard attempts to offer a re-evaluation of meaning and not simply to fall into the universe of non-meaning, this wager is to be abandoned. In the final chapter, I attempt to disclose a certain logic within which Baudrillard finds himself, a logic which asks for the abandonment of this bet, or this wager. A more crucial wager underlies Baudrillard's work: The fatal strategy is either an attempt to render the world more unintelligible than it has been given to us, or it is an attempt to grant the world clarity,[9] to unfold the play between meaning and non-meaning,

---

[9] Which altogether does not mean the abandonment of non-meaning, of seduction, of that which is fatal, but rather a discovery of their significance.

between something and nothing. I attempt to disclose why the first alternative is not viable, why it immediately becomes its own simulacrum. This, however, is a re-evaluation of the fatal strategy. Just as Baudrillard of the early '70s was at a turning point, just as he had to choose between following the Marxist critique of the new spheres of capitalism or granting the Nietzschean themes present in his work more significance, so now he has to choose as well. The fatal strategy should either follow the task of rendering the world more enigmatic than it has been given to us, or this strategy, being raw phenomenology, should become truly phenomenological: By means of a phenomenological reduction to Objects, this strategy has the prospect of rendering the world in a clearer light by describing the play between appearances and meaning. Only if the fatal strategy bets on this alternative does it have the prospect of not merely problematizing and escaping the orders of meaning, truth, and "the real," but of recovering them as well. Only if this alternative is chosen, does the fatal strategy become a strategy of this world, about this world, from this world.[10]

---

[10] "The natural world," writes Merleau-Ponty in *Phenomenology of Perception*, "is the horizon of all horizons, the style of all possible styles, which guarantees for my experiences a given, not a willed, unity underlying all the disruptions of my personal and historical life" (330). And a little later: "Each thing can, after the event, appear uncertain, but what is at least certain for us is that there are things, that is to say, a world. To ask oneself whether the world is real is to fail to understand what one is asking, since the world is not a sum of things which might always be called into question, but the inexhaustible reservoir from which things are drawn" (344).

CHAPTER I

THE LIMITS OF PERSPECTIVISM

"The mind's eye too has its blind spot," wrote Merleau-Ponty in *The Visible and the Invisible*, for "reflection recuperates everything except itself as an effort of recuperation, it clarifies everything except its own role" (Merleau-Ponty, 33). To insist on the blindness of the mind is to believe that the relation between *cogito* and *cogitatum* cannot explain our "commerce with the world," that the relation between thought and its object already rests on the accomplished "initiation into the world," that the "openness upon the world" escapes the reflective glance the very moment reflection attempts to capture it. "We are catching sight of the necessity of another operation besides the conversion to reflection, more fundamental than it, of a sort of *hyper-reflection* that would also take itself and the changes it introduces into account" (Merleau-Ponty, 38). The task of hyper-reflection is to catch sight of the reasons that prevent reflection from explicating the openness upon the world and to offer a way to reach it. As the further pages of *The Visible and the Invisible* reveal, hyper-reflection, among other things, is a critique of eidetic phenomenology, for the latter "by principle leaves untouched the twofold problem of the genesis of the existent world and of the genesis of the idealization performed by reflection" (Merleau-Ponty, 46). The problem of eidetic phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty argued, boils down to the fact that the attempt to understand the spectacle of the world demands our withdrawal from the unfolding of our perceptions, our ceasing

to be one with the "concrete flux of our life."

It is my suspicion that Nietzschean perspectivism encounters a similar difficulty — it too has its blind spot. It is my aim to argue that revealing the *spectacle* of the world genealogically, perspectivism does not explain its own possibility. *How does the interpreter relate to what is interpreted? How do different centers of force interrelate?* Even though *practical* solutions to these problems can be encountered in Nietzsche's writings, at a more fundamental level these questions remain unanswered. In light of these two questions I will present four different approaches to perspectivism with a negative aim in mind: to ground my suspicion about them. My aim is not merely to show that "hyper-perspectivism" is not encountered in Nietzsche studies but also to concede that the aforementioned questions remain beyond the scope of Nietzsche's writings, that for Nietzsche they are merely remnants of metaphysical idols.

Three Aspects of Nietzsche's Perspectivism

In the writings of Nietzsche the theme of perspectivism serves first and foremost the purpose of a radical critique of the Kantian distinction between things-in-themselves and phenomena. As Nietzsche tells us in *The Will To Power*, a thing-in-itself is just as perverse as "a sense-in-itself" or a "meaning-in-itself": "there are no 'facts-in-themselves,' for a sense must always be projected into them before there can be 'facts.'" (WP, 556). Hence, to say that the only possible givenness is perspectival is to assert that there are no uninterpreted facts or truths. *The Will To Power* has numerous references to

Kant and in nearly each of them, with a few exceptions, the distinction between things-in-themselves and appearances is Nietzsche's target of criticism. The Kantian problem, according to Nietzsche, boils down to the fact that Kant forgets that a thing-in-itself is not *given*, but merely inferred. It is perspectivism that makes this distinction between things-in-themselves and appearances (both as givenness and as inference) *meaningless*, and therefore impossible.

However, it would be a mistake to restrict Nietzschean perspectivism to Kantianism. For Nietzsche, the Kantian distinction is but a variant of the Platonic one between the true and the apparent worlds. According to Nietzsche the latter distinction, taking multiple forms, has always been presupposed by and never questioned in philosophy. Hence Nietzsche uses the terms philosophy and Platonism interchangeably. The doctrine of perspectivism overcomes this duality between the true and apparent worlds in one stroke. It is hard not to notice how revolutionary this claim is. What will later be said of Husserl, can already be said of Nietzsche: the question of *meaning* precedes the question of *being*; the latter is found within the limits of the former. To make the world appear as a phenomenon is to realize that the being of the world is no longer its existence or its reality but its *meaning* and that its meaning lies in the fact that, to use Husserlian language, it is the *cogitatum* that *cogito* intends. From now on, the only ontology that is possible is not the one that asks the question of being, but rather the one that asks the question of the *meaning* of being.

Just as Nietzsche's perspectivism is anti-Kantian and, in a very broad sense, anti-

Platonic, it is anti-Cartesian as well. Nietzsche's perspectivism is radically opposed to the Cartesian search for foundational epistemology. Descartes' search for new methodology is striking in how it encourages and rewards the self-imposed withdrawal from the surrounding world. The absolute foundation of knowledge is won by unambiguous distrust of the world. The Cartesian path to truth is an "armchair odyssey", to use the expression of Elliot Jurist, that overcomes skepticism by stressing social isolation not just as a means, but as an end as well. "Safety is found through retreat. The culture of philosophy — ironically put — is to be cultureless" (Jurist, 19). Although an attempt to find a philosopher today who would proclaim her allegiance to the "Cartesian myth" is not an easy task, as a silent presupposition, the remnants of the search for truth and cultural isolation going hand in hand is not a rare phenomenon in the scene of contemporary philosophy. When Hilary Putnam in *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body, and World* proclaimed his allegiance to naive realism and hence, his refutation of the Cartesian myth that was still present in his earlier works, Colin McGinn reacted to this shift as an unfortunate retreat from the philosophical search for the indubitable epistemological knowledge that underlies any possible experiential givenness. "The key issue about perception", McGinn tells us, "has always been how our inner subjective experience is connected to the external object that sits there in the objective world, sometimes millions of miles away" (McGinn, 71). For McGinn, the question of philosophy of perception is of *epistemological* value and it operates within such distinctions as subjective/objective, internal/external, inner/outer, material/immaterial.

Can perception ground my knowledge of the *external material* world? Do I really see *material* objects or just *appearances*? Finally, does perception actually relate me to objects at all or does it belong to the group of merely *subjective* experience? These are the questions, McGinn tells us, that make up philosophy of perception.[11] Even though McGinn *explicitly* rejects Cartesianism, the latter is still *implicitly* present in his writings. It is this style of philosophy that is left behind the back of Nietzschean perspectivism.

As Alan Schrift has it, Nietzsche's perspectival account is "a rhetorical strategy that offers an alternative to the traditional epistemological conception of knowledge as the possession of some stable, eternal 'entities,' whether these be considered 'truths,' 'facts,' 'meaning,' 'propositions'" (Schrift, 145). Such a possession, according to Nietzsche, is merely an oxymoron. Against the positivist claim that there are only facts, Nietzsche retorts: "No, facts is precisely what there is not, only interpretations. We cannot establish any fact 'in itself': perhaps it is a folly to want to do such a thing" (WP, 481). That is to say, any possible evaluation is practiced from a certain perspective; the imposition of value precedes the designation of something as a fact — the *establishment* of a fact precedes the possibility of a thing-in-itself and hence makes the latter impossible. Prior to any judgement that asserts something to be a truth, a fact, or that

---

[11] Forty years before the appearance of McGinn's *Cartesian* attack on Putnam, Merleau-Ponty well described the essential failure of this approach to perception: "To reduce perception to the thought of perceiving, under the pretext that immanence alone is sure, is to take out an insurance against doubt whose premiums are more onerous than the loss for which it is to indemnify us: for it is to forego comprehending the effective world and move to a type of certitude that will never restore to us the 'there is' of the world" (Merleau-Ponty, 36). The Cartesian roots of this type of approach to perception Merleau-Ponty already described in *Phenomenology of Perception*.

something is real, perspectives and interpretation are already at work. Hence, the world with which we are concerned is "not a fact but a fable" (WP, 616) that follows a meager sum of observations: there is no "truth" (WP, 616), there are no facts (WP, 604) that we could take up; all meaning is necessarily relative and perspective (WP, 590). What this reinterpretation of the world actually means is open to multiple interpretations. I will limit myself to four of them: a subjectivistic account, an interpretation that links perspectivism to the doctrine of the Will to Power, the "philological Nietzsche," and the "hermeneutical Nietzsche."

In Nietzsche's writings one can distinguish at least three aspects of perspectives: they are 'physiological,' 'socio-historical' and 'instinctual'[12] (1) The fundamental fact that any type of perspective is physiological, that any "center of interpretation," as Nietzsche would say, is situated within a particular body, constitutes a limit for any perspective, a limit for *how* the object can appear to me, which Nietzsche, referring to the prolonged search for things-in-themselves, takes to mean the following: we simply lack any organ for "knowledge or truth about the world" (GS, 354). (2) Just as our perspectives are wrapped within our bodily being, similarly, they are clothed by our socio-historical presence as well: our perspectives fall within the context of the socially accepted standards for what is to count as 'true' or 'real.' Again, as Nietzsche has it in *Gay Science*, "whatever in nature and in history is of my own kind, speaks to me, spurs me on, and comforts me—: the rest I do not hear or forget right away" (GS, 166).

---

[12] See A. Schrift, *op. cit.* p. 146.

(3) In addition to the "physiological" and "socio-historical" givenness, Nietzsche speaks as well of knowledge derived from impulses, drives, and needs. All our judgements have a pre-history in our "instincts, likes, dislikes, experiences and lack of experiences" (GS, 335). Knowledge, Nietzsche tells us, is but a certain behavior of instincts towards each other (GS, 333), each of which attempts to establish its own perspective as a norm of judgement in the struggle for mastery over other instincts. As he tells us in *The Will To Power*, "it is our needs *that interpret the world* (...); every drive is a lust to rule; each one has its perspective that it would like to compel all the other drives to accept as a norm" (WP, 481)

The physiological, socio-historical and instinctual aspects of our perspectives lead me to believe that Nietzsche's perspectival narrative carries an ambiguous explanation of how the interpreter relates to what is interpreted and how different centers of interpretation interrelate. In *Nietzsche and the Question of Interpretation*, Schrift argues that the mentioned characteristics lead one to believe in three basic qualifications of perspectives: they are "inevitable, indispensable, and 'false'" (Schrift, 149). To say the least, the latter qualification is both disturbing and ambiguous. Disturbing, for if facts are merely invented facts, *facta ficta*, one might be tempted to interpret Nietzsche's claim that truth is merely a Platonic myth in the most nihilistic manner. Ambiguous, for such an interpretation falls short of noticing that 'truth' and 'falsity' can have different meanings when they are employed in the context of the narrative of the true world or the world of 'appearance.' The fact that Shrift uses the term 'false' in quotation marks adds

to this ambiguity: does this word indicate the limited nature of perspectives or do the quotation marks question the opposition between truth and falsity? This ambiguity and disturbance boils down to the question how does the interpreter relate to what is interpreted: What is the world that perspectives open up to us? Are perspectives 'false' because they present only an inverted picture of what they are directed at, or are they 'false' because the question of what they open up is no longer asked within the Platonic distinction between the true and apparent worlds? In the first case we would still be dealing with the question of representation, for the falsity of perspectives would indicate a certain deviation between the things that our perspectives are directed at and the content of perspectives themselves — perspectives are mirrors that present us with the false pictures of the objects. In the second case, the context of representation would be left behind — presentation would be 'false' not because it is a false mirroring of the object but because the mirror of representation is broken by Nietzsche's perspectival narrative, because it has never been the aim of perspectives to grant us a good correspondence of the real things that, à la McGinn, sit out there in the external world waiting to be discovered by us: the question of perspectives is not to be seen within the epistemological context.

Needless to say, this is not a problem of Schrift's interpretation, but rather an ambiguity that lies within Nietzsche's writings. It seems to be the case that Nietzsche is open to both interpretations. On the one hand, as I have already indicated, the narrative of perspective is a critique of the Platonic distinction drawn between the true and the

apparent worlds. On the other hand, the physiological and instinctual aspects of perspectives give textual support to the 'representational' interpretation. It seems to be the case that this question is no exception to the famous phrase of Kurt Tucholsky: "Tell me what you need and I will supply you with a Nietzschean citation ... for Germany and against Germany, for peace and against peace; for literature and against literature — whatever you want".[13] In my view, perspectivism is first and foremost an attempt to overcome the Platonic distinction, an attempt that is still infused with the residues of traditional language. That is to say, I read 'representational' Nietzsche within the context of 'post-representational' Nietzsche. But even this account is ambiguous, for the residues I have in mind are revaluated within the genealogical reading of values.

The Subjectivistic Reading of Nietzsche

As long as we refrain from asking the question how perspectivism relates to the doctrine of the Will to Power, Nietzsche's perspectival narrative carries the presupposition of a modern subjectivity and Christian creativity. According to Nietzsche, the elementary fact of our experience that things are given to us as identical things[14] does not, in fact, indicate *their* identical character: it is "thanks to the *need* the world reappears always the same" (WP, 521); "'thingness' was first created by us" (WP, 569). Hence "the attribution of 'reality' to something is merely another human contribution to the

---

[13] Tucholsky, *Gesammelte Werke*. Also cited in Jurist's *Beyond Hegel and Nietzsche*, p. 211.

[14] As Husserl rightly indicates in *Cartesian Meditations*, identification is the primary form of consciousness.

world of becoming, which, if we are to accept the traditional grounds for such an attribution, appears unjustifiable" (Schrift, 151). But what do we end up with by accepting such an inverse picture? What an amazing power of instincts and needs! What an amazing attribution on the part of... *the subject*! Subjectivity *as the only possible hypothesis* is but a modern myth, a Cartesian myth, and surprisingly, it is at work even in the writings of such an outspoken critic of modernity as Nietzsche. To be sure, Nietzschean subjectivity is not to be identified either with the Cartesian ego or with Kant's transcendental subjectivity. Nietzsche's *always hypothetical* discussion of subjectivity is an attempt to step beyond the unity of consciousness. In contrast to the identical ego, Nietzsche offers subjectivity as multiplicity; instead of ego as consciousness, Nietzsche speaks of consciousness being grounded in the unconscious:

> The assumption of one single subject is perhaps unnecessary; perhaps it is just as permissible to assume a multiplicity of subjects, whose interaction and struggle is the basis of our thought and our consciousness in general? A kind of aristocracy of "cells" in which dominion resides? To be sure, an aristocracy of equals, used to ruling jointly and understanding how to command? My hypothesis: the subject as multiplicity. (WP, 490)

And yet, this obvious difference between Nietzsche on the one hand and Kant or Descartes (to use but examples from subjectivistic philosophy) on the other, is still presented within the context of subjectivistic philosophy: it is still the subject that infuses the world with meaning, if not with beings; it is still the subject whose existence is so powerful that it overshadows the question of the existence of other beings; it is still "cultureless," as Jurist says, subjectivistic thought. Nietzsche makes this point very clearly in *The Will To Power*: "the subject alone is demonstrable; hypothesis that only

subjects exist — that 'object' is only a kind of effect produced by a subject upon a subject — a *modus* of *the subject* (WP, 569).

The myth of such a metaphysical subjectivity is doubled by yet another myth, which is of (God forbid!) Christian nature. *What Nietzsche has never doubted is the myth of creativity*[15]: "We can comprehend only the world we have made" (WP 495, 517). Just as the eye of the beholder in perspectival arts, the Nietzschean perspectivist takes the place that was earlier occupied by God. To the question how the subject relates to the object, Nietzsche seems to be offering the following answer: the question is wrongly posed, for there is no relation here; the subject, as the only possible hypothesis, is the ultimate source of the virtual being of the object; this 'being' is virtual, for only the subject really exists. The interpreter is not just the center of force to which the periphery shows its face; the face of the world was first and foremost created by the interpreter, and definitely, created *ex nihilo*. Just like a rattlesnake, Nietzsche's critique of metaphysics seems to be making a circle and returning into its nest. We seem to have made a circle and returned to the same problem of cultural isolation, a self-imposed distrust of the world that we have already encountered in the Cartesian narrative.

The physiological and instinctual aspects of perspectives lead us to reiterate

---

[15] This claim has recently been made by R. Bittner. Bittner argued that the issue of reconciling Nietzsche's denial of substance with his doctrine of the Will to Power persists, for Nietzsche makes metaphysical claims, even if in a negative way. Only in the world of agents can power talk be meaningful. While this problem has been usually dealt with by renouncing the denial of substance and by keeping the doctrine of the Will to Power, Bittner offers an opposite strategy, which leads him to show essentially traditional myths still present within Nietzsche's writings (first and foremost, the myth of creativity). Hence, we witness that de(con)structive Nietzsche merely leaves us hanging in suspense. See *Nietzsche's Postmoralism: Essays on Nietzsche's Prelude to Philosophy's Future.*

Heidegger's conviction that Nietzsche is the last metaphysician. However, it is precisely in the *manner* of Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche that one finds a suggestion as to how the mentioned difficulties are to be overcome. Heidegger was the first and the main proponent of the view that Nietzsche's entire philosophy can be identified with the Will to Power. This interpretation, Heidegger argued, is both the key to Nietzsche's thought as well as his *entire* thought. Here I will not interpret Heidegger's direct contribution to Nietzsche studies, but rather limit myself to mentioning that the reading of Nietzsche through the doctrine of the Will to Power that Heidegger inaugurated constitutes one of the most important group of interpretations of Nietzsche in the 20th century. In the present context, the contribution of Michel Haar is most helpful.

Perspectivism and the Will to Power

In the first part of this chapter (p. 23), I have indicated that the characterization of perspectives as 'false' is open to two different readings: on the one hand it can be read in a 'representational' context; on the other hand, it is possible to see this characterization as an attempt to overcome the representational context itself. So far I have concentrated on the 'representational' reading of this word. Michel Haar is a proponent of the second reading. The latter, I will argue, overcomes the shortcomings of the first, and yet it does not answer how the interpreter relates to what is interpreted, nor how different centers of force interrelate.

There is an obvious problem with the subjectivistic reading of perspectivism: it

directly contradicts numerous passages of Nietzsche's writings. In *The Will To Power* Nietzsche insisted on the fictitious character of subjectivity: "'the subject' is the fiction that many similar states in us are the effect of one substratum: but it is we who first created the 'similarity' of these states" (WP, 485). He insisted as well that the task of philosophy is to bring to light the preconditions upon which our belief in the 'ego' rests (WP, 487). He himself contributes to this task by arguing that the belief in the unity of the subject is a philological mistake that boils down to our "grammatical customs." He was right when he insisted that "nothing is so much deception as this inner world which we observe with the famous 'inner sense'" (WP, 478). He explained the meaning of this statement in the following manner:

> "There is thinking: therefore there is something that thinks": this is the upshot of all Descartes' argument. But that means positing as "true *a priori*" our belief in the concept of substance — that when there is thought there has to be something "that thinks" is simply a formulation of our grammatical custom that adds a doer to every deed. (WP, 478)

How are we to avoid the contradiction between the non-subjectivistic Nietzsche and the 'falsity' of perspectives that lead to the subject as the only possible hypothesis? It is by choosing a non-representational reading of 'falsity' that confusions can be avoided. In "Nietzsche and Metaphysical Language" Haar draws attention to Nietzsche's strange and ambiguous language *vis-à-vis* the traditional language of philosophy.

> Indeed, Nietzsche develops, in direct opposition to the tradition and its language, a language of his own, a form particularly insinuating, insidious, complex — and designed for the purpose of subversion. On the one hand, when making use of current metaphysical oppositions [...], *he does so with a view of eradicating and*

> *abolishing these very distinctions*; there is thus inevitably an ambiguity weighing upon his use of terms having a precise meaning within the tradition, *terms such as "true" and "false," "good" and "evil."* On the other hand, the key terms of his own vocabulary...elude conceptual logic. (Haar, 6) [my italics, SG]

Hence, Haar argues that Nietzsche's use of the words 'true' and 'false' is to be understood in direct opposition to the Platonic distinction between the "true world" and the "apparent world." The terms 'true' and 'false' "become interchangeable in so far as the 'true' of which Plato speaks proves to be fictitious and therefore false, and insofar as the real is true if it is taken as false in Plato's sense but as containing *also* within it the fictitious" (Haar, 7). Contrary to the traditional attempt in philosophy to gather diversity into a unity of essence, Nietzsche offers a polysemic genealogy. A recourse to polysemy is a destruction of traditional identities, and hence, a destruction of traditional conceptualization, for "every concept arises from identifying what is not identical" (TL, ch. 1). Contrary to philosophical systematization, "Nietzsche's method aims at unmasking, unearthing, but in an *indefinite* way — i.e., without ever pretending to lift the last veil to reveal any originary identity, any primary foundation" (Haar, 7).

How are we to understand, having stressed the polysemic and indefinite character of Nietzsche's language, the constant affirmation that everything at bottom is Will to Power: "The essence of the world is Will to Power"(BGE, 186), "The essence of life is Will to Power" (GM, II 12), "The most intimate essence of being is Will to Power" (WP, 693)? Are we to read these affirmations as indications of the metaphysical character of the Will to Power, for is not the identification of beings in their totality precisely what constitutes metaphysics? But what does *identification* in Nietzsche mean? "To what

extent is the term Will to Power still an identity? Does it not, like all great themes in Nietzsche, refer back to identities that are broken, disfigured, forever dispersed and unrecoverable?" (Haar, 8).

It is important in the present context to stress that the Will to Power is not to be read in a psychological or an anthropological manner. Next to the theme of the Will to Power Nietzsche insists as well that "there is no such thing as will" (WP, 46). That is to say, there is no will that constitutes what things are in themselves. There is no will, for "the individual does not possess an identical and permanent will from which his actions flow. What the individual calls his 'will' is a plurality of instincts and impulses in constant battle with one another to gain the upper hand" (Haar, 9). There is no will, for there is no defined center. "Every force, every energy, whatever it may be, is Will to Power — in the organic world (impulses, instincts, needs), in the psychological and moral worlds (desires, motivations, ideas), and in the inorganic world itself — in as much as 'life is but a special case of the Will to Power'" (Haar, 10). Hence, ultimately the Will to Power has always to do with itself, it is always overcoming itself. Nothing escapes it, for "man would rather will *nothing* than *not* will at all" (GM, III, 28).

Nietzsche's polysemy is an attempt to "deconstruct" all traditional identities, including that of subjectivity. The doctrine of the Will to Power clearly reveals the inadequacy of the subjectivistic reading of Nietzsche. Not only is the subject not the ultimate 'fact'; the creative aspect of perspectivism is not a variant of Christian creativity, but rather a case of the Will to Power. But is the doctrine of the Will to Power in any

way helpful in determining how perspectivism relates the subject and the object and how different centers of interpretations interrelate? In fact, as soon as this question is posed, we reach another ambiguity in Nietzsche's narrative.

In contrast to the traditional conceptualization that attempts to ground difference in the unity of essence, Nietzsche insists on the initial bipolarity of the Will to Power: the latter is both active and reactive. It is this bipolarity, Haar suggests,

> that forms the basis from which the whole enterprise of genealogy receives its definition. The "genealogical"critique of values consists in relating any given value to the originary direction (affirmative or negative) of volition, in unveiling the long lineage issuing from this primordial orientation, and in unraveling the remote thread of encounters that have since frozen into "values." (Haar, 12)

This description is open to two different interpretations: on the one hand, as long as the bipolar Will to Power *forms the basis* of genealogy, we are to see interpretation within the limits of the Will to Power. On the other hand, the Will to Power can be seen not as the basis of interpretation, but rather as *the interpretation* that Nietzsche offers. Are we to see genealogy within the boundaries of the Will to Power, or are we to bet on the reverse, for does not genealogy itself give meaning to the doctrine of the Will to Power? This is a crucial question in the present context: can the Will to Power explain interpretation, or is it found within the limits of the latter? Although in the last quotation Haar seems to bet on the first alternative, a little later he makes a different claim: "This origin [i.e. the Will to Power] has and gives meaning only in retrospect — namely in and through the genealogical development that issues from it, and by which it is recognized" (Haar, 12). Hence Haar does not differentiate between these two questions. However,

since the late '80s this question became an important one in Nietzsche studies. Alexander Nehamas in *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, stresses the heuristic element of the Will to Power. Maudemarie Clark emphasizes that the Will to Power is a "construction of the world from the viewpoint of [Nietzsche's] moral values" (Clark, 227). In a similar fashion, E. Jurist writes, "I would agree that Nietzsche offers the will to power as both a heuristic device and a self-conscious construction, and that he surely would be prepared to acknowledge that it reflects his own values" (Jurist, 232). I will show below that Schrift bets on the second alternative as well. Here it is possible to talk of consensus in Nietzsche studies: for Nietzsche the doctrine of the Will to Power does not ground interpretation but rather is placed within the boundaries of interpretation. However, if this is the case, one cannot turn to the Will to Power in order to answer the posed questions, for the answer would horizonally presuppose the question. Let me turn to the themes of "the philological Nietzsche" and "the hermeneutic Nietzsche," for here the question of interpretation is the central one.

The Philological and the Hermeneutic Nietzsche

"The *lack of philology*; one continually confuses the exegesis with the *text* — and what an exegesis!" (KGW, VIII, 3:15[82]).[16] This philological remark that Nietzsche made in 1888, the last year of his productive life, attracts Jean Granier's attention and

[16] Also quoted in Jean Granier's "Perspectivism and Interpretation," p. 190.

gives rise to his peculiar interpretation of Nietzsche. What the subjectivistic account of perspectivism does not take into account is Nietzsche the philologist, and the latter does not merely precede Nietzsche the philosopher[17]. If we take the philological remarks seriously, Granier suggests, we will have to conclude that "for Nietzsche thought is never external to Being. [...] For Nietzsche, thought participates in Being" (Granier, 190). There is an obvious tension between, on the one hand, Nietzsche the perspectivist (interpreted subjectivistically) and, on the other, the ontological Nietzsche, who asserts the distinction between the exegesis and the text. How are we to reconcile this distinction with the hypothesis that only the subject really is, that there are only interpretations? An underlying antinomy disturbs Nietzsche's entire reflection.

Granier's Nietzsche overcomes this contradiction by placing the question of perspectivism within the confines of the question of Being. The text, Granier tells us, is nothing else but Being itself, for "by introducing the notion of interpretation, Nietzsche imposes a definition of Being as 'text'" (Granier, 192). However, this still seems to be a wishful reading, for what are we supposed to do with passages like the following?

> That things possess a constitution in themselves quite apart from interpretation and subjectivity, is a quite idle hypothesis: it presupposes that interpretation and subjectivity are not essential, that a thing freed from all relationships would still be a thing. (WP, 560)

Granier's Nietzsche overcomes this apparent contradiction by insisting that knowledge, although subjective, is immanent to Being, for "subjectivity is not an accident

---

[17] Nietzsche himself tells us that he remained a philologist all his life.

that befalls Being, impairing its truth; rather it is an essential moment of the life of Being" (Granier, 193). Nietzsche overcomes the antinomy between subjective perspectivism — the perspectivist phenomenalism that identifies truth with value and ultimately abolishes the notion of 'text' — and authentic knowledge as strict philology, which, if taken literally, turns out to be dogmatic ontology. The apparent contradiction, although present within Nietzsche's writings, is overcome "on the basis of his intuition of Being as interpreted Being. (...) Being remains essentially 'open'" (Granier, 197).

It did not take long for Granier's interpretation of Nietzsche to be criticized: Sara Kofman's critical alternative appeared in the appendix to Granier's *Nietzsche et la metaphore.* Sarah Kofman challenged Granier's ontologization of Nietzsche for remaining within the Heideggerian problematic of the question of Being. "Whereas the task of philology for Granier's Nietzsche is to decipher Being as that which *constitutes* perspectival interpretations, Kofman's Nietzsche views 'Being' itself as a text constituted *by* the primary interpretations of the spontaneous instinctual evaluations which need to make life intelligible" (Schrift, 167). Structurally, the problem here coincides with the one I mentioned in regard to Haar: does the question of Being precede interpretation or follow it? Is Being to be found within the confines of perspectives or vice versa, do perspectives fall within the confines of Being? Only in the latter case can the ontological Nietzsche explain the problem of perspectivism. However, Sarah Kofman insists that the second alternative is not viable. Philology is not, *pace* Granier, ontological, but rather genealogical: we are to see behind secondary interpretations the initial interpretations *as*

interpretations. "The text without interpretation is no longer a text" and therefore there is no absolute text that could determine the validity of different interpretations. Good philology is characterized not by its honesty and "absolute respect" for the text, but by presenting interpretation as interpretation.

Hence the problem remains: if perspectives and interpretations are not constituted by Being, how is Being constituted? How are we to overcome the antinomy between the philological and perspectival Nietzsche? The doctrine of philology appears to posit an oblique border between text and interpretation. If perspectival interpretation leads to the proliferation of creative textual appropriation, philological interpretation calls for methodological rigor in regard to the text. It was the task of Alan Schrift to find a solution to this antinomy in *Nietzsche and the Question of Interpretation*. According to Schrift, "in claiming that there is nothing other than interpretation (perspectivism) while at the same time calling for an apprehension of the text without falsifying it by interpretation (philology), Nietzsche appeared to anticipate the contemporary hermeneutic dilemma of relativism and dogmatism" (Schrift, 170). One can overcome this antinomy, Schrift argues, only by placing Nietzsche in the hermeneutical context. However, such a placement calls for a transvalued notion of the text:

> The solution to this problem will give rise to a transvalued notion of *text* to accompany Nietzsche's transvalued conception of philology....The transvalued conception of philology as the art of reading well does not stand primarily in opposition to the doctrine of perspectivism, but opposes itself instead to *bad* philological method. Thus, a transvalued text which is to be read well, while distinct from any *particular* interpretation, itself remains *nothing other but interpretation*....The opposition between perspectivism and philology thus does not face the interpreter with the methodological demand of choosing one or the

> other; rather, perspectivism and philology emerge as the *limits* between which Nietzsche's pluralistic approach to interpretation plays. (Schrift, 167-168)

Let me spell out how Schrift settles the Granier-Kofman debate. We seem to be dealing with an antinomy here only because we pose the question in ontological terms. However, Schrift argues, Nietzsche offers us not an *ontological*, but rather a *practical* answer. That is to say, the ontological status of the text is not Nietzsche's concern, or to put it in other words, the question of "hyper-reflection" is not Nietzsche's question. "Instead, he provides a conception of the text that will work in the context of the praxis of interpretive pluralism" (Schrift, 196). Questions of ontology, Schrift goes on to say, are superfluous for they exceed any finite comprehension, they are questions regarding things-in-themselves. Therefore all ontological speculation is an "idle hypothesis".

Obviously, in Nietzsche's narrative there is no place for a "text-in-itself", a text freed from all interpretations. While this phrase does not clarify what a text is, it tells us what a text is not. But it is important to keep in mind that "Nietzsche refuses to specify what a text *is*, insofar as the posing of the question 'what is a text?' already stands as an *imposition* of meaning in predetermining an answer within an ontological framework" (Schrift, 195). Far from being an independently existing object, "Nietzsche's transvalued conception of the text suggests the following: the 'text' is not an independently existing object but the heuristic aggregate of all possible interpretations which can be imposed on it" (Schrift, 196).

Does that mean that all interpretations are to be viewed equally? Certain passages in Nietzsche seem to give support to this claim:

> In former times, one sought to prove that there is no God — today one indicates how the belief that there is a God could *arise* and how this belief acquires its weight and importance: a counterproof that there is no God thereby becomes superfluous. When in former times one had refuted the "proofs of the existence of God" put forward, there always remained the doubt whether better proofs might not be adduced than those just refuted: in those days atheists did not know how to make a clean sweep. (D, 95)

Hence, Nietzsche seems to be telling us that the success of "contemporary atheists" is indebted to their abandonment of the horizon of Truth. And yet, it would be a mistake to conclude that Nietzsche suggests a proliferation of numerous interpretations that all possess equal value, for it is precisely the question of value that Nietzsche's genealogical analysis addresses to interpretations. It is not enough to determine genealogically philosophical presuppositions as errors in order to overcome them, for "the genealogical search for origins is not discernment of truth but the deciphering of value" (Schrift, 173). The genealogical inquiry is a re-reading of the history of various phenomena with the aim of deciphering what values are inscribed at their origin. It is these values that determine the course of their historical development. When Nietzsche insists that genealogically everything is Will to Power, he means that there are *life-enhancing* and *life-impoverishing* interpretations. Even though pure life-enhancing and life-impoverishing interpretations are impossible to achieve (for the Will to Power as the interpretive principle is both indefinite and bipolar, or as Deleuze has it, it is simultaneously an origin and its inverted image[18]), it is precisely these two histories of value that give grounds for

---

[18] "Action and reaction are not in a relation of succession but in one of coexistence in the origin itself" (Deleuze, 55). See Deleuze, pp. 55-58.

determining the validity of interpretations. To put it in different terms, it is the difference between the *grand style* and the *decadent style* that does not allow one simply to argue that Nietzsche's perspectivism leads to an indifferent proliferation of interpretations. "To 'give style' to one's character — a great and rare art" (GS, 290). Style, however, is not to be understood aesthetically. For Nietzsche, decline comes from the decadent style and ascent from the grand style. As Schrift has it, "The grand stylist, as a master of self-legislation, is able to control the 'greatest multiplicity of drives' through the imposition of a life-enhancing order of rank upon these drives" (Schrift, 177).

Let me show with the help of two Nietzschean metaphors how the "hermeneutical Nietzsche" *practically* overcomes the ambiguities that lie within the "philological Nietzsche." The metaphor of a dance is helpful in determining how Nietzsche can be viewed in the middle between the philological demand for rigor and the perspectival tendency to proliferation of multiple interpretations. As Nietzsche tells us in *Human, All-Too-Human*, dancing is not merely following a pattern of steps. The dancer follows the basic pattern, and while he does so, the dance is constantly created anew. Similarly, an interpretation is determined both by the interpreted text and by what the interpreter brings to the text. An interpretation is both a response and a creative act. Hence it is not a question of choosing between the dogmatic insistence on one meaning and a relativistic acceptance of any meaning. Interpretive pluralism is found between these two extremes. Both philological rigor and creative apprehension are at work in an interpretive act.

The second helpful metaphor is that of Dionysus. In *The Will To Power*

Nietzsche draws a distinction between Dionysus and the Crucified: "The god on the cross is a curse on life, a signpost to seek redemption from life; Dionysus cut to pieces is a *promise* of life: it will be eternally reborn and return again from destruction" (WP, 1052). If the Nietzschean Crucified is a symbol of life-impoverishing interpreter and of a decadent stylist, Dionysus is the symbol of life-enhancing interpreter and of the grand stylist. Just as Dionysus' fate is to be "cut to pieces and to be eternally reborn and return again from destruction", Schrift shows a similar fate of "interpretation in the labyrinth of the text." It is only with the help of Ariadne that Dionysus escapes the labyrinth. Within Schrift's analysis, Dionysus is to be seen as the multiplier of perspectives and Ariadne's thread is the thread of philological rigor. Without this thread the interpreter would be eternally condemned to wander meaninglessly in the labyrinth; without the multiple interpretations — the numerous "centers of force", the thread of Ariadne would be useless. Far from being mere opposites, the philological rigor and the proliferation of perspectives call for each other's assistance.

* * *

In presenting four different interpretations of perspectivism, I attempted to show that none of them answers the questions how the interpreter relates to what is interpreted and how different "centers of force" interrelate. My analysis ended with the hermeneutical Nietzsche, i.e. Nietzsche who directly tells us that the mentioned questions cannot be answered, for (1) the questions presuppose the Platonic distinction between the

true and the apparent worlds, and because (2) on the level of communicative praxis the answers are not necessary. Nietzsche tells us himself that the question of 'hyper-perspectivism" is not his question: "Dionysus" is only a "myth," "Übermench" is only a "metaphor" (WP, 866), "Will to Power" is only an interpretation. When in *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche concluded one of the passages by saying that everything at bottom is a form of the Will to Power, this conclusion was followed by an observation such as this: "Supposing that this is also only interpretation — and you will be eager enough to make this objection? — well, so much the better" (BGE, 22). That is to say, the question of interrelatedness of interpreters and the interrelatedness between the interpreter and what is interpreted is taken by Nietzsche for granted.

Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological ontology clearly reveals that to ask the question of what lies beyond the scope of reflection, intentionality, perspectivism, does not mean to leap back into the Platonic either/or between the true and the apparent worlds. However, what interests me in the present context is not the question *how* the limits of perspectivism can be overcome in a post-Platonic ontology, but rather *what happens* when perspectivism loses its ground. I will try to show how Baudrillard's writings can be read as an answer to this question.

As soon as one attempts to grant Baudrillard's "sociological" writings philosophical significance, as soon as one attempts to place his work within the context of recent European philosophy, Nietzsche's writings cannot be ignored. In fact, a philosophical reconstruction of Baudrillard's corpus of works allows one to say the

following: they could have only appeared within the context of Nietzschean philosophy. However, this is the case not because Baudrillard is a follower or a disciple of Nietzsche — far from it. I will attempt to show a surprising coincidence: Even though Baudrillard does not offer any overt interpretation of Nietzsche, his writings spring out of what I find to be the *central snag* that Nietzsche's perspectivism faces — the lack of explanation how the interpreter relates to what is interpreted and how different centers of interpretation interrelate. For Baudrillard, this lack of clarity is not an unfortunate and yet reparable weakness of perspectivism but rather its inevitable character.

While the theme of *hyper-reflection* is an attempt to give grounds to intentionality, the theme of *hyperreality* is an attempt to explicate the consequences that the *ungrounded* perspectivism faces. As long as we see perspectivism ungrounded and as long we do not see any possibility of grounding it, *mise-en-scene* becomes *mise-en-abyme*: entering the perspectival realm results in the loss of all grounds of what is 'real' and 'true' — in the realm of simulation. Let me follow the themes of the *hyperreal*, *simulation* and the *precession of the model* to see why, contrary to Nietzsche's desires, we have passed from the *scene* to the *obscene*, why we have passed from the *growth* of perspectives to their *outgrowth*, why the proliferation of interpretations signifies their disappearance.

CHAPTER II

FROM "MARXISM" TO THE HYPERREAL

My attempt to place Baudrillard's corpus of works within the Nietzschean context requires an explanation, for it has already become commonplace to insist that Baudrillard's readings of simulation, the hyperreal, implosion, etc., spring not from the Nietzschean, but from specifically Marxist themes that he analyzed in his early writings. It is a common tendency among Baudrillard's critics to approach the early Baudrillard as a Marxist and to ask at what point Baudrillard abandons Marxism and begins developing his own themes. That the early Baudrillard is a Marxist (according to some, a communist) is never questioned, but rather taken for granted. This broadly accepted strategy is well summed up by Mark Poster: "from the position of firm leftism he gradually moved to one of bleak fatalism" (Poster, 5). As Poster explains, while the writings of the late '60s express an effort to extend the Marxist critique of capitalism to the areas that lie beyond the scope of traditional Marxist critique, somewhere in the early '70s Baudrillard "abandoned Marxism...developing his position along lines that have affinities with post-structuralists like Foucault and Derrida" (Poster, 1).

I will try to show that it is not an effort to extend Marxist themes, but rather an effort to deconstruct them, to indicate the presuppositions that underlie them, to explicate the themes that interrupt the Marxist analysis, to uncover what both Marxism and capitalism share that the early writings first and foremost reveal: these writings have

more affinities with French post-structuralism than with Marx himself. To be sure, the early critique of Marx is still presented in a Marxist context, but this is the case not because of an explicit intention on the part of Baudrillard, but rather because these writings are *non-conclusive*. In other words, Baudrillard's early writings offer an "internal" critique of Marxism. Before I proceed to this re-reading of the early Baudrillard, let me turn to the common question: At what point does Baudrillard abandon Marxism and begin developing his own themes? Here four different answers are possible.

The first position, which is the most popular, is defended among others by Mark Poster, who insists that *The Mirror of Production* (1973) marks Baudrillard's parting of the ways with Marxism, for it is here that "the political economy of the sign is presented not as a supplement to the critique of political economy, but as its successor, as the new basis for critical social theory" (Poster, 4). To be sure, *The Mirror of Production* announces an explicit break with Marx, but this does not mean that in his early works Baudrillard attempts to stay faithful to the guiding Marxist principles. Therefore it comes as no surprise that this over-generalization is not accepted by everyone. Charles Levin offers an alternative view: even though *The Mirror of Production* explicitly announces a break with Marxism, there is no clear-cut division here between this work and the previous ones. Already in *The System of Objects* (1968), "where Baudrillard is most sanguine about adopting conventional Marxist categories, an attentive reader can hardly escape noticing how they are progressively more volatilized by the emerging frame of

reference" (FC, 6). Furthermore, Levin insists, in *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* (1972), most of the distinctive features of Marxist theory are structurally implicated in political economy itself — that is to say, in the economy which is to be placed within the realm of semiology. I take this to be a sufficient indication that even though the early Baudrillard is working with the concepts of orthodox Marxism, already here his analysis leads to its deconstruction.

One could adopt a different attitude and argue that it is *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (1976) that marks Baudrillard's departure from Marxism, for here Baudrillard is no longer dependent on Marxist terminology; here he is developing new themes within which Marxism is merely presented as a false negative of capitalism. However, these three possibilities fade in the face of the fourth — the one that Baudrillard himself defended in 1993 in an interview with Mike Gane and Monique Arnaud:

> Marx's analysis was certainly influential on my work. [...] As far as political economy is concerned, *I only came to it in order to deconstruct it*. In fact, from the beginning I subscribed to Marxism but almost immediately began to question it and became ambivalent about it, distancing myself from it more and more as I went along. (BL, 20) [my italics — S.G.]

Hence, Baudrillard himself suggests that the historical analysis of his departure from Marxism is a badly posed question that results in a false organization of his works: there is no clear-cut line between the Marxist and the non-Marxist Baudrillard. A little later in the interview he observed: "if I started anywhere it was with poetical things, Rimbaud, Artaud, etc., Nietzsche, Bataille" (BL, 21). However, it is not my purpose to substitute Nietzsche for Marx in the debate over the ultimate source from which

Baudrillard's writings spring. I will argue, rather, that it is by expanding Nietzschean themes that Baudrillard gradually overcomes the narratives of alienation, production, labor, as well as the opposition between use-value and exchange-value.

If we take the aforementioned quotation of Baudrillard seriously, what matters is not so much the question of his dependence upon Marxism but rather the question of the importance of deconstructing Marxism. Why is it important for Baudrillard to offer an analysis of Marxist themes? In *Symbolic Exchange and Death* Baudrillard offers the following answer: "[S]ince for two centuries historical determination has been built up around the economic (since Marx in any case), it is there that it is important to grasp the interruption of the code" (SED, 9). This type of approach I will term an "external" criticism of Marxism. If this type of a critique is prevalent in Baudrillard's writings since the mid. '70s, in the earlier works he first and foremost offers an "internal" critique of Marx. Let me start with the latter.[19]

"Internal" Critique of Marx

What is the "internal" criticism of Marx and how does it differ from the "external" critique? There are five reasons that allow me to differentiate between the critique of Marx that Baudrillard offers in his early works and in the ones he has written since 1973:

---

[19] It is not the purpose of this work to present an exclusive analysis of Baudrillard's dependence on or "deconstruction" of Marxism, but rather to indicate what role Marxism plays in Baudrillard. I have chosen certain passages from *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* which are to serve as prime examples of the non-conclusive analysis that Baudrillard offers. Although non-conclusive, this analysis is illuminating for it reveals the emergence of Nietzschean narratives in Baudrillard.

(1) While in the early writings Marxist themes are at the very center of Baudrillard's analysis, in the case of the later works Marxist themes emerge among others — that is to say, the overall purpose of the later critique cannot be limited to Marxism or post-Marxism. (2) The early critique is "internal" for it is presented in Marxist terminology. (3) In contrast to the "external" critique, it does not offer a new horizon within which Marxist themes are to be placed but is presented within the Marxist context. (4) While the early critique of Marx is *thematic*, the later critique is *genealogical*: while in the early works Baudrillard questions the relation of certain Marxist themes to others as well as their significance in contemporary social surroundings, in the later works Baudrillard attempts to disclose the presuppositions that command the unfolding of Marxism. Hence, (5) the "internal" critique does not necessarily indicate the final rejection of Marxism, but rather concentrates on the tensions within Marxism and therefore, up to a degree, it can be read as an extension of Marxism. That is to say, the question whether the purpose of this critique is a reinterpretation or a rejection of Marxism is left unanswered. One affinity between the internal and the external critique is significant in the present context: in both cases Baudrillard criticizes Marx with the help of specifically Nietzschean tools.

Baudrillard's analysis of the *fetishistic metaphor* in Marx's writings serves as a good example of the "internal" critique. For Marx the concept of fetishism sketched the lived ideology of capitalism — the individual appropriation of the system of exchange value. The concept of fetishism indicates the whole process whereby concrete social values are abstracted, alienated and replaced by transcendent ideological values. I will

attempt to disclose why this placement of fetishism within the realm of exchange value is problematic. Secondly, if within Marx's analysis contemporary fetishes (money fetishism, commodity fetishism, automobile fetishism, sex fetishism, etc.) are to be seen as successors to archaic fetishism and religious mystification ("the opium of the people"), Baudrillard attempts to reveal that the ideological and the symbolic are essentially irreconcilable. I will try to show that by breaking the link between "religious mystification" and fetishism Baudrillard attempts to uncover a more fundamental opposition than that between use value and exchange value which governs the fetishistic metaphor in Marx. The opposition I have in mind is that between the symbolic and the semiotic.

Baudrillard indicates several dangers that the fetishistic metaphor encounters: it does not merely short-circuit analysis, but as well, at least in the case of its appearance in Marx's writings, it does not do away with the Christian connotation — "the worship of certain earthly and material objects called fetishes." Just as in the latter case fetishism is understood as "the worship of the golden calf," similarly, the concept of commodity fetishism intends the notion of false consciousness which is devoted to the worship of exchange value. The fetishistic metaphor presupposes the existence of the non-alienated consciousness of an object in a true, objective state: what Marx calls use value. Just as Nietzsche took human essence to be an expression of Platonic or Christian values, in a similar manner Baudrillard points out that the fetishization of the conscious subject or of human essence involves a metaphysic that is at the root of the whole system of Christian

values:

> By referring all the problems of "fetishism" back to superstructural mechanisms of false consciousness, Marxism eliminates any real chance it has of analyzing the *actual process of ideological labor*. By refusing to analyze the structures and the mode of ideological production inherent in its own logic, Marxism is condemned (behind the facade of "dialectical" discourse in terms of class struggle) to expanding the reproduction of ideology, and thus of the capitalist system itself. (FC, 89-90)

Just as Nietzsche's analysis of moral phenomena is based on the critique of the Platonic distinction between the true and the apparent worlds, Baudrillard insists that the real structure and process of ideology requires that we explode "the *fetishistic* theory of infrastructure and superstructure" and replace it with "a more comprehensive theory of productive forces, since these are *all structurally* implicated in the capitalist system" (FC, 90).[20] Just as Nietzsche's interpretation of moral phenomena requires an etymological analysis (for the terms "good and evil," "good and bad" have a life of their own), one finds a recourse to etymology in Baudrillard's analysis of fetishism and ideology, for "the term 'fetishism' almost has a life of its own" (FC, 90).[21] And, as I will argue later, just as for Nietzsche the real stakes are Platonic dualism and genealogical ambivalence, for Baudrillard the real stakes are the semiotic and the symbolic — economic equivalence

---

[20] Baudrillard's analysis starts with the received ideas about fetishism only to discover that the theory of ideology may be in doubt: "[F]or in order to reconstitute the *process of fetishization* in terms of structure, we would have to abandon the fetishist metaphor of the worship of the golden calf — even as it has been reworded by Marxists in the phrase 'the opium of the people" — and develop instead an articulation that avoids any projection of magical or transcendental animism, and thus the rationalist position of positing a false consciousness and a transcendental subject" (FC, 90).

[21] In a similar fashion, just as the answer to the question whether Nietzsche's analysis of moral phenomena allows one to speak of immoral or postmoral Nietzsche does not have a single clear-cut answer, so the question whether Baudrillard's analysis of fetishism and ideology allows one to speak of post-Marxist Baudrillard or Baudrillard as an anti-Marxist is open to interpretation.

and symbolic ambivalence, or in other words, semiological reductionism to duality and the "symbolic split" (*écart*), or symbolic ambiguity.

Baudrillard's etymological strategy reveals a semantic distortion that the term "fetish" has undergone. Although today this term signifies a "supernatural property of the object" and a potential in the subject through alienation and reappropriation, originally it signified exactly the opposite: "a *fabrication*, an artifact, a labor of appearances and signs".[22] Far from referring to the natural or supernatural objective force, the term "fetish" is inseparable from the aspect of "faking," of "artificial registering," or what Baudrillard terms *cultural sign labor*: "[T]his magical substance having been spread about so liberally, one forgets that what we are dealing with first are signs: a generalized code of signs, a totally arbitrary code of differences, *and that it is on this basis, and not at all on account of their use values or their innate 'virtues,' that objects exercise their fascination*" (FC, 91).

Hence, contrary to what Marx's writings reveal, the term "fetish" refers not to the signified (fetishism of substances and values) — this reinterpretation of "fetishism" is truly ideological — but rather to the signifier. The fundamental articulation of the ideological process is not the projection of the alienated consciousness into certain superstructures, but "the generalization at all levels of a structural code" (FC, 92). *Not a fascination for objects, but a fascination for signs; not the sanctification of a certain object, but the sanctification of the system; not a passion for substances, but a passion for*

---

[22] For a detailed analysis of the etymology of fetishism, see *For A Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, p.91.

the code — this is what the leading reinterpretation of fetishism has forgotten and what the etymological analysis reveals. It is this "forgetfulness" which allows Marx to oppose the fetishistic exchange value to the concrete use value, which is the structural foundation of the revolutionary consciousness.[23] Baudrillard's etymological analysis brings the latter distinction into question: if it is not the signified but the signifier that is infused with the fetishistic powers, the revolutionary consciousness loses its basis, for use value is just as fetishistic as the exchange value.

The phenomenon of "money fetishism" clarifies Baudrillard's etymological analysis: fascination or worship of desire devolves not upon a substance but upon the system. "What is fascinating about money is neither its materiality, nor even that it might be the intercepted equivalent of a certain force (e.g., of labor) or of a certain potential power: it is its *systematic nature*, the potential enclosed in the material for total commutability of all values, thanks to their definitive abstraction" (FC, 93). That is to say, what is adored in money is the total artificiality of the sign. It is not the "golden calf" that is the object and the source of fetishistic consciousness but rather the "closed perfection of the system" in which the fetishistic consciousness finds itself. The same structure of fascination is found in "beauty fetishism": far from revealing a worship of a substance, the fetish-beauty "is the final disqualification of the body, its subjection to a discipline, the total circulation of signs" (FC, 94). It is essentially bound up with the stereotype of models of beauty in which the "natural" wildness is veiled by make-up:

---

[23] In a Nietzschean manner, I would add, this is yet another variant of the Platonic distinction between the true and the apparent worlds.

"signs perfect the body into an object in which none of its real work...can show through" (FC, 94). The fetish objects are always caught in a code; what is recognized in seduction is always the "beyond" of "the perfect closure effected by the signs": "[W]hat fascinates us is always that which radically excludes us in the name of its internal logic or perfection: a mathematical formula, a paranoic system...or, again, a smooth body, without orifices, doubled and redoubled by a mirror, devoted to perverse autosatisfaction" (FC, 96).

If, contrary to Marx, fetishism signifies the "internal" link between fascination and the code (as opposed to the merely external link between worship and the abstract exchange value), contemporary fetishism is not be understood as a form of "the opium of the people." Only on the basis of the liquidation of the symbolic ambivalence can signs form a bivalent fetishistic structure. Or as Baudrillard says himself, "the absolute condition for...ideological functioning is the loss of the symbolic and the passing over to the semiological", and a little later, "*[T]he semiological reduction of the symbolic properly constitutes the ideological process"* (FC, 98). A few sociologically descriptive examples might be helpful in clarifying Baudrillard's argument.

The mass media's discovery of the body and sex can become a fetish only if the symbolic ambivalence of these phenomena are reduced to a bivalent semiology. If the symbolic and sexual truth of the body is not the "naive conspicuousness of nudity" but rather the "*uncovering* of itself," if the true path of desire is always ambivalent, only as far as this ambivalence is liquidated "nudity can become a sign among others, entering

into a distinctive opposition to clothing"[24]. Similarly, the distinctive structure *masculine-feminine* is possible only on the basis of semiological reduction into sexes that are full, distinct and opposed to each other. If "sexual ambivalence (activity-passivity) is at the heart of each subject," if "sexual differentiation is registered as a difference in the body of each subject," only if this symbolic ambivalence is liquidated, can the grandiose cultural models separating the sexes come into existence. *The Unconscious* encountered a similar semiological fate: if originally the work of the unconscious was to challenge the conscious subject, semiologically reduced it simply enters as an oppositional term vis-à-vis consciousness: today everyone has an unconscious. "The 'rediscovered' unconscious, generally exalted from the beginning, runs directly counter to its original meaning: ...It is transformed into a sign function, labor power and object of appropriation by a unified, autonomous subject, the eternal subject of consciousness and of private property" (FC, 100). *The semiological myth of the unconscious solves the problem of the unconscious.* Being reduced to a simple term that is opposed to consciousness, being hierarchically subordinated to consciousness, the unconscious is reduced to the system of order and social values.

To be sure, this critique is not a final rejection of Marxism and therefore, up to a degree, it can be read as its reinterpretation. Baudrillard's position neither is nor attempts to be conclusive.[25] Its task is rather to describe the schemes that emerge in the

---

[24] See *For A Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, p. 97-98.

[25] "There is no conclusion to this preliminary analysis of the ideological process" (FC, 100).

reinterpretation of ideology. The latter are as follows: (1) there is a certain homology or simultaneity of the ideological operation on the level of the psychic and the social structures; (2) the process of ideology aims at an abstraction by signs, at the semiological reduction of the process which Baudrillard ambiguously terms "real labor;"[26] (3) the logic of signs, which forms an autonomous totalization, operates by internal differentiation, general homogenization and hence effects "this closure, this perfection, this logical mirage that is the effectiveness of ideology" (FC, 101). This abstract coherence gives ideology the power of fascination; (4) as an abstract totalization, signs function ideologically — they establish the order of power and real discriminations.

Far from being a final rejection, Baudrillard's early critique of Marx attempts to point out the tensions prevalent in his writings. And definitely, the disclosed structures that Baudrillard offers are still presented in a Marxist context: the basis of production, of labor, of revolution, finally of ideology are not yet questioned.[27] Hence the common tendency to approach these early works as a contribution to Marxism. However, this conclusion is premature. This infusion of meaning into a text hardly finds any textual support. Furthermore, it directly contradicts what these texts tell us, namely, that they are non-conclusive. What we see in Baudrillard's early writings is the constant attempt to grapple with the Marxist themes. Furthermore, Baudrillard's critique of Marx can be

---

[26] By "the real labor" Baudrillard means "the process of unconscious symbolic labor in the division of the subject, the process of labor of productive forces in the explosion of relations of production" (FC, 100).

[27] These questions Baudrillard will address in *The Mirror of Production* and in *Symbolic Exchange and Death*.

read as an expansion on Nietzschean intuitions — this is what both the early and the later critique of Marx share. The intuitions I have in mind are the following:

(1) Just as Nietzsche's writings reveal the interpretive nature of what Cartesian thought regards as autonomous subjectivity, similarly, Baudrillard's critique of the distinction between use value and exchange value reveals the "fetishized" nature of use value. Just as Nietzsche criticizes Cartesian subjectivity as being already an *interpreted* subjectivity, in early Baudrillard Marx's promise of a resurgence beyond the market economy "in the glorious autonomy of man's simple relation to his work and his products" (FC, 130) is seen as nothing else but an idealistic remnant, for use value is already an abstraction.[28] Baudrillard's critique of use value can be seen as a sociological implication of Nietzsche's critique of subjectivity.

(2) Baudrillard's critique reveals that Marx's use of the notion of false consciousness presupposes the existence of the non-alienated consciousness in some true objective state. According to Baudrillard, this is an ill-founded presupposition, a mere remnant of "Christian metaphysic." Just as Nietzsche opposes subjectivity as multiplicity to the autonomous unity of the modernistic ego, similarly, to the undivided subject of consciousness, Baudrillard opposes the "fundamental division of the subject" (FC, 96). Just as for Nietzsche the unity of the ego is a constructed entity, for Baudrillard the undivided subject is a semiologically reductive ideological tool.

---

[28] For a detailed critique of use value see *For A Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, 130-142.

(3) Just as in Nietzsche Platonic dualism can be challenged only by the bipolar and indefinite Will to Power, in the early Baudrillard the hierarchically ranked oppositions that semiological reduction brings forth can be challenged only by symbolic ambivalence. If in Baudrillard hierarchical equivalence can be opposed only to ambivalence, in Nietzsche hierarchical dualism can be opposed only by the bipolar Will to Power. Once again, I take these sociological assertions of Baudrillard to be already implicated in Nietzsche's philosophical writings.

(4) Reference to etymology constitutes both the strength and the weakness (if not the success and the failure) of Baudrillard's critique of the fetishistic metaphor in Marx's writings. This critique is successful in that the reference to etymology enables Baudrillard to explicate the semiological nature of fetishism. It is deficient in that it is still presented in a Marxist context — not only does it fail to address Marx's most significant themes, it takes the latter for granted. Nietzsche's genealogical writings reveals etymology as a powerful theoretical tool, for precisely in genealogy lies the possibility of reconstructing the logic of "history". Although a bleak reference to genealogy is already present in Baudrillard's early writings, not until later will genealogy become the most significant weapon in Baudrillard's critique of Marx. If the aforementioned Nietzschean themes enable Baudrillard to explicate the contradiction *within* Marxism, genealogy will enable him to place Marx in a non-Marxist context and hence to question the ultimate themes in Marx's writings. The difference between the *thematic* and the *genealogical* analysis is dividing-line between the "internal" and

"external" critique of Marx.

As every work that Baudrillard wrote contains passages on Marx, an exclusive account of the "external" critique by far exceeds the scope and purpose of this chapter. I will limit myself to indicating what I find to be the most significant criticism and how the latter relates to the themes I analyzed in the first chapter. The presentation of the "internal" or the early critique of Marx is not a prelude to an exclusive account of Baudrillard's relation to Marx. Its purpose is rather that of showing that the widespread approach to the early Baudrillard as a Marxist does not find a lot of textual support. Nor is it helpful in seeing how the works that Baudrillard wrote in the late '60s and the early '70s relate to the themes he analyzes in later works.

I would like to suggest the following: the four Nietzschean themes I have just mentioned link the early and the later Baudrillard. Although they take different forms, we encounter them in all of Baudrillard's writings. There is an obvious break between the two Baudrillards because the further analyses of these themes force him to reject his earlier conclusions. Hence it is by expanding on Nietzschean intuitions that Baudrillard gradually abandons Marxism.

Although the intuitions of the interpreted nature of subjectivity and of subjectivity as multiplicity are already present in his early writings, the Baudrillard of the later '70s turns against his earlier analysis for the latter still presupposes the posited unity of the subject. Similarly, although we encounter the theme of the modulation of signs in Baudrillard's early writings, not until later will he insist that his early writings were still

presented within the system's own logic. Let me turn to these themes and present them in some detail.

From Radical Difference to Radical Indifference

The Baudrillard of the late '60s and early '70s saw his analysis as a further dialectical elaboration of the logic of capitalism. His aim was to capture and depict new emerging forms in the order of power, the semiological expansion of the system, the new forms of discrimination and alienation. But this analysis does not square easily with the aforementioned Nietzschean intuitions of the interpreted nature of subjectivity and subjectivity as multiplicity. In fact, the themes of alienation, discrimination and power presuppose the unity of the ego, or to put the matter on the social realm, this analysis presupposes social identity. If one abandons the unity of the subject altogether, the theme of alienation loses its ground. Similarly, the talk of power makes sense only in the context of subjectivities. Baudrillard is caught in a puzzle: on the one hand, a further dialectical analysis of the system's logic necessitates the recognition of the unity of the subject. On the other hand, a further elaboration of the Nietzschean intuitions requires a critical examination of the themes of power, alienation and social identity.

Hence it comes as no surprise that from 1973 onward the aim of Baudrillard's work is to depict what his earlier analysis presupposes. That is to say, we witness a shift from the textual to the contextual analysis. From now on the guiding themes of power, alienation and the system deserve a detailed scrutiny. And the latter is presented as if

these themes themselves are already dead. As Baudrillard writes in *Forget Foucault*:

> "When I speak of time, that's because it's already no longer there," said Apollinaire. But what if Foucault spoke so well to us concerning power — and let us not forget it, in *real* objective terms which cover manifold diffractions but nonetheless do not question the objective point of view one has about them, and concerning power which is pulverized but whose *reality principle* is nonetheless not questioned — only because power is dead? (FF, 11)

What motivates Baudrillard to make a claim as radical as this? It is obvious that the early Baudrillard could not have made this affirmation. Even more, Baudrillard could just as well have directed this claim to his own early works, for the latter do not question the *reality principle* of power either. That is to say, if the early works of Baudrillard are presented within the context of power, the later works address the question of power. This transition from the textual to the contextual inquiry, however, indicates a shift from *sociological* to *"sociological"* analysis, a shift from the evaluation of the *social* to the examination of the *masses*.

If the early works of Baudrillard can be regarded as sociological (for their purpose is to indicate the changes in social configuration), the later works strictly speaking are no longer sociological, for their task is to depict *the disappearance of the social*. Hence at best they are "sociological" if quotation marks can capture the forms of disappearance that occupy the center of Baudrillard's attention. What interests Baudrillard is how phenomena *hide* behind the scope of traditional sociological theories (first and foremost, how this is prevalent in Marxist analysis) and *resist* the infusion of meaning. To put it in phenomenological language, this shift from sociological to "sociological" analysis at the noetic level has a noematic correlate: a shift from the social to the masses.

According to Baudrillard, the mass is the realm which cannot be provided with meaning for it has none.[29] What characterizes sociological analysis is precisely the attempt to infuse the mass with meaning, i.e. to turn *the mass* into *the social*. If the social has an identity and a voice, the masses have none. According to the imaginary representation of revolutionary theories, the mass drifts somewhere between passivity and wild spontaneity: it is a potential energy, a reservoir of social energy. If today it is merely a silent referent, it is still the protagonist of history of tomorrow. What the imaginary representation does not question is the supposed fact that the mass has a voice, a social position, or in other words, a social identity. In contrast to this supposition Baudrillard argues that the mass has no history to write, neither past nor future, that it has no energy to release, no desire to fulfill. The strength of the mass is not potential but rather actual, not that of the future or the past, but rather that of the present. The strength of the mass consists in its silence, for the masses silently absorb and neutralize the meaning that is infused into them. Precisely this silent absorption constitutes the strength of the silent majority: there is "something" that is stronger than power — ironic indifference. The mass is a "spongy referent" which can prove any theory right but it will always do it *ironically*: it is eager to absorb the meaning that is projected towards it, and yet it absorbs this meaning ironically, hence, neutralizing it forever. The masses face the infusion of meaning the way children face the adult universe: the child always responds with a double strategy. When it is demanded that she be an object, she opposes

---

[29] See *In the Shadow of Silent Majorities*, p. 1-9.

disobedience, revolt, emancipation by making a claim to subjecthood. When it is demanded that she be a subject, she opposes that with a stubborn object's resistance: passivity, absolute dependence, infantilism. Similarly, the revolutionary theories celebrate the resistance-as-subjects on the part of the masses by taking the practices of emancipation, expression, constitution as a political subject to be valuable and subversive. But by doing so, revolutionary theories face a double problem: first, by infusing meaning into the liberating practice the theory itself turns the masses-as-subjects into masses-as-objects; secondly, having received a voice, the mass always subverts its meaning and in this manner shows its resistance.

The shift from the investigation of the social to the examination of the masses constitutes the necessity on the part of Baudrillard to abandon the sociological quest. This is how Baudrillard himself describes the analysis that *In the Shadows of the Silent Majorities* offers:

> This [SSM] is, therefore, exactly the reverse of a sociological understanding. Sociology can only depict the expansion of the social and its vicissitudes. It survives only on the positive and definitive hypothesis of the social. The reabsorption, the implosion of the social escapes it. The hypothesis of the death of the social is also that of its own death. (SSM, 4)

I take this shift from sociological to "sociological" analysis, from the interpretation of the social to the examination of the masses, to be the most significant difference between Baudrillard's early works and those that he wrote since 1976. From now on, when Baudrillard turns to analyze the same phenomena that he analyzed in his early works, he is forced to re-evaluate and reject his earlier interpretations. For example,

if in his early work "Requiem for the Media" Baudrillard analyzed and condemned the media as the institution of an irreversible model within which communication is a "one way street", or communication *without response*, in his later work "Implosion of Meaning in the Media," Baudrillard is forced to reject this explanation, for it carries the presupposition of alienated subjectivities that have a true voice which is rejected by manipulating powers. In contrast to this *sociological* analysis which is still based on a strategy of power, Baudrillard insists that the absence of response is to be understood as a counter-strategy of the masses in their encounter with power. And yet, Baudrillard does not want to abandon his early conclusions altogether but rather to incorporate them into an implosive conclusion: "[I]s it the media that neutralize meaning and that produces the 'uniformed' (or informed) mass, or is it the mass that victoriously resists the media by diverting or absorbing all the messages which it produces without responding to them"(SSM, 105)? Baudrillard refuses to bet on either of these alternatives and precisely therefore his conclusion is implosive: According to Baudrillard, a clear-cut answer to this question is impossible to obtain. Similarly, "[A]re the mass media on the side of power in the manipulation of the masses, or are they on the side of the masses in the liquidation of meaning, in the violence done to meaning and in the fascination that results" (SSM, 105)? Again, no answer to this alternative is possible. To put it in Hegelian language, it is the *bad infinite,* or *contradiction* that hangs in the air without ever reaching the *ground*, that Baudrillard describes by opposing this analysis to sociological approach.

That is to say, it is not a dialectical synthesis, or as Ricoeur would have it, a

dialectically hermeneutical appropriation of earlier positions into a new category that Baudrillard attempts to depict. As he tells us in *Fatal Strategies*, "the world is not dialectical — it is sworn to extremes, not to equilibrium, sworn to radical antagonism, not to reconciliation or synthesis" (FS, 7). While Baudrillard's early writings are dialectical (their purpose being that of describing the further dialectical development of the system), the works from 1976 onwards declare a definite rupture with dialectic. One wonders: What are the reasons that force Baudrillard to abandon the dialectical quest? But first and foremost, is the abandonment of dialectic possible?

From Dialectic To Implosion

There is at least one obvious difficulty with any attempt to overcome dialectic. According to Hegel, the essential nature of the Absolute Idea is to *return to itself.* The critics who call the Hegelian system "philosophy of death" (Bataille) are justified in as much as death is thought in a Christian manner — that is to say, death is always followed by rebirth. The Absolute Idea must be lost in order to be regained, wasted in order to be redeemed; and it is lost and wasted through radical difference which is the condition of and the protagonist in a dialectical narrative. Hence, any attempt to leave the system aside appears to be a strange, if not paradoxical, enterprise. Any attempt to break out of the system might turn out to be just another reason to believe in its truth. Any attempt to step outside the system might turn out to be just another trap set by Hegel himself — it might turn out to be a negative moment of dialectic. As Hegel tells us in *The Science of*

Logic, "[E]ach new stage of *forthgoing*, that is, of *further determination*, is also a withdrawal inwards, and the greater *extension* is equally a *higher intensity*" (Hegel, 840-841). That is to say, the truth of the system is its process, and the latter lies on the possibility of negation. "Hegel maintains that what is immediate is categorically the poorest, least developed form of truth, while what is mediated is the concrete, explicit and developed form of truth" (Williams, 149). Hence any attempt to overcome dialectic can be likened to "tossing a coin," if not "playing with fire" — it seems to be impossible to predict its outcome. The totality of the system constantly sets traps for any attempt to leave it behind, or overcome it from "outside." The role of negation in a dialectical system *frees* movements towards externality and by doing so it *imprisons* any external attempt to leave the system behind.

Keeping this difficulty in mind, I see Baudrillard's attempt to overcome dialectic as being similar to that of Derrida, especially as presented in "Differance". In this work Derrida argued that although differance has profound affinities with Hegelian speech, it attempts to work out a "sort of displacement" with regard to dialectic. Definitely, a displacement is not a final rupture: "A definite rupture with Hegelian language would make no sense, nor would it be at all likely; but this displacement is both infinitesimal and radical" (Derrida, 145). Derrida attempts to overcome Hegel by following him, by arguing for "Hegelianism without reserve" — by arguing that the power of negation is even stronger than Hegel saw it. If the story that Hegel tells us is essentially a determined story — if the dialectic is essentially a never-ending history of different determinations of

the Absolute Idea — it is precisely the determinate character of Hegelian categories that Derrida attempts to reject. Differance rejects any possibility of categorical determination. As far as differance is the negation of the self one is not left with the possibility to see difference (with an e) as the unfolding of the Idea. "Wouldn't Hegel say that every category could be used as an interpretative scheme for every other? Dialectic *depends* on the open possibility of traversal in all directions and levels" (Lampert, 194). That is to say, Hegel offers an inherently hermeneutic interaction of different interpretations: every category implicitly contains the whole history and every category tells the same story differently. But what Derrida points out is this: every story in this hermeneutical context is essentially a story of determinations. The spatial/temporal differance deconstructs presence not only as primordial, but as *simple and mediated* as well. According to Derrida, *the present cannot be singularly determined.* Its determination is possible only so far as one ignores differance. Differance is a *simulacrum* of presence; it dislocates and refers beyond. It is neither presence nor absence. It can never appear as such: "the trace escapes all determinations, all the names it might receive in the metaphysical text" (Derrida, 158). Hence, differance is neither a name nor a concept and, I should add, not a category either. What is left, according to Derrida, is to affirm the constant play of differences "in the sense that Nietzsche brings affirmation into play — as a certain laughter and a certain dance" (Derrida, 159). Derrida's glance at the ground, as far as it is determined, is a laughing glance: "deconstruction maintains that if the ideal end-point can never be finished, then it can't function *in medias res* either. Hence synthesis will always

be forged, but they may as well generate loose ends, in short, disseminations and aporias" (Lampert, 192). The affirmative laughter of the no-name differance lies beyond dialectic.

A similar strategy is at work in Baudrillard. Just as in the case of Derrida the internal difference of each term prohibits it from being sublated into a singular ground (that is, *Aufhebung* is to be thought of as dissemination rather than as a singular determination), Baudrillard opposes *implosive absorption* to dialectical appropriation. "Strictly speaking, this is what implosion signifies: the absorption of one pole into another, the short-circuit between poles of every differential system of meaning, the effacement of terms and of distinct oppositions, and thus that of the medium and the real" (SSM, 102-103). The shift from the social to the mass is to be understood on the basis of implosion. Just as the Derridian trace, implosion resists dialectical determination, or to put the matter in the "sociological" realm, it resists social identification. It is on the basis of implosion that Baudrillard's ironic remarks like the following are to be understood:

> "[T]hings have found a way of avoiding a dialectic of meaning that was beginning to bore them: by proliferating indefinitely, increasing their potential, outbidding themselves in an ascention to the limit, an obscenity that henceforth becomes their immanent finality and senseless reason" (FS, 7).

Each work that Baudrillard has published since 1976 attempts to depict implosive phenomena in different realms — implosion manifests itself in political, biological, psychological, media domains. On the one hand, first and foremost these descriptions have a negative purpose, for their task is to show the impotence of any analysis that does not question the status of presuppositions, or conceptual tools, that are at work. In this respect Baudrillard's writings are deconstructive as long as deconstruction signifies a

project of critical "interpretation" that sees its task in locating and taking apart the axioms which command the unfolding of any text. Precisely the collapsing of the two traditional poles into one another is at the center of Baudrillard's attention: "IMPLOSION — an absorption of the radiating model of causality, of the differential model of determination, with its positive and negative electricity — an implosion of meaning. *This is where simulation begins*" (S, 57). On the other hand, this analysis is not merely negative, and not only because the shift from the *textual* to the *contextual* analysis carries with it the possibility of critical re-evaluation of the phenomena at hand. Just as the Derridian *differance* is to be *affirmed* with a Nietzschean laughter and a Nietzschean dance, implosion is not merely a theoretical weapon to fight traditional analysis. It is not a new theoretical framework with the help of which phenomena are to be approached but vice versa, the phenomena themselves manifest implosion and therefore require a new context of understanding. Implosion in the media can serve as an example here: the collapse of the medium and what is mediated does not stem from theoretical imagination; rather "there is no longer any medium in the literal sense: it is now intangible, diffuse and diffracted in the real, and it can no longer even be said that the latter is distorted by it" (S, 54). The medium itself is no longer identifiable: when Marshal McLuhan proclaimed that the medium is the message he offered "the first great formula of this new age" (S, 54).

The Emergence of Post-perspectivism

According to McLuhan, any analysis that does not take into consideration the medium within which the question at hand manifests itself is inevitably a partial analysis. Therefore to interpret phenomena merely thematically is to do today's job with yesterday's tools. However, McLuhan is not merely reiterating a wide-spread phenomenological fact that any analysis is to be, as Husserl used to say, a horizonal analysis, that each and every perception is as well apperception, that each presence is an appresentative presence. What interests McLuhan is not so much a description of the necessary structures of transcendental consciousness but rather technological shifts in horizonal nature of the social, or to be more precise, technological, experience: "Societies have always been shaped more by the nature of the media by which men communicate than by the content of the communication" (McLuhan, 8). Without knowledge of how the media works, McLuhan insists, it is impossible to understand the present social and cultural changes. This is the case because all media "work us over completely": "[T]hey are so pervasive in their personal, political, economical, aesthetic, psychological, moral, ethical, and social consequences that they leave no part of us untouched, unaffected, unaltered" (McLuhan, 26). That is to say, it is impossible to isolate a phenomenon from the context within which it manifests itself and any analysis that does not take this into consideration fails. To say that the medium is the message is to say that an analysis of any social phenomenon is to be a contextual analysis, an interpretation that is *first and foremost* directed at the medium that brings the phenomenon forth.

But how is an analysis of the medium possible? How is it philosophically

possible to address a "phenomenon" which essentially is not an object but rather that which makes objects possible? If consciousness is by definition intentional as Husserl would say, or if it is essentially perspectival as Nietzsche would have it, i.e., if it is always directed at objects, how is it possible to address the context within which experience is present? This is a post-perspectival question that I addressed in a Nietzschean context in the last chapter and to which I turn once again. I have tried to show that for Nietzsche to ask this question is simply to lapse back into an outdated metaphysical context, and at the same time I attempted to indicate that this question inevitably needs to be addressed. To my mind, McLuhan reveals on the social level how a post-perspectival question can be meaningfully asked in a post-Platonic context. Furthermore, it is precisely this post-Nietzschean analysis of the medium that is celebrated by Baudrillard as "the great formula of the new age."

This is McLuhan's suggestion: "all media are extensions of some human faculty — psychic or physical" (McLuhan, 26). I take this to be McLuhan's post-perspectival answer to the Nietzschean problem: the context and the text, or the medium and the message, are to be seen and accounted for in a reversible relation. Any technological invention is an extension of certain senses: the wheel is the extension of the foot, the book is the extension of the eye, clothing, an extension of the skin. That is to say, on the one hand the genesis of the content of the different media lead back to our experience; on the other hand, our experience is always given in a certain medium. This, however, is only part of the story. Each extension of the sense has its counterpart — amputation. For

example, the appearance of the alphabet intensifies the operation of vision and suppresses the operation of other senses. That is to say, the medium alters the environment and evokes in us unique ratios of sense perception. "When these ratios change, men change" (McLuhan, 41). Whenever one sense is extended, the way we think and act, the way we perceive the world, is altered. Hence, each over-extension of technology has its danger and the task of McLuhan's investigation is to reveal both what is gained as well as what is lost by the appearance of a certain medium. According to McLuhan, this can be achieved by asking the following four questions: (1) what does the medium enhance or intensify? (2) what does it render obsolete or displace? (3) what does it retrieve what was previously obsolesced? (4) what does it produce or become when pressed to the extreme?[30]

According to McLuhan, the introduction of the *phonetic alphabet* formed a particular model that shaped the whole Western history for some three thousand years: "a medium that depends on the eye of comprehension" (McLuhan, 44). The fact that the alphabet is strung together out of fragmented bits and parts which have no meaning on their own "fostered and encouraged the habit of perceiving all environment in visual and spatial terms — particularly in terms of a space and of a time that are uniform" (McLuhan, 44). The same structure, McLuhan tells us, that is found in the alphabet is later to be encountered in different forms of logic — they all depend on a sequential presentation of facts and concepts. Although rationality and visuality have long been

---

[30] See McLuhan's *Laws of Media*.

interchangeable terms, "we do not live in a primarily visual world any more" (McLuhan, 45).

However, even if it is possible to live in a primarily visual world, the world is not primarily visual. "Until writing was invented, man lived in acoustic space: boundless, directionless, horizonless, in the dark of the mind, in the world of emotion, by primordial intuition, by terror" (McLuhan, 48). A detailed account of what this primary world is like is lacking in McLuhan. Furthermore, the substitution of the visual world with the acoustic one is highly doubtful: this might turn out to be merely a reversal of what McLuhan terms "the Western history," a reversal which is never an overcoming, but rather a deeper dependence. Nevertheless, even if one does not take McLuhan at face value, even if his "description" of the acoustic model is not convincing, the account that he gives of the visual medium is revealing. The actual possibility to step beyond it, whether it is seen as a description of the present social situation or as a description of certain phenomena that will reveal the birth of a new model in the future, opens up new possibilities for interpretation within the social (as well as the "social") sphere. Not only is a merely thematic interpretation not sufficient; it is not sufficient anymore merely to indicate the context of analysis, it is necessary to show a possible conflict between different contexts and to account for the latter. According to McLuhan himself, the present social situation is that of a major shift in the mediums: in contrast to the long history of the West, our situation is that of all-at-once-ness:

> "Time" has ceased, "space" has vanished. We now live in a global village...a simultaneous happening. We are back in acoustic space. We have begun again to

> structure the primordial feeling, the tribal emotions from which a few centuries of literacy divorced us. (McLuhan, 63)

To be sure, this conclusion is not the reason why Baudrillard returns to McLuhan's writings. In Baudrillard's reading of McLuhan, "the medium is the message" signifies the necessity to step beyond dialectic and Marxism. But does McLuhan essentially escape a dialectical appropriation? The appropriation of McLuhan by the situationists reveals that this is clearly not the case.

In *The Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, Guy Debord undertook a dialectical approach toward what McLuhan termed the shift from the visual world to the acoustic. According to Debord, this shift is to be understood in specifically dialectical terms — it is a further determination of the reign of the spectacle. If for some time the social manifested two rival and successive forms of spectacular powers — that of *the concentrated* and of *the diffuse*, we are now witnessing the birth of a new form, of the sublation of the latter — of the *integrated spectacle*. Five principal features characterize the appearance of the integrated spectacle: (1) incessant technological renewal; (2) the integration of the state and of the economy; (3) generalized secrecy; (4) unanswerable lies; (5) an eternal present (Debord, 11-12). But first and foremost the integrated spectacle manifests the reign of the immediate. However, while Debord is in full agreement with McLuhan's characterization of the present social situation in terms of simultaneity and immediacy, he does not share the optimism that McLuhan expressed concerning this shift. Furthermore, Debord does not see the latter as a return to a certain primordial world, whether one terms it 'acoustic' or looks for a better determination of it,

but rather as a further dialectical expansion of the spectacle. "When social significance is attributed only to what is immediate, and to what will be immediate immediately afterwards, always replacing another, identical, immediacy, it can be seen that the uses of the media guarantee a kind of eternity of noisy insignificance" (Debord, 15). Far from being a world that requires full participation of everyone, a world that has so little of "what can be assigned to some individual," a world in which each 'something' is "shared by everyone" (McLuhan, 61), as McLuhan saw it, the integrated spectacle is to be understood not in terms of emancipation, but rather in terms of a stronger alienation and a more subtle manipulation. A step into the global village is not a step into the "world of full involvement in which everybody is so profoundly involved with everybody else and in which nobody can really imagine what private guilt is anymore" (McLuhan, 61): "agora is gone," (Debord, 19) "spectacular discourse leaves no room for no reply" (Debord, 29). The "global village" first and foremost signifies the secret domination of this world. Debord is quick to point out that the global village, like any village, is characterized by pettiness, boredom, gossip: "villages, unlike towns, have always been ruled by conformism, isolation, petty surveillance, boredom, and repetitive malicious gossip about the same families" (Debord, 34). Hence far from being a return to the lost human nature, the global village for Debord is merely a more subtle manipulation and alienation of the human nature.

Baudrillard shares Debord's skepticism concerning McLuhan's euphoric description of the global village. As Mark Nunes rightly points out, "In place of

McLuhan's utopia of the 'global village,' Baudrillard sees the hyperreal world of immediacy as a cold desolate realm of communication and information. Instead of providing a 'universalization,' these media create a satellization" (Nunes).[31] And yet, Baudrillard does not see a dialectical forthgoing as a good alternative to McLuhan's optimism. Indeed, Baudrillard sees McLuhan's formula as a step beyond post-Marxist analysis that Debord offers: "We are no longer in the society of spectacle which the situationists talked about, nor in the specific types of alienation and repression which this implied" (S, 54). What are the reasons that underlie Baudrillard's claim? Why can't we understand the present situation as a further form of alienation?

The theme of alienation extends within the space of meaning, or what Baudrillard himself calls the 'order of the real': it is the *real* voice, or the *true* sight (as McLuhan would have it), that is rejected by manipulating power. But McLuhan's analysis of the medium first and foremost addresses not the themes within the order of the real; his question is rather that of *how the order of the real comes to be.* If the creation of reality's models is inseparable from amputation, the theme of alienation becomes both meaningless and redundant. Meaningless, for the real non-alienated voice, or the non-amputated extension of the senses, is unimaginable. Redundant, for alienation becomes inescapable. Hence, as far as the theme of alienation indicates the possibility of authentic true identity beyond external 'manipulation', alienation loses its meaning. On the other

---

[31] By satellization Baudrillard understands a state of over-proximity to a simulated, transparent world. See e.g. *Fatal Strategies,* p. 7-25, as well as *The Ecstasy of Communication,* p. 27.

hand, Baudrillard does not simply argue that McLuhan's formula indicates the disappearance of alienation. It rather indicates the inescapable proliferation of alienation without the faintest possibility, as Nietzsche had it, to lift its last veil and to reveal what hides behind it. That is to say, Baudrillard challenges the theme of alienation because of the artificial nature of its opposite — that of the absolute freedom from anything alien.

Images, in contrast to Debord's spectacles, are subject to no principle of truth or reality. Therefore, as Paul Patton rightly points out, any attempt to maintain a moral defense against them misses the point.[32] In contrast to Debord's moral accusation of the new order of the spectacle, Baudrillard maintains that this new order lies beyond moral argumentation, for it lies beyond representation: "We believe that they immorally pervert images. Not so. They alone are conscious of the profound immorality of images... (GWD, 47). Once again, it is in McLuhan that Baudrillard finds support for this position.

While the theme of alienation is found within the order of the real, for Baudrillard McLuhan's slogan *the medium is the message* indicates the birth of a new order — that of the *hyperreal.* To say, as McLuhan does, that all media are extensions of human faculties and that the media alter the environment by evoking in us unique ratios of perception, is to say that things are never given to us the way they *truly* are.[33] Not only is this the case because the horizon within which a certain experience is given alters the actual givenness.

---

[32] See Patton's introduction to Baudrillard's *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place.*

[33] This is the case not only because hyperreality signifies the disappearance of things in themselves. It as well signifies the end of any type of representation: I can never step outside the model and determine my relation to "things" within it. As Baudrillard says in *Impossible Exchange*, "[C]ritical thought sees itself as holding up a mirror to the world, but the world knows no mirror stage" (IE, 23).

To say, as McLuhan does, that the alphabet intensifies the operation of vision and suppresses other senses, is to say that the alphabet is no longer a thing among others, but that it leads a different 'existence.' It becomes the real which is as well that which makes the real possible — it is both a text and the context, or a thing which no longer is merely a thing; the medium which no longer represents things, but rather envelops them by altering their existence. Therefore the medium itself is no longer the real, but rather the hyperreal — more than the real — for it is both a phenomenon and that which makes phenomena possible. It is both the real and the imaginary, for it is never as such encountered merely within the context of the real.

McLuhan's account of the media shares quite a few structural affinities with Nietzsche's perspectivism. Just as the physiological, socio-historical, and impulse dependence of perspectives indicates the impossibility of things-in-themselves, similarly, within the context of McLuhan's media, no talk of a radical independence of things is possible. And yet, if Nietzsche's perspectivism signifies the birth of the order of meaning, according to Baudrillard McLuhan's media indicate the disappearance of meaning. This is the case because media "work us over completely" — they envelop not only phenomena but subjectivities as well.

I have indicated in the previous chapter that on Shrift's account Nietzsche's perspectives are inevitable, indispensable, and 'false.' To my mind Baudrillard offers a specific answer to how the 'falsity' of perspectives is to be accounted for. His answer, however, is as well a post-perspectival detour from the perspectival dead-end into which

Nietzsche is led. For Baudrillard, *the medium is the message* signifies the precession and circulation of the model. By placing the interpreter and what is interpreted within the confines of the model, Baudrillard offers the following answer to the double problem of perspectivism that I have analyzed in the first chapter: it is the circulation of the model that links the interpreter to what is interpreted; the question how different centers of force interrelate is no longer problematic, for they are all enveloped within the confines of the model. That is to say, perspectives are false, because they essentially lie beyond the order of truth. This is the case because perspectivism inevitably presupposes a post-perspectival background. Images are characterized by the precession of the model: "the models come first, and their orbital circulation constitutes the genuine magnetic field of events" (S, 32). 'True' or 'false' perspectives depend neither on the subject, nor on the phenomena themselves, but rather on that which envelops phenomena and subjectivities — the circulation of the models. But how is the precession and circulation of models to be understood? This is the guiding question of the following chapter.

* * *

If Baudrillard's placement within a Marxist context reveals the irreconcilable differences between the early and the later Baudrillard, placing Baudrillard in a Nietzschean context reveals what the early and the later Baudrillard share. We encounter the Nietzschean intuitions of the interpreted nature of subjectivity, of subjectivity as multiplicity, of the distinction between bipolarity and duality, as well as the distinction

between the textual and the genealogical in all works of Baudrillard. By elaborating on these intuitions, the later Baudrillard turns against the conclusions of his earlier works, for the latter still presuppose the context of subjectivist thought.

Baudrillard's turn from sociological to "sociological" analysis, from the examination of the social to the examination of the masses, indicates the abandonment of the Marxist context. While in his early writings Baudrillard approaches Marxism thematically, from the *Mirror of Production* onward Marxism is approached contextually — Baudrillard's question is no longer that of deciphering the dialectical forthgoing within the social sphere but rather that of uncovering Marxist presuppositions. The shift from the theme of radical difference to that of radical indifference signifies the abandonment of subjectivism that was still prevalent in his early writings. This, however, signifies the abandonment of the dialectical approach and its replacement with the theme of implosion. Implosion signifies the birth of a new order — that of the hyperreal. The hyperreal presupposes the precession of the model which can be seen both as a further elaboration of what lies implicit in Nietzschean perspectivism as well as its criticism: The circulation of the model is Baudrillard's post-perspectival answer to the double problem of perspectivism that was analyzed in the first chapter.

CHAPTER III

BAUDRILLARD'S GENEALOGY: FROM SIMULACRA TO IMPOSSIBLE EXCHANGE

What does it mean to say that Baudrillard's abandonment of Marxism goes hand in hand with the further elaboration of the Nietzschean intuitions that we encounter already in his early works? On the one hand, it means to rethink the common approach to the early Baudrillard as a Marxist, on the other hand, this re-reading requires that we no longer approach the themes that Baudrillard brings forth in the later works as springing from the Marxist context. Hence in the last chapter I tried to bring these themes forth by showing (1) that although the early Baudrillard grapples with the Marxist notions, his early works neither are nor attempt to be conclusive, and (2) that the later themes (e.g., those of the masses, implosion, hyperreality and the medium) are not to be read in a Marxist or a post-Marxist context. But this is the context in which Baudrillard's work is most commonly situated. As Douglas Kellner has it, in *The Mirror of Production* and in *The Symbolic Exchange and Death* "Baudrillard continues to situate his work within a problematic of 'critical' and 'revolutionary' social theory, in contrast to his later 'postmodern' works, which enter into a completely different theoretical universe and attempt to take a radical social theory and politics into a new post-Marxian problematic" (Kellner, 33). In contrast to this approach which sees Baudrillard as a Marxist and a post-Marxist, I approach the leading Baudrillardian themes as springing from specifically

Nietzschean intuitions.[34]

The full significance of this re-reading of Baudrillard is to be witnessed while approaching the themes of simulacra and seduction. Just as bracketing the designation of Baudrillard's early works as Marxian reveals what the Baudrillards of the '60s and the '70s share, so placing Baudrillard's later works in a non-Marxist context reveals both the divergences and the convergences between semiological and fatal strategies. The task of this chapter is neither to approach the semiological and the fatal Baudrillard in relation to Marxist themes, nor is it an attempt to argue for or against Baudrillard's semiology. I shall attempt to bring forth the themes of simulacra and seduction as genealogical analyses which will reveal the three orders of the image and seduction as not merely following each other but as existing simultaneously and preceding each other as well. It is my contention that Baudrillard's placement in a Marxist context cannot come to terms with this richness of semiological and fatal strategies. [35]

To be sure, the genealogical practice both links Baudrillard to Nietzsche and signifies his difference from Nietzsche. There are three central differences: (1) While

---

[34] See Chapter II, p. 55-57.

[35] Kellner, for instance, argues that "the crux of Baudrillard's critique of the Left in France, as well as of its Rightist 'new philosopher' critics, is that they fail to grasp the profound changes going on in society and politics and the growing role of the media, simulations, information and massification..." (Kellner, 59). This analysis sees Baudrillardian themes on a sociological level: within this context the themes of simulacra and seduction are placed within the realm of the "arrow of history" as if they merely followed the age of production.

Nietzsche's genealogy is guided by the will to truth[36], Baudrillard's genealogical inquiry manifests the abandonment of truth. (2) While Nietzsche's genealogical question is that of the self, Baudrillard's genealogical question is ultimately that of the Object. (3) While Nietzsche's genealogy leads to the differential element that gives rise to values, Baudrillard's genealogy attempts to disclose fundamental indifference beneath the layer of difference, uncertainty as the absolute horizon. But these differences notwithstanding, Baudrillard's attempt to disclose the "logic" of the image's history and to account for how this logic is possible deserves the name of genealogy.

Genealogy

Genealogical practice is an attempt to clarify our commitment to truth and at the same time it is driven by the commitment to truth. The object of genealogy coincides with the motive that underlies the genealogical undertaking: in both cases we are dealing with "the *fundamental will* of knowledge." This circularity allows one to insist that *genealogy is always the genealogy of itself*: being driven by the will to truth and being directed at "us, the men of knowledge," it attempts to clarify this will to knowledge.

Not by chance does Nietzsche start his *Genealogy of Morals* by addressing the question of the self: "[W]e are unknown to ourselves, we men of knowledge — and with good reason" (GM, 1). As Nietzsche explains, we have never sought ourselves, we have

---

[36] As Havas argues throughout his *Nietzsche's Genealogy: Nihilism and the Will to Knowledge*, the practice of genealogy counts for Nietzsche as obedience to the will to truth.

never asked the question "who *are* we really?" and therefore "we are necessarily strangers to ourselves...we *have* to misunderstand ourselves, for us the law 'Each is furthest from himself' applies to all eternity — we are not men of knowledge in respect to ourselves" (GM, 1). *The fundamental question of Nietzschean genealogy is that of the self* — that of the commitment to truth, which is what we are.

The fact that Nietzsche addresses the *origin* of the self by asking the question of value and the value of values indicates the *historical* nature of the self: the history of values determines our conception and misconception of the self. As Randall Havas rightly indicates, "the point of arguing that our commitment to truthfulness has a history is...not to show that it is a merely contingent development, but rather to show that the hold that value has upon us is in some way fateful for who we are" (Havas, 179). When Nietzsche asks whether something other than the will to knowledge could matter to us, he responds to it with another question: us as opposed to whom? That is to say, the question of the self necessarily involves the question of the history of the self, for the self is a historical achievement, a self with "inheritance." Furthermore, the question of the origin of the self does not precede its history, but rather *is* its history — it is the "logic" of the historical development of the self that Nietzsche attempts to disclose.

One might find Nietzsche's claim that we have never sought ourselves surprising, for it is preceded by two centuries of subjectivist philosophy, i.e., that philosophy which asks the question of the ego. But the self is not necessarily an epistemological ego and in Nietzsche's case, it is by far not clear whether the self can be called an ego in any sense

one pleases. As Nietzsche points out in *Genealogy of Morals*, "our ideas, our values, our yeas and nays, our ifs and buts, grow out of us with the necessity with which a tree bears fruit — related and each with an affinity to each, and evidence of *one* will, *one* health, *one* soil, *one* sun" (GM, 2). Nietzsche terms this oneness (which just as much is difference) *the Will to Power* and insists that it is the Will to Power that interprets itself.

Indeed, by asking the question of the self, Nietzsche "denounces the soul, the 'ego' and egoism as the last refuges of atomism" (Deleuze, 7). What genealogy uncovers is not a self as ego, but rather the *differential element* from which values and the value of values spring. By asking the question of origin, Nietzsche is not attempting to disclose a unity which underlies difference: "[T]he origin is the difference in the origin, difference in the origin is *hierarchy*,...the relation of a dominant to a dominated force, of an obeyed to the obeying will" (Deleuze, 8). The genealogical undertaking is opposed to absolute values, it signifies the differential element of values. This internal difference of the origin is the second reason why *genealogy is always the genealogy of itself.* Genealogy is both origin, birth and the distance within the origin. It is hard to overestimate how significant the concept of genealogy as the revaluation of values is for Nietzsche: Not only is it a promise of new values for the future, but a prospect of a new organization of sciences and of philosophy as well.

Just as the genealogical search for the self is not a search for the ego, so the genealogical search for origins is opposed to the metaphysical search for *arche*. Genealogy "opposes itself to the search for 'origins'" (Foucault, 77), for it rejects the

metahistorical deployment of indefinite teleologies. That is to say, there are at least two senses of the term "origin" in Nietzsche, and on occasion these senses are placed in opposition to one another: "[T]he miraculous origin (*Wunderursprung*) sought by metaphysics is set against the analyses of historical philosophy, which poses questions *über Herkunft und Anfang*" (ibid). Nietzsche rejects the metaphysical pursuit of the origin for it attempts to capture the exact essence of things. In contrast to this search, which assumes the existence of immobile forms, genealogy attempts to uncover the origin not outside, but within history. Hence genealogy does not oppose itself to history for "history teaches how to laugh at the solemnities of the origin" (Foucault, 79).

However, just as there are at least two sense of the term "origin" in Nietzsche, so there are at least two sense of the term "history". On the one hand, genealogy as the search for origins is not an attempt to go back in time to restore a unity or an essence; genealogy does not neglect the vicissitudes of history and therefore it does not confuse itself with the search for the "origins" of values and knowledge. But on the other hand Nietzsche writes: "I can't stand these lustful eunuchs of history, all the seductions of an ascetic ideal; I can't stand these blanched tombs producing life or those tired and indifferent being who dress up in the part of wisdom and adopt an objective point of view" (GM, III, 26). Hence just as it is opposed to the search for timeless origins, so genealogy is a systematic dismantling of the constructions of the "comprehensive views of history." Together with Foucault we can distinguish between traditional history and *wirkliche Historie*: While the former "aims at dissolving the singular event into an ideal

continuity.... 'effective' history deals with events in terms of their most unique characteristics, their most acute manifestations" (Foucault, 88). While traditional history (rationalistic or theological) falls under the demands of a suprahistorical history, "effective history is explicit in its perspective and acknowledges its system of injustice" (Foucault, 90). While traditional history is guided by an attempt to give unity to difference, to avoid confusions by placing events within "the arrow of history," "effective history...shortens its vision to those things nearest to it....it unearths the periods of decadence, and if it chances upon lofty epochs, it is with the suspicion...of finding a barbarous and shameful confusion" (Foucault, 89).

Let me turn to Baudrillard's genealogy of simulacra and seduction with an attempt to show that these distinctions between the two senses of the terms "origin" and "history" are just as significant to Baudrillard as they are to Nietzsche. Although Baudrillard has never explicitly stated that his works are genealogical, in this chapter I shall expose the themes of simulacra and impossible exchange as genealogical undertakings. I shall show that the questions of the origin, the difference within the origin, and the unfolding of the origin are fully justified in Baudrillard's narrative. Furthermore, I shall show that the same structure of reversibility underlies both Nietzsche's and Baudrillard's genealogies.

Three Orders of the Image

Symbolic Exchange and Death is the first work that can be seen as a genealogical

undertaking for it is here that Baudrillard first informs us of the three orders of the image and their parallels to the mutations of the law of value. The first order is that of *counterfeit* — the dominant schema of the 'classical' period, which operates on the natural law of value. The second order of the image is that of *production* — the dominant schema of the industrial era, which operates on the market law of value. The third order is that of *simulation* — the dominant schema in the current code-governed phase, which operates on the structural law of value.[37]

The signs that attract Baudrillard's attention are of social nature: signs that refer to social configuration, social practices and functions as well as to social identity. While the signs of the "feudal order," the "bourgeois order," "society based on rank" as well as the "cast society" are characterized by overt distinctions — they are obligatory, unequivocal, immobile — counterfeit signifies the appearance of liberated, equivocal, mobile and arbitrary signs.[38] Counterfeit — the first order of simulacrum — indicates the emancipation of signs. Signs are no longer limited in number and their circulation is no longer restricted: "[T]he arbitrariness of the sign begins when, instead of bonding two persons in an inescapable reciprocity, the signifier starts to refer to a disenchanted universe of the signified, the common denominator of the real world, towards which no-one any longer has the least obligation" (SED, 50).

The *emancipated* signs replace the *obligatory* ones — competitive democracy

---

[37] See *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, p. 50.

[38] Signs before Renaissance are "protected by a prohibition which ensures their total clarity and confers an unequivocal status of each" (SED, 50).

replaces the endogamy of signs. The fact that now every class can participate in the game of each sign, that the values or signs of prestige transfer from one class to another, signifies the necessary appearance of the counterfeit: it is not the restricted sign within which each class participates, but rather its counterfeit. However, counterfeit does not change the 'original' but rather indicates its extension.[39] The emancipated sign still gives the appearance that it is bound to the world, for it "dreams of its predecessor, and would dearly love to rediscover an *obligation* in its reference to the real" (SED, 51). This dream, this designatory bond, however, indicates that *the emancipated sign is merely a simulacrum of the symbolic obligation.* "The sign suffers the same fate as labor, for just as the 'free' worker is only free to produce equivalents, the 'free and emancipated' sign is only free to produce equivalent signifieds" (ibid).

That is to say, simulacrum of the first order is that of the lack of equivalence between signs and what they attempt to designate, it is the inescapable failure of representation in its attempt to capture the being of the original. The value of the modern sign is that of the simulacrum of 'nature': the forgery and the natural go hand in hand, "ranging from the deceptive finery on people's backs to the prosthetic fork, from the stucco interiors to Baroque theatrical scenery" (ibid). The first order simulacrum signifies the "metaphysics of the counterfeit," the ambitions of the "earthly *demiurgy.*" Although

---

[39] Baudrillard's primary example is that of stucco: "In the churches and palaces, stucco embraces all forms, imitates all materials: velvet curtains, wooden cornices, and fleshy curves of the body. Stucco transfigures all this incredible material disorder into a single new substance, a sort of general equivalent for all the others, accruing a theatrical prestige, since it is itself a representative substance, a mirror of all the others" (SED, 52).

it still works with substances and forms, "it is already aiming at control of a pacified society" (SED, 53), for the dream of the demiurge is that of a synthetic substance of the counterfeit which evades death and therefore guarantees eternal power.[40] The project of the first order simulacrum aims at "political and mental hegemony," at a closed mental substance: "here is something we did not expect: a simulacrum in which the project of a universal semiotics is condensed" (SED, 53). However, only later, with the appearance of the third order simulacrum — with the establishment of the closed system of signs and with the abolishment of reference — will the universal semiotics come on stage.

The passage from the first-order to the second-order simulacra is the passage from the natural law of value to the market law of value: The technical principle replaces the principle of imitation, production replaces counterfeit. No more questioning of nature, no more differentiation between being and appearance: the second order simulacrum is ruled by the principle of operativity, by mechanical efficiency. Baudrillard presents the difference between these two orders of simulacra by opposing the automaton (which we encounter in the first order) to the robot (which is the protagonist of the second order): "the automaton is the *analogon* of man and remains responsive to him....The machine is the *equivalent* of man, appropriating him to itself as an equal in the unity of a functional

---

[40] Baudrillard exemplifies this point by telling a story of an old cook in Ardennes who attempted to capture the world as God had left it by eliminating its wild spontaneity. This, however, can be achieved by a replacement of all God's creations with a single polymorphous material: reinforced concrete. "Concrete furniture, chairs, chests of drawers, concrete sewing machines; and outside, in the courtyard, an entire orchestra, including the violins, in concrete. Everything in concrete! Concrete trees planted out with genuine leaves, a reinforced concrete boar with a real boar's skull inside it, concrete sheep covered in real wool" (SED, 52). This type of a transubstantiating dream is paradigmatic of the first order simulacrum. Within the confines of the first order of the image, the implication of a unified mental substance signifies the appearance of control and power.

process" (SED, 53). While analogy still implies a difference between the technical and the natural realm and signifies the hierarchical privilege of the natural order, we witness a reversal of value with the appearance of the second order simulacrum: the technical principle wins over the principle of imitation by abolishing any possible reference to what is outside the mechanical unfolding. This is the central difference between the two orders.

"No more semblance or disemblance, no more God or Man, only an immanent logic of the principle of operativity" (SED, 54). The latter erects a reality without any reference, without any differentiation between being and appearance: the second order simulacrum signifies not only the disappearance of subjectivity as principle, but the liquidation of the real as well. If in the first order simulacrum the unfolding of signs is restricted by their reference to the real, the abolishment of this reference — the passage from counterfeit to products — signifies the proliferation of signs. If the reference to the real gives meaning to the first order simulacra, the second order simulacra have meaning only within the dimension of their mechanical *proliferation*. No more origins of signs — technics is their origin: we witness a possibility of *n* identical objects. The relation between the latter is not that of origin and its counterfeit but rather of *equivalence* and *indifference*. Hence signs of the second order are no longer simulacra of their origin (as is the case in the first order) but rather simulacra of each other. The extinction of reference indicates the general law of equivalences — the very possibility of production: "In the series, objects become indistinct simulacra of one another and, along with objects,

of the men that produce them" (SED, 55).

However, to say that the second order simulacra are capable of indefinite proliferation, that they have meaning only within the series of identical products, is to say that at bottom the principle of production is nothing else than the principle of reproduction. Or as Baudrillard has it, "[T]he fabulous energies at work in technics, industry and economics should not hide the fact that it is at bottom only a matter of attaining this indefinite reproducibility, which is a definite challenge to the 'natural' order..." (ibid). That is to say, the only meaning that production has is that of reproduction.

Walter Benjamin was the first to notice that the principle of production is subsumed by the principle of reproduction. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" is an attempt to count the implications of reproduction: in the spheres of art, cinema and photography, reproduction changes the goals of production, alters the status of the product and the producer. This work is of crucial importance for Baudrillard's narrative: Benjamin, Baudrillard tells us, stands on the borders of reproduction and simulation:

> It is at the level of reproduction (fashion, the media, advertising, information and communications networks), at the level of what Marx rather carelessly used to call the *faux frais* of capital (immense historical irony!), that is, in the sphere of simulacra and the code, that the unity of the whole process of capital is formed. Benjamin was also the first (with McLuhan after him) to grasp technology as a medium rather than a 'productive force' (at which point the Marxian analysis retreats), as the form and principle of an entirely new generation of meaning. (SED, 56)

Benjamin stands at the borders of reproduction and simulation, for as soon as

reproduction is *recognized* as the principle of production, the gate from serial production to the generation through models is opened. "[A]ll forms change from the moment that they are no longer mechanically reproduced, but *conceived according to their very reproducibility*, their diffraction from a generative core called a 'model'" (ibid). The genesis of the code and simulation is the very possibility of mechanical production, or in other words, the third order simulacrum subsumes the second order.

The passage from the second to the third order simulacrum is a passage to a new operational configuration: we pass from the market law of value to the structural law of value; from efficiency as principle to structural polarity; from reproduction to modulation; from injunction to disjunction; from general equivalence to the form of distinct oppositions. If the second order signs are ruled by the technical principle, *digitality* is the metaphysical principle of the third order simulacrum. But most important, the passage to the third order simulacrum is the passage to the 'precession of the model': digitality indicates the "metaphysics of indeterminacy and the code" (SED, 57).

The third order sign — our sign — is digital and programmatic. It indicates an ever more forceful extermination of reference, for the third order sign "has a purely *tactical* value" (that of the DNA model), it "has the structure of a micro-molecular code of command and control" (ibid).

Baudrillard likens the precession of the model to the molecule emitting signals which irradiate us, for we are continuously tested by the program which is hardwired into

our own cells: "[W]e are always searching for the smallest indivisible element, the organic synthesis of which will follow in accordance with the givens of the code" (SED, 58). The code itself is "a genetic, generative cell" producing all the questions and at the same time all the possible solutions to them — this, Baudrillard tells us, is the status of a sign at the end of signification: "[C]ybernetic control, generation through models, differential modulation, feedback, question/answer, etc.: this is the *new operational* configuration" (SED, 57).

DNA is the prophet of the third order simulacrum. Its structure *contains* information transmitted through *reproduction* and it is endowed with the capacity to *reproduce itself* indefinitely. Baudrillard takes safe distance from evaluating the possible implications of what lies implicit in this biological structure. His purpose is rather to see what significance these implications have been granted. He is quick to point out Thomas Sebeok's analysis, for the latter drew attention to the convergences of genetics and linguistics as autonomous and yet parallel disciplines. According to Sebeok, the fact that terminology of genetics is full of expressions taken from linguistics is no coincidence:

> Today it is clear that the genetic code must be considered as the most basic semiotic network, and therefore as the prototype of all the other systems of signification used by the animals, including man....It is possible to describe both language or living systems from a unifying cybernetic point of view. A reciprocal rapprochement between genetics, animal communication and linguistics may lead to a complete science of the dynamics of semiosis, which science may turn out, in the final analysis, to be nothing other than a definition of life. (Sebeok, also quoted in SED, 59)

This is the outline of the current strategic model: Life is now ruled by the indeterminacy of the genetic code. We have passed from teleology to prediction, for

finality is no longer encountered at the end (hence, there is no longer any finality and therefore no determinacy), but rather at the beginning, finality being there "in advance, inscribed in the code" (ibid). This is our biological nature — "a phantasm of nature in fact, as it has always been, no longer a metaphysical sanctuary for the origin and substance, but this time, for the code" (ibid). There is no longer any social control by means of the *end* (i.e. social control is no longer dialectical) but rather by means of prediction, programmed anticipation. The system itself puts an end to all referential values, to the myth of origins and to the myth of its end (hence, we are beyond the stage of revolution).

To be sure, the genetic code is not only encountered in the laboratory of the scientists, it shows itself at the most banal levels of daily life. Baudrillard attempts to locate it in the concrete form of the test, the question/answer, the stimulus-response. Here we witness the same tactical indeterminacy within which the cycles of meaning become infinitely shorter. The test, Baudrillard tells us, is the fundamental social form of control, for whether we look at billboards or TV advertisements, "everywhere supply devours demand, the question devours the answer, either absorbing and regurgitating it in a decodable form, or inventing it and anticipating its predictable corroboration" (SED, 62). A test is a pure form of simulation: the answer to the question is *design-ated* in advance, the question induces the answer. Therefore every reading of a message becomes a perpetual test of the code: "the object today is no longer 'functional' in the traditional sense of the term; it doesn't serve you, it *tests* you" (SED, 63).

Just like the object, a human being is no longer functional either. In relation to the precession of the model, Baudrillard presents the relation between the subject and the object in reversible terms. Just as we test reality, reality tests us in return and it does that "according to the same score-card." The passage from the second to the third order simulacrum indicates that we are no longer users, but rather "readers, selectors, reading cells. But beware, since by the same token you are yourself constantly selected and tested by the medium" (SED, 64). 'Public opinion' — not an autonomous group, but a sample — is the finest example of this reversal. Baudrillard calls it a hyperreal political substance, "the fantastic hyperreality which survives only by editing and manipulation by the test" (ibid).

McLuhan's slogan "the medium is the message" is of utmost importance here: public opinion is both a medium and a message. The binary question/answer implodes the distinction between the medium and the message, between the real and the imaginary. The logic of the model is that of the *montage*. Opinions within the realm of opinion polls are no longer produced, but rather reproduced following the narrow question/answer schema. Hence "it is no longer possible to obtain a *non-simulated response* to a direct question" (SED, 67), for the questioned always behave in accordance with the projected image of the questioner.

The appearance of the third order simulacrum signifies the elision of meaning and this I take to be the most significant philosophical implication of "the current image phase." While meaning belongs to the sphere of *presencing*, to the perspectival sphere,

the reduction of meaning signifies the passage from perspectivism to post-perspectivism. While meaning indicates the realm of givenness, the third order simulacrum deconstructs all givenness into the smallest binary units. "No more scenes, no more cuts, no more 'gaze,' the end of the spectacle and the spectacular, towards the total, fusional, tactile...environment" (SED, 71). Besides an obvious criticism of the situationists, the abandonment of the visual[41] is a challenge for phenomenology. I will take up this issue in detail in the following chapter. For now it is important to note that the end of the spectacle brings forth the collapse of reality into hyperrealism within which the contradiction between the real and the imaginary is effaced. Is DNA our imaginary construct or our real nature? No single-handed answer to this question can be given. As far as it refers to our biological nature, it should be placed within the realm of the real. On the other hand, science explains only that which has been defined and formalized in advance and which subsequently conforms to these explanations. In this respect, 'objectivity' is an imaginary construct. Reality is immediately contaminated by its own simulacrum, or as Baudrillard has it, "it is reality itself that disappears utterly in the game of reality" (S, 146).

However, within Baudrillard's narrative the disappearance of the real is not merely an outcome of the third order simulacrum. When Baudrillard writes that the hyperreal transcends representation only because it is entirely in simulation, he does not

---

[41] "We are closer in effect to the tactile than we are to the visual universe, where there is a greater distance, and reflection is always possible" (SED, 65).

want to indicate the unfortunate loss of what was at hand in earlier times. That is to say, the hyperreal is not merely the fate of the real; rather, the real itself has always been merely the hyperreal:

> The very definition of the real becomes: that of which it is possible to give an equivalent reproduction. *At the limit* of this process of reproductibility, the real is not only what can be reproduced, but that which is always already reproduced. The hyperreal. (S, 146) [my italics, S.G.].

What do the words "at the limit" mean here? Are we to understand them temporally — as that which follows the order of the real, or should we rather think of the *genealogical* limits of Baudrillard's claim? Indeed, Baudrillard does not merely want to tell us that the hyperreal only follows the order of the real; rather, the latter has always been merely the former. Precisely this reversibility of the outcome and the 'origin,' of 'cause' and 'effect' indicates the specifically genealogical aspect of Baudrillard's narrative. Although Baudrillard's narrative of simulation announces an explicit break with the dialectic, there is one similarity that they share. Just as it is the case with the Hegelian Idea, the further development of the image is a "deeper forthgoing" as well. Each new stage of the image is a further return to the "origin" of simulation. Baudrillard is not speaking of an atemporal origin, situated outside the sphere of appearances. Just as in the case of Nietzsche, the origin and its unfolding for Baudrillard cannot be distinguished. The depiction of the immanent 'logic' of the image is at the center of Baudrillard's analysis.

What unfolds explicitly within the second order of the image, implicitly lies already within the first order: "technology and technocracy are already fully operative in

the notion of an ideal counterfeit of the world, expressed in the invention of a universal substance and a universal combinatory of substances" (SED, 52). Similarly, what unfolds explicitly within the third order of the image, implicitly lies already within the second order: reproducibility is the meaning of production and as soon as it is recognized as such, as soon as things are conceived according to their very reproducibility, we are dealing with the third order of the image. Furthermore, what unfolds explicitly within the third order of the image, lies already within the first order: within the realm of counterfeit lies the simulacrum in which the project of a universal semiotics is condensed. Already the first order of the image dreams of the phantasy of a closed mental substance. Hence the third order of the image does not merely follow the other two, but precedes them as fate, as origin, as well.

Baudrillard's critique of representational signs and his attempt to uncover the hyperreality that underlies representation is reminiscent of Heidegger's critique of the concept of truth in "On the Essence of Truth." According to Heidegger, propositional truth is possible only on the basis of material truth, of *adequatio rei ad intellectum.* This concept of truth, Heidegger tells us, "implies the Christian theological belief that, with respect to what it is and whether it is, a matter as created (*ens creatum*), *is* only insofar as it corresponds to the idea preconceived in the *intellectus divinus*" (Heidegger, 120). Hence "*veritas* as *adaequatio rei* (*creandae*) *ad intellectum* (*divinum*) gurarantees *veritas* as *adaequatio intellectus* (*humani*) *ad rem* (*creatam*)" (Heidegger, 121). That is to say, truth implies the coming of beings in agreement with their creator. We find a similar

argument in Baudrillard: "All of Western faith and good faith was engaged in this wager on representation: that a sign could refer to the depth of meaning, that a sign could exchange for meaning and that something could guarantee this exchange — God, of course" (S, 10). This whole system becomes weightless, it becomes only a gigantic simulacrum, as soon as God himself is simulated, reduced to signs which attest his existence.

What interests Baudrillard is the actual *possibility* of the death of God, and furthermore, the possibility that the death of God does not merely follow his life but that God's existence itself has always been only a gigantic simulacrum. What happens to divinity when it reveals itself in icons, when it is indefinitely multiplied in simulacra? In *Simulations* Baudrillard exemplifies the precession of the third order of the image with the Iconoclasts-Iconolators conflict. Does the proliferation of divine images retain or even multiply divine authority or does it volatilize the divine existence so that we are left with the "pomp and power of fascination — the visible machinery of icons being substituted for the pure and intelligible Idea of God" (S, 8)? What underlies the iconoclasts' rage to destroy images was the *sense* of the omnipotence of simulacra, their power to efface God and their suggestive overwhelming truth: "that ultimately there has never been any God, that only the simulacrum exists, indeed that God himself has only ever been his own simulacrum" (ibid). Their despair did not come from the mere belief that images can occult or mask God, for it is possible to live with the idea of a distorted truth. Their metaphysical despair was indebted to the idea that the images concealed

nothing at all, that in fact they were not images of the first but rather of the third order. Although iconoclasts are often accused of despising images, they are the ones who accorded images their actual worth. But the reverse can be said as well: the iconolators were the most modern minds "since underneath the idea of the apparition of God in the mirror of images, they already enacted his death and his disappearance in the epiphany of his representations" (S, 9). They must have known that the images do not represent anything, that their proliferation is merely a game, and yet, the greatest game of all, for they also knew "that it is dangerous to unmask images, since they dissimulate the fact that there is nothing behind them" (ibid).

Hence the third order of the image is not merely the dominant schema in the current code-governed phase, for the question of what happens to signs after signification cannot be limited to the proliferation of the current structural analyses. What seems at the outset to be a representation, has always been a simulation — a creation of the real through conceptual models which have no origin in reality. Baudrillard's genealogical strategy reveals both the destination and the destiny of signs. If the destination of signs is found in their link to referents, the destiny of signs is to loose their referential function. Or as Baudrillard tells us in *The Ecstasy of Communication*, "the destiny of signs is to be torn from their destination, deviated, displaced, diverted, recuperated, seduced" (EC, 80). To be sure, this destiny is not to be found in a Platonic world, this is not a destiny thrown on man by the divine: "[I]t is their destiny in the sense that this is what always happens to them; it is our destiny in the sense that this is what always happens to us" (EC, 80-81).

As an attempt to capture the destiny of signs, Baudrillard's project deserves the name of genealogy.

One of the most important lessons that Nietzsche's genealogy teaches us is the following: The death of God is not to be equated with nihilism. In fact, although Nietzsche took nihilism to be an inevitable outcome of the death of God, his question was that of how to overcome nihilism. In *The Gay Science* we read the famous story about Diogenes — Nietzsche's first and most dramatic announcement of the death of God:

> Have you not heard of that madman who lit a lantern in the bright morning hours, ran to the market place, and cried incessantly: 'I seek God! I seek God!' — As many of those who did no believe in God were standing around just then, he provoked much laughter. Has he got lost? Asked one. Did he lose his way like a child? Asked another. Or is he hiding? Is he afraid of us? Has he gone on a voyage? Emigrated? — Thus they yelled and laughed. (GS, 125)

To put it in the words of Randal Havas, Nietzsche's task is that of how to make the death of God matter. Nietzsche's question is that of how to respond to the nihilist, to the one who "maintains that there can be no important consequences of the pursuit of truth — that the death of God is simply a matter of our having outgrown the illusions we formerly found necessary or at least expedient" (Havas, 181). His task is to find an answer to those who maintain that regret over the loss of the divine referent is madness or nostalgia. We find Nietzsche's answers to these questions in his genealogy: It is by asking the question *how* it is possible to believe in God and *how* it is possible for God to have died that Nietzsche attempt to overcome nihilism as the inevitable consequence.

In a similar fashion, Baudrillard argues that nihilism is an inevitable outcome of the third order of the image. From *Seduction* onwards, the question how to overcome

nihilism becomes Baudrillard's central question. *Objective irony, objective indifference,* Baudrillard tells us, is the only possible alternative to the ubiquity of simulation. However, for Baudrillard indifference is not merely that which can be opposed to the semiological realm but as well that which underlies it. I will try to show that the *fatal* indifference of the world is the final layer of Baudrillard's genealogy.

From the Symbolic to Seduction

So far I have paid attention only to one side of Baudrillard — to the Baudrillard who proclaims the disappearance of the real, the disappearance of reference, the proliferation of signs. However, there is a double spiral that moves through all of Baudrillard's works: The deciphering of the sphere of the sign, the simulacrum and simulation, is accompanied by the reversibility of all signs in the shadow of seduction and death. So far I have attempted to interpret one paradigm; but since Baudrillard's early works there have been two paradigms in the course of the spiral: "On the one hand: political economy, production, the code, the system, simulation. On the other hand: potlach, expenditure, sacrifice, death, the feminine, seduction, and in the end, the fatal" (EC, 79).

The symbolic has been the early term for the shadow of the proliferation of signs. In *For a Critique* Baudrillard has opposed it to the semiotic. In the last chapter I indicated that the semiological reduction of the symbolic constitutes the proliferation of signs and forms the basis for their ideological function. But this relation between the

symbolic and the semiotic can be reversed: according to Baudrillard of the early '70s, the symbolic is the final figure of any revolution — revolution will be symbolic or will not be at all. The symbolic for Baudrillard is the figure of reversibility — of a reversal of all the codes and distinctive oppositions on which the ideological functions are based.

However, the abandonment of Marxism in the '70s indicates a curious fate that *the symbolic* undergoes. The transition of simulacra from the second to the third order is the crossing from the dialectic of alienation to the "giddiness of transparency." Hence the symbolic as the basis of the final revolution belongs to the second order simulacrum, i.e., it belongs to the order of the past. Today "the dream of a transgression, of a possible subversion of codes, and the nostalgia for a symbolic order of any kind, born out of the deep of primitive societies, or of our historical alienation, have been lost" (EC, 80). After *Symbolic Exchange and Death* we no longer encounter *the symbolic* as the basis of the future revolution in Baudrillard's writings. However, the disappearance of the symbolic is not the disappearance of the double spiral, of reversibility. *Seduction* takes the place of the symbolic. To be sure, this is not merely a terminological shift: if the symbolic is still based on the desire of the subject, seduction attempts to capture the destiny of the object:

> With *Seduction*, there is no longer any symbolic referent to the challenge of signs, and to the challenge through signs, no more lost object, no more recovered object, no more original desire. *The object itself takes the initiative of reversibility*, taking the initiative to seduce and lead astray. (EC, 80)

The seduction of the world is opposed to the subduction of signs. If the order of

signs indicate a subjective projection of meaning[42], the order of seduction indicates the disappearance of the subject as well as the disappearance of meaning. In this sense seduction is a *fatal* strategy. However, the term "fatal" has nothing fatalistic or apocalyptic about it: "[T]hat which is linked outside the subject, that which is on the side of the subject's disappearance, is fatal" (EC, 88). That is to say, all that is not a subjective strategy is a fatal strategy.

How does the fatal strategy, or the theory of seduction, relate to the analysis of simulation? According to Baudrillard, there is *radical convergence* as well as a *radical divergence* between these two extremes. It is not hard to see why these two approaches are divergent. A distinction between passive objects and active Objects is crucial for Baudrillard's theory of seduction. Passive objects fall into the realm of use, exchange, function, equivalence, identification, projection or alienation. Active Objects are enigmatic — they resist any identification, any infusion of meaning. If "the object only exists in that it is designated and desired by the subject" (EC, 90), the Object only exists in that it escapes the subject's projected meaning into it, in that it hides from the subject. To put it in other words, if the object has meaning, the Object is indifferent to its own meaning. The opposition is that between the object as system and the Object as destiny, between the object as structure and the Object as "crystal" — as pure sign. This distinction, however, requires theory to alter its meaning: from critical structuralism one

---

[42] This is the case in the first order of simulacrum and, up to a degree in the second order as well. I will describe below how the disappearance of the subject in the third order relates to the subject-less fatal strategy.

should pass to the fatal strategy.

But this divergence between seduction and simulation is also a convergence, for *the destiny of the object is to become an Object*. Baudrillard does not merely aim to oppose seduction to the semiotic, but rather to show how the semiotic passes into the fatal. The figure of reversibility marks the passage of objects into Objects:

> The Object and the world let themselves be surprised for an instant (a brief instant in the general cosmology) by the subject and science, but today they are violently reasserting themselves and taking revenge. Such is the figure of our fatality, that of an objective turnaround, of an objective reversal of the world. (EC, 87)

This "brief instant of surprise" is that of the first and partly of the second order of the image. We have seen how the third order simulacra indicate the disappearance of reference. It is not by chance that Baudrillard's description of the fatal overlaps with that of simulation, for the latter is already potentially the former. Simulation signifies deviation, displacement, diversion as the destiny of objects: things surpass their own definition, they become indifferent toward their own meaning. It is here, at the last level of simulacra, that Baudrillard attempts to grasp the interruption of the fatal. Or to put it in other terms, *seduction is the fourth level of Baudrillard's genealogical inquiry* — it is the "ground" of the objective indifference that underlies the play of signs.

"Against the banal vision (conventional and religious) of the fatal, one must set up a fatal vision of the banal" (EC, 84). Where else can one look for a better illustration of Baudrillard's claim if not in the transition from the social to the masses? The mass is the fatal perfection of the social — the silent absorption of any projection of meaning. In contrast to alienation as the grand narrative of the social, the mass is to be seen not in

terms of servitude but rather in terms of a challenge: "a genius of indifference which victoriously opposes itself to all enterprises of meaning and difference, but which cannot be attributed to one group, one class, or to particular individuals" (EC, 85-86). The mass is at odds with the dialectic of the social, it is foreign to it; but most important, it is a figure of a possible reversal, for here something forms a ground (*fait masse*[43]). It is the ground of fatal reversibility: the "social" has become indifferent to its own determination, for the mass is that which has no meaning. It has become the non-dialectical other — the pure Object.

Things can no longer be reconciled with their own essence: the mass is that which is more social than the social; terror is that which is more violent than the violent; porn is that which is more sexual than sex; simulation is that which is more real than the real; fashion is that which is more beautiful than the beautiful; information is that which is more factual than the facts; obesity is that which is fatter than fat.[44] And just as an obese body reaches the point at which it is no longer recognizable (hence, obesity is a paradoxical mode of the disappearance of the body), similarly, the mass is the disappearance of the social; simulation is the disappearance of the real; fashion is the disappearance of beauty; information is the disappearance of facts.

---

[43] The term "*la masse*" implies a condensation of terms which allows Baudrillard in his *In the Shadow of Silent Majorities* to make a number of allusions. "*La masse*" is not merely "the mass" but also "substance," "matter," "ground," "majority" as well as the electrical usage of the word "earth." Hence, as the translators of *In the Shadow* point out, *faire masse* simultaneously means *to form a mass*, *to form an earth* or *to form a majority*.

[44] See *Fatal Strategies*, p. 7-25.

Through endless proliferation, things are brought to disappearance and precisely here seduction is to be encountered, for it is here that the Object is taking its revenge. Baudrillard terms it *fatal reversibility*: by infusing meaning into objects, we are left with obscene objects — objects that no longer have definite boundaries. This is their revenge, or what Baudrillard calls *the revenge of the crystal*: the disappearance of objects is not to be seen as the result of a mistake committed by the subject, but rather as the ironic response of Objects themselves.

The *crystal* is an Object in a passionate form. If subjective passion is that which attempts to interpret the object and transform it, Objective passion is that of Objects hiding from their possible appropriation. If the subjective passion turns the world into a metaphor, "it colonizes everything: the bestial, mineral, astral, historical, and mental" (EC, 93), the Object is not metaphor but passion and "the subject is perhaps only a mirror where objective passions come *to be reflected* and played out" (ibid) [my italics - S.G.].

How is it possible for the subject to turn into a mirror, to *reflect* the object which has disappeared? Does not reflection indicate the sphere of presence and not that of perpetual disappearance? To be sure, Baudrillard does not oppose mere absence to presence, his aim is not that of capturing *nothing*, but rather that of capturing the unfolding of things as disappearing, i.e. their passage into nothing. His aim is to unveil the indifference of things toward the meaning we have given them, to show that any appropriation is at the same time a loss; or to put the matter in Heidegger's language, that the further unfolding of Being is its further forgetfulness; or to put the matter in

Derridian language, that any determination is at the same time dissemination. Only that which escapes me can seduce me — I can be seduced only by that which resists appropriation. According to Baudrillard, things seduce me with their passionate indifference. The world which Baudrillard attempts to disclose is that about which the Stoics talked in great eloquence — the indifference of the world is to be approached with greater indifference: "The indifference of the world in this respect is marvelous; marvelous is the indifference of things in respect to us, and yet things passionately unfold and confuse their appearances" (EC, 95).

Impossible Exchange

That which is fatal belongs to the final order of Baudrillard's genealogy. Although I have spoken of seduction as the fatal, it is important to keep in mind that these terms are not synonymous. The fatal is the generic term that encompasses both seduction and impossible exchange. Therefore it comes as no surprise that seduction and impossible exchange share numerous similarities. Indeed, the only difference between them is this: what seduction says of the Object, impossible exchange says of the *world*, of one's own *life* as well as of *thought*.

Just as to see the Object as seductive is to place it beyond equivalence, to say that the world is fatal is to indicate that it has no double. In this sense "everything starts with impossible exchange" (IE, 3), for the world has no equivalent anywhere, it cannot be exchanged for anything. The world is that which cannot be semiologically reduced, for it

has no equivalent, no double, no representation, no mirror.[45] Although things within the world can be approached within the specter of verification, the world itself lies beyond verification. In this sense, *uncertainty is the condition of life*, for "being without possible verification, the world is a fundamental illusion" (ibid). However, the term "illusion" is not supposed to indicate a merely subjective phantasm of thought. On the contrary, in Baudrillard's narrative, "illusion" (in contrast to "reality") is precisely that which lies on the side of the Object. The impossible exchange indicates the vanishing of the principle of reality, for, as Baudrillard explains in *The Vital Illusion*,

> reality is but a concept, or a principle, and by reality I mean the whole system of values connected with this principle. The Real as such implies an origin, an end, a past and a future, a chain of causes and effects, a continuity and a rationality. No real without these elements, without an objective configuration of discourse. And its disappearing is the dislocation of this whole constellation. (VI, 63)

However, by haunting the world, impossible exchange haunts all the systems of this world. The economic system — the sphere of all exchange — when taken overall, cannot be exchanged for anything. Hence, it belongs to the order of fundamental uncertainty as well. Similarly, the spheres of politics, law and aesthetics, although laden with signs, are characterized by the same non-equivalence *when seen from the outside*: they absorb "everything which comes into their ambit and convert it into their own substance, but they are not able to convert themselves into — or be reflected in — a higher reality which would give them a meaning" (IE, 4). We encounter the same structure in the sphere of living matter and biology: we witness an infinite ramification of

---

[45] "Any mirror whatsoever would still be part of the world" (IE, 3).

genetic experimentation and "the more ramified they become, the more the crucial question is left unanswered: 'who rules over life, who rules over death'" (ibid). Hence illusion is the fundamental rule, uncertainty is the fundamental horizon of life.

To be sure, we can encounter uncertainty not only as that which envelops the forms of certainty. Every system can be explained semiologically, for in each of them we can find the principle of equilibrium, the play of fixed oppositions. This is the sphere of difference which ensures the dialectical movement of the whole system.

> Up to this point, all is well. It is when this bipolar relationship breaks down, when the system short-circuits itself, that it generates its own critical mass, and veers off exponentially. When there is no longer any internal reference system within which exchange can take place...you get into an exponential phase, a phase of speculative disorder. (IE, 6)

We have already seen that the third order simulacrum precisely signifies the disappearance of reference. The precession of the model indicates that events are no longer explained in the referential context, but rather in that of the "coded" nature of the model. That is to say, uncertainty is not merely the ultimate horizon of all the systems, it is their inevitable outcome, their "exponential phase" as well. To put it in other words, *uncertainty is not merely the condition of life; it is as well the present condition of social life.*

All systems of exchange inevitably run up against "the Impossible Exchange Barrier." As we have already seen, that which cannot be exchanged (the third order simulacrum) proliferates wildly. Whether we look at the shift from the social to the masses, or at the impossibility to explain news coverage within a representational

context, or if we pay attention to our "biological nature", *here and now* the whole edifice is no longer exchangeable for anything, or in other words, it is exchangeable for Nothing. "The true formula of contemporary nihilism lies here, rather than in any philosophical or moral considerations: it is the nihilism of value itself" (IE, 7). And just as Nietzsche describes nihilism as the inevitable consequence of the death of God and attempts to offer an alternative to it (attempts to make the death of God matter), Baudrillard's task is to elaborate on the consequences of the impossible exchange.

On the one hand, the impossibility to exchange this world for any other makes uncertainty into the fundamental principle that underlies all possible systems. On the other hand, "It is on the continuity and reciprocal exchange of the Nothing, of illusion, of absence, of non-value, that the continuity of Something is founded" (IE, 8). That is to say, the constant attempt to divest the real of the anti-real, the constant struggle to divest truth of illusion, exchange of everything that cannot be exchanged, matter of the anti-matter, certainty of all uncertainty, paradoxically results in the loss of the real, of truth, of exchange as well as of certainty. If impossible exchange as the ultimate horizon is creative, impossible exchange as the present condition is destructive; if impossible exchange as fundamental principle is to be put into play, impossible exchange as the present condition is to be overcome. And it can be overcome by recognizing impossible exchange as the fundamental rule of life, for it is the forgetting of the Nothing which is the cause of the deregulation of the system. "For it is from the inside, by overreaching themselves, that systems make bonfires of their own postulates, and fall into ruins" (IE,

6).

It is not the Nothing, not uncertainty and the impossible exchange, that cause the present social state of deregulation. On the contrary, it is our constant attempt to overcome the Nothing, to divest being of all negative electricity that brings forth this result. It is the constant struggle to overcome all contingencies of what it means to be human in the biological attempt to find the true positive nature of man which results in new hypothesis and particles being invented to shore up the equations; it is the constant attempt to overcome all the contingencies of human thought in the struggle to erect Artificial Intelligence that renders thought utterly useless; it is the struggle to overcome the contingency of life by "cloning beyond human and the inhuman"[46] that makes life itself lose its symbolic meaning. Or as Baudrillard has it in *The Vital Illusion,*

> We are dealing with an attempt to construct an entirely positive world, a perfect world, expurgated of every illusion, of every sort of evil and negativity, exempt from death itself. This pure, absolute reality, this unconditional realization of the world — this is what I call the Perfect Crime. (VI, 67)

It is the *forgetting* and the denial of the Nothing which continues to exist (not) that results in the disappearance of meaning. "If it is the Nothing which is missing, it is the Nothing which must be brought (or returned) into play" (IE, 8). This is Baudrillard's solution to nihilism into which the third order of the image leads: *uncertainty is to become the new rule of the game*; not that uncertainty which we always seek to correct by injecting new values, new certainties, but uncertainty which by itself circulates as the

---

[46] See *The Vital Illusion*, especially "The Final Solution: Cloning Beyond Human and the Inhuman", p. 1-31.

basic rule, as the very precondition of life, as "the Nothing [which] is the only ground — or background — against which we can apprehend existence" (IE, 8).

"The Impossible Exchange Barrier" is the final figure in Baudrillard's genealogy. It sets limits for any kind of semiological unfolding, it gives each and every system of meaning a destination and a destiny. A destination, for signs have no choice but be in the world and of the world, they have no choice but speak of the world (this is the case in the first order simulacrum); a destiny, for signs have no choice but lose their referent, for the latter is not passive (as is most often assumed) but active, it allows itself to be surprised only for a second, for signs have no choice but be sedimented. Hence just like Nietzsche, Baudrillard does not an attempt to uncover an origin which lies outside the world, outside signs and their unfolding, but rather attempts to grasp this unfolding as the origin itself. Just like Nietzsche, Baudrillard does not attempt to place the origin within the true world (as opposed to the merely apparent one) — for this would be merely a banal understanding of the fatal — but rather to speak of the origin as that which always happens to us.

Just as at the bottom of Nietzsche's genealogy we encounter the bipolarity of the active and the reactive powers, so at the bottom of Baudrillard's genealogy we encounter the bipolarity of Nothing and Something. And just as in Nietzsche, the fact that the active or the reactive can gain the upper hand does not mean that the bipolarity of the Will to Power is abolished, so in Baudrillard the attempt to abolish the Nothing results in the revenge of the Nothing. And finally, just as the bipolarity in Nietzsche is hierarchical,

so the bipolarity of the Nothing and Something in Baudrillard is hierarchical as well.

I have indicated the figure of reversibility in Nietzsche's genealogy: it is both guided by and directed at the fundamental will to knowledge. This reversibility might be seen as Nietzsche's answer to the double problem of perspectivism of which I spoke in the first chapter. Indeed, why not say that to the questions "how does the interpreter relate to what is interpreted" and "how do different centers of force interrelate" we find an answer in the doctrine of the Will to Power, for isn't it the Will to Power which interprets itself? So isn't the Will to Power, as the final figure of Nietzschean genealogy, the post-perspectival answer to the double problem that perspectivism faces? Indeed, as I have argued in the first chapter, Nietzsche comes close to this solution. And yet, the Will to Power is not the ground of Nietzschean interpretation, the Will to Power *is* Nietzsche's interpretation; furthermore, it is one interpretation among many others. Hence it is the Will to Power which is placed within the realm of interpretation and not vice versa, not interpretation within the doctrine of the Will to Power. Therefore ultimately it is the Will to Power that finds support in the doctrine of perspectivism and consequently it would be an error to explain the problem of perspectivism by turning to the Will to Power.

As I have stressed in the last chapter, already in McLuhan's work it is possible to trace a post-perspectival answer to the Nietzschean problem. However, for Baudrillard the answer that lies in the formula "the medium is the message" still belongs to the third order of the image, i.e., to the semiological realm. The fourth level of Baudrillard's genealogy forms a strong opposition to the universe of simulacra, for it attempts to

disclose that which cannot be exchanged, dubbed, or simulated. Hence, if the third order of the image signifies the disappearance of perspectivism, does not the fourth level of Baudrillard's genealogy constitute the reappearance of perspectivism?

Indeed, the third order of the image does not signify the death but rather the disappearance of perspectivism. Disappearance is *displacement*; in contrast to death, that which is displaced can reappear. However, perspectivism reappears in a different form than the one that has disappeared. One could even say that perspectivism at the fourth level of Baudrillard's genealogy is perspectivism at its radical form. If the third order of the image signifies the disappearance of the subject, center and periphery, the fatal strategy signifies the birth of the Object, i.e., the birth of that which cannot be simulated, mirrored, exchanged, doubled or dubbed. That is to say, perspectivism at the first and the fourth levels of Baudrillard's genealogy is significantly different. On the one hand, if the first order of the image is perspectival for it assumes the distance between the counterfeit and the original[47], the passage of the image to the later stages of simulacra signifies the disappearance of this distance. On the other hand, the distance of the fatal order is irreducible, for the Object is that which cannot be appropriated, the Object is that which always appears as disappearing; or to put the matter in Levinasian terms, the Object as the Other is that which cannot be reduced to the order of the Same.

One wonders: does not the reappearance of perspectivism signify the

---

[47] It is precisely the perspectival "having" of the original that constitutes the possibility of proliferation of counterfeits, for the latter are counterfeits *of the original.*

disappearance of post-perspectivism? To be sure, it signifies that post-perspectivism understood in McLuhan's terms is not post-perspectivism at its radical form. And yet, *just as perspectivism is to be lost so that it can be regained at a more radical form, so post-perspectivism is to be misplaced only to reappear again in its radicalness*. If the first form of perspectivism is ruled by distance that can be resolved in the modulation of the code (i.e., in the first form of post-perspectivism), so the second form of perspectivism is a call for a new form of post-perspectivism — that which is ruled by fatal *reversibility*. If the first form of post-perspectivism is ruled by the order of the Same, the second form of post-perspectivism is ruled by radical Otherness. We can encounter this new form of post-perspectivism in the relation between thought and the unfolding of things.

It is *thought* which can turn Nothing as the underlying fabric of all things into the rule of the game. However, to achieve this aim thought is to alter its meaning: from critical understanding one must move to a fatal strategy. But why is critical understanding to be abandoned? Baudrillard reasons in the following fashion: Within the realm of critical understanding there is meaning only in that which is Human. The world is measured by the Human, events are measured by History, thought is measured by the Real, signs are measured by things. However, the movement from the first to the third order of the image signifies that "[W]e are moving everywhere towards an elimination of the Inhuman, towards an anthropological integrism which aims to submit everything to the jurisdiction of the Human" (IE, 16). This, however, is "a planetary project to

exterminate the Inhuman in all its forms, an integrist project to domesticate any reality from outside our own sphere — the extreme turn of an imperialism by which, ironically and paradoxically, we deprive ourselves of any idea of the Human as such" (ibid). This is the revenge of the crystal about which I talked in the previous section. Just as the implosion of the real and the virtual signifies the disappearance of the real, just as the exclusion of the Nothing leads to the loss of the real, similarly, the disappearance of the distinction between the Human and the Inhuman signifies the disappearance of the Human: Domestication of everything that is not Human results in the *extermination* of the Human. Extermination, however, is not physical and radical, but more literal — "'*Ex-terminis*': it means that all things pass beyond their own end, beyond their own finality, where there is no reality anymore, nor any reason for being, nor any determination" (VI, 61). Extermination is not death but rather disappearance, for if death belongs to the symbolic order (as it is in the case of the death of God) — it leaves a trace and indicates the possible re-evaluation of all values — disappearance leaves no trace behind itself. Hence in the realm of the third order simulacrum the question of the subject can no longer even be posed.

Hence, on the one hand, *thought can no longer be subjective*, for the third order of the image signifies the disappearance of the subject. But on the other hand, if the Nothing continues (not) to exist, if "everything that exists continues not to exist at the same time" (IE, 9), this must be the nature of thought as well. Hence the Nothing becomes the precondition of the divided nature of thought: "I am not alone in thinking the

world...the world, in turn, thinks me" (IE, 8). The shift from subjective to fatal thought is the shift from reflective to reversible thought: Reversibility becomes the fundamental rule of thought.

But how is "thinking of the world thinking us" (IE, 24) to be understood? If negatively it becomes obvious that thought is irreducible to the consciousness of the subject, what is the positive determination of thought as the fatal strategy? What does it mean to "think the world thinking me?" Furthermore, how is the world thinking me? And finally, what does "to think" mean here? This re-evaluation of thought can be clarified with the help of the relation between the scientist and the object.

Just as science today no longer 'discovers' its object but invents it, similarly, the object does not merely discover us, but invents us as well: "It seems that we have victoriously wrenched the object from its peaceful state, from its indifference and the secrecy which enshrouded it. But today, before our very eyes, the enigmatic nature of the world is rousing itself, resolved to struggle to retain its mystery" (IE, 23). This active struggle on the part of the Objects to retain their independence from any form of appropriation — this active form of the *disappearance* of the objects — is as well the subject's loss of sovereignty, for it signifies the *virtual* character of appropriation. This is the case because uncertainty is not confined to physics: Just as it is impossible to calculate the speed of a particle and its position simultaneously, so it is also impossible to evaluate both the reality and the meaning of an event as it appears in the information

media, to isolate the subject from the object in experiments in subatomic physics.[48]

Hence, "the object thinks me" means: the Object inevitably escapes the order of meaning, the Object is indifferent to meaning. Just as *the mass* seduces any sociological theory by conforming to its laws (by pretending to be *the social*), but at the same time this conformation is always ironic, so the Object seduces any order of meaning by confirming its logic, but again, it always does it ironically. That is to say, the Object escapes the order of meaning and of truth by seducing the subject to believe in the order of truth: "Civilization's first gesture is to hold up a mirror to the Object, but the Object is only seemingly reflected therein; in fact it is the Object itself which is the mirror, and it is here that the subject is taken in by the illusion of himself" (TE, 173). Like Proteus, the object is always that which escapes me, and therefore my search for it is never final. "The Object thinks me" means: the Object actively escapes any attempt of appropriation on the part of the subject, for what is fatal in seduction is the Other's sovereign otherness with respect to us.

Hence perspectivism reappears in Baudrillard's narrative in its radical form, for even at the frontiers of science "the Object appears ever more ungraspable: it remains internally indivisible and hence unanalyzable, infinitely versatile, reversible, ironic, and contemptuous of all attempts to manipulate it" (TE, 172). However, if the first form of perspectivism signifies the birth of meaning, its second form signifies the disappearance of meaning, for perspectival distance between me and the Object is taken to the extreme.

---

[48] See *Impossible Exchange*, p. 18-24.

This radical perspectival distance is established on the basis of indifference on the part of the Object. However, for this form of perspectivism to come to be, the subject must adopt a similar strategy to that of the Object: "To be the reflection of the real, to enter into a relation of critical negativity with the real, cannot be theory's end" (EC, 97). Theory must employ the same strategy as its object, it must assume the "form of a world from which truth has withdrawn" (EC, 98). This strategy is that of a duel, that of a challenge. Theory should partake of and become the acceleration of the secret logic of the world: If the world is ecstatic, ironic, indifferent, so theory must be as well. Furthermore, theory should be more ecstatic, more ironic, more indifferent than the world itself. Just as one "pulls a chair out from under a person about to sit down" (EC, 101), so theory must challenge the secret irony of the world that destines everything to be diverted, deviated, manipulated. Hence, theory must anticipate its own destiny because in this anticipation lies its possibility of escape:

> Let us be Stoics: if the world is fatal, let us be more fatal than it. If it is indifferent, let us be more indifferent. We must conquer the world and seduce it through an indifference that is at least equal to the world's. (EC, 101)

I take this form of reversibility to be not just the establishment of radical perspectivism but as well the second post-perspectival answer to the double problem of Nietzsche's perspectivism: it is seduction that links the "interpreter" to what is "interpreted."

In contrast to the traditional project to escape alienation by disalienation and the reappropriation of oneself, Baudrillard suggests the opposite extreme — the path toward

the absolute Other:

> I am not alienated. Rather, I am definitely other. No longer subject to the law of desire, but subject now to the total artifice of rules. I have lost any trace of desire of my own. I answer only to something non-human — something inscribed not within me but solely in the objective and arbitrary vicissitudes of the world's signs. (TE, 173)

While to enter the universe of meaning is to abolish the mystery of the real or at least reduce it by appropriation, to enter the universe of seduction is to re-establish the Nothing as the fabric of all things. The interaction between the subject and the object signifies not only the genesis of meaning but also the disappearance of subjectivity and objectivity, for when the universe of meaning is entered, the mystery of the real is perpetually abolished. Just as the turn of a thing into a *Gestell* is a loss of the object, similarly, the becoming of the subject into an epistemological ego is a loss of the subject. Hence,

> The necessity of always focusing somewhere else, of never seeking the other in the terrifying illusion of dialogue but instead following the other like the other's own shadow, and circumscribing him. Never being oneself — but never being alienated either: coming from without to inscribe oneself upon the figure of the Other, within that strange form from elsewhere, that secret form which orders not only chains of events but also existences in their singularity. (TE, 174)

Hence ultimately the task of the fatal strategy is dual: (1) as the world is evolving towards a frenzied state of affairs, thought must take a frenzied view of it; (2) as the world is given to us as something enigmatic and unintelligible, the task of thought is to make it even more enigmatic and more unintelligible. Just as Nietzschean genealogy is an attempt to both uncover the origin of value and to offer a revaluation of values, so Baudrillard's genealogy is an attempt to uncover that which proliferation of signs

presupposes as well as to offer a revaluation of theory.

While traditional theory is subjective, fatal theory is Objective; while subjective theory is an attempt to uncover meaning, fatal theory attempts to uncover that which is meaningless; while subjective theory attempts to uncover truth, fatal theory announces a departure from truth; while subjective theory is based on reflection, fatal theory is based on reversibility. One wonders: is the fatal theory really ruled by reversibility as the fundamental genealogical principle, or is it merely ruled by the aim of a reversal of values? Isn't the price one is to pay for fatal theory too high? Furthermore, what is a reversal if not a *re-action* in the Nietzschean sense of the term, merely an expression of *ressentiment*? These are the questions of the final chapter.

* * *

My exposition of Baudrillard's themes of the three orders of simulacra and impossible exchange as genealogical undertakings explains the relation between the semiological and the fatal orders as not merely divergent but convergent as well. Within the genealogical realm, the three orders of the image and the fatal strategy are not to be seen merely in a sequential order: they follow each other, underlie each other, as well as endure simultaneously. Each new order is not merely an abandonment of the previous order, but a further elaboration of what lies implicit in the latter as well. Hence the final order is not merely the final outcome of Baudrillard's genealogy of the emancipated signs, but also the deepest layer that makes all others possible. But the final order is not

merely the *condition* of all the other ones; it is as well the present *condition* of social life.

The third order of the image is the first form of post-perspectivism: it indicates the disappearance of the perspectival structures of subject/object correlation and their replacement by the circulation of the code. The fatal order is no longer that of the model but rather that of the Object: it signifies the reappearance of perspectivism in its radical form as well as the birth of a new form of post-perspectivism. The latter signifies the final abandonment of subjectivity, of meaning and of truth, it indicates the birth of the Object and the reappearance of the Nothing. This order insinuates a new conception of thought: it is not to be subjective and reflective, but governed by reversibility.

CHAPTER IV

RAW PHENOMENOLOGY AND THE FUNDAMENTAL RULE OF REVERSIBILITY

Baudrillard has referred to his work as *raw phenomenology*. A surprising choice of terms, for Baudrillard's project presupposes the renunciation of four central phenomenological themes, namely, those of *meaning*, *subjectivity*, *reduction*, and *reference*. While meaning covers the entire sphere of phenomenological investigation, what interests Baudrillard is not the *epiphany* of meaning but rather the *apophany* of the real, the elision of meaning. Similarly, while phenomenological subjectivity is the bearer of meaning, Baudrillard consistently aims at disclosing the filtering of the impact of the subject, what he terms "the deployment of the object's own magic" (PWL). Thirdly, while phenomenological reduction *to* meaning is the first thesis in the order of the *founding* of the phenomenological sphere, it is the reduction *of* meaning that Baudrillard attempts to disclose. And finally, while phenomenology regards each expression as not only having a meaning but a *reference* as well (each expression not merely says something but also says something *of something*), Baudrillard's task is that of uncovering the semiological and the fatal disappearance of reference: reference (or the real) is (1) that which inevitably becomes its own simulacrum and (2) that which is consistently ex-orbitated and ex-centered. Hence, while a phenomenological project always aims at disclosing phenomena, at describing experience as it presents itself, while

phenomenology by definition is *the study of presencing*, raw phenomenology is phenomenology of absence. It seems to be the case that Baudrillard might just as well have described his project as anti-phenomenological. So why such a strange use of terms? What motivates Baudrillard, I believe, is the fact that the mentioned renunciation of the major phenomenological postulates is not merely a working hypothesis. Baudrillard's works are not anti-phenomenological since they aim at describing phenomena as they appear, only we find that this appearance is unexpected and unusual: Appearance "belongs" to the sphere of seduction — it belongs to the enchanted simulacrum, or to the vital illusion, i.e., appearance precedes the orders of subjectivity, meaning, reality and truth.

We have learned from Paul Ricoeur that phenomenology is not capable of radicalizing numerous questions without entering into a dialogue with semiological disciplines which address the same issues. While addressing the question of language, Ricoeur insisted that it is through and by means of semiological analyses that phenomenology of speech is possible. In contrast to simply turning the question of the closed structure of language into the question of sedimentation, Ricoeur argued for a renewed phenomenology of meaning which "cannot be content with repeating descriptions of speech which do not acknowledge the theoretical status of linguistics and the primacy of structure over process which serves as an axiom for linguistics" (Ricoeur, 251). In contrast to that phenomenology which poorly begins the dialogue with the

"scientists,"[49] only through a "hand-to-hand combat with the presuppositions of semiology," Ricoeur insisted, could phenomenology reconquer the relation between signs and transcendence or reference.

Raw phenomenology constitutes a direct challenge to classical phenomenology, for the similarity between them that I have mentioned is also an indication of a difference between the two. I will attempt to offer a hand-to-hand combat between raw and classical phenomenologies. I will show how raw phenomenology not merely challenges the basic themes of classical phenomenology but as well how the former offers a reinterpretation of the latter. I shall also show how phenomenology of presencing interrupts phenomenology of absence — how a certain subjectivity, meaning and reference are implicated by Baudrillard's analysis.

Ambiguity Of the Fatal

A certain tension that underlies Baudrillard's latest works brings caution to the claim that meaning, truth, reference and subjectivity have disappeared from his narrative. On the one hand, the Baudrillard of the late '90s still insists that the task of theory is to return the world more unintelligible and more enigmatic than it has been given to us; that theory is to adopt a frenzied view of the world, for the latter is reaching a frenzied state of affairs. But at the same time Baudrillard argues that the fatal alteration of our viewpoint serves the purpose of *seeing ourselves* and the world anew, that the task of fatal strategy

---

[49] "In fact, [the dialogue] is not even begun at all" (Ricoeur, 248).

is "*not to fall into the universe of non-meaning*, but to recover the potency and originality of the world before it assumes force of meaning and becomes, in that same movement, the site of all powers" (IE, 16) [my italics - S.G.]. So *has meaning disappeared from Baudrillard's narrative*? Similarly, simulacrum is not that which conceals *the truth* but rather that which conceals that there is no truth; and yet, while contrasting illusion and seduction to the order of truth, Baudrillard insists that seduction as an imposture "is not the opposite of truth: it is a more subtle truth which enwraps the former in the sign of its parody and its erasure" (IE, 151); he similarly argues that simulacrum as that which conceals the truth is as well that which is the true. So *has truth disappeared from his narrative*? Thirdly, *the real* within the semiological sphere is nothing else but a simulacrum — a mere *creation* of the real through conceptual models which have no connection or origin in reality; but at the same time the fatal strategy signifies the ex-centering, the ex-orbiting of the real, pushing the latter to the limit and making a periphery out of it. As Butler has rightly indicated, "There are thus two different senses in which the real is used in Baudrillard's work: there is that real which is brought about by the system and that real which is the absolute limit of the system" (Butler, 17). So *has the real disappeared from Baudrillard's narrative*? And finally, by constituting the precession and circulation of the model, the semiological sphere signifies the disappearance of *subjectivity*, of any center and any periphery; and yet, the challenge that fatal strategy brings forth signifies the birth of a reversible Object: the subject is to be the mirror of the latter. So *has subjectivity disappeared from his writings*?

Probably the most popular solution to this type of a problem is to state that a certain understanding of meaning, truth, reference and subjectivity are challenged by Baudrillard and replaced by different conceptions. To be sure, strategically this approach is appealing, for it offers an easy solution to any imaginable dead-end. However, this strategy has its downside: it overlooks the possibility that it is not Baudrillard's intention to offer a re-evaluation of the themes at hand. Assuming an explicit intention on the part of the author runs the risk of solving the problem before one encounters it. Things get further complicated by the fact that Baudrillard has repeatedly argued for the disappearance of these crucial themes for nearly thirty years and that indications (though not explications) of their possible re-evaluation are only recent and rare. This tension can be resolved not be assuming a certain strategy but rather by being guided by Baudrillard's strategy: Instead of asking how Baudrillard reinterprets these themes one should rather ask how this tension is possible.

Let me start with subjectivity. The semiological order signifies the displacement of the subject: neither consciousness nor the ego is in the position of principle or origin. The modulation of the code is a substitute for consciousness: That which at the outset appears to be meaningful in fact is semiological, for each structure can be reduced to signs. Hence the logic of events should be explained not by their relation to consciousness, but rather by their relation to, or procession from, the code. Before the subject posits himself, before the subject encounters the world as meaningful, both the subject and the world have already been rooted in semiological structures. This

anteriority of the code to subjectivity, this anteriority of I am to I think, as Ricoeur would say, introduces a gap between the subjective "having" or seeing and the semiological structures that this "having" presupposes.

The passage from the semiological to the fatal order is the passage from the universe of endless exchange to that of non-exchange. This passage, however, marks *the reappearance of subjectivity as the implication of the seductive order*: it is the subject who is to be seduced by the objective disappearance. Hence here we discover that the semiological order has not eliminated the subject but rather displaced it. To be sure, the subject that the fatal order implicates is not an apodictic cogito. One can speak of it as a "wounded subjectivity": it posits itself but does not possess itself.

Without the implicative subjectivity, the fatal order is unthinkable. I have indicated in the last chapter how the indifference of the world is to be counted by even stronger indifference: this is the bet on which the fatal strategy rests. Only on this basis can theory as a duel, as a challenge, take place. Here lies the reason for the tension concerning the issue of subjectivity in Baudrillard's work. On the one hand the fatal order is the order of "the Object's own magic" (in this sense it signifies the disappearance of the subject), but on the other hand, this order is based on a bet. To be sure, *there is no bet without a subjectivity*: *I*, the interpreter, am to realize the impossibility of any representational theory and to *bet* on the objective disappearance; *I*, the interpreter, am to realize the distant nature of the real, *I* am to realize that the real is but an illusion, and hence, in the shadow of this 'illusion,' to *constitute* the autonomy of the virtual by

challenging the irony of the distant 'real.' This subjectivity is crucial to the game that the fatal theory plays.

Baudrillard is quick to point out that the loss of will cannot be simulated.[50] "Radical absence of will is to be found in the immanent disorder of the real world" (IE, 62). Any attempt to simulate it inevitably becomes its own perversion. But it is important to keep in mind that "the radical absence of will" is not easy to possess: it demands an *effort*, it requires a *task*, a *direction*, as well as an *intention*. In this sense the passage to the fatal order is not a passage to the objective realm from the subjective one, for it is the endless and painful task of subjectivity to *constitute* the Object as unreachable. But is this task possible to achieve? "Arbitrariness lies not in choosing chance, but in the unpredictable as it exists, in the relation to others as they are, in the unforseen events of the world and its appearances" (IE, 61). As far as constitution is seen as an imposition of a will, the task of "self-disappearance" is indeed unreachable. And yet, constitution is not an imposition of one's will, but rather a passive genesis of things themselves, a letting things appear the way they do. Indeed, constitution is both an act of the subject and at the same time it first and foremost is, to put it in Husserl's terms, a passive genesis; or to put it in Baudrillard's terms, it is a form of letting oneself be the mirror of the object.[51] Subjectivity as an implication of the fatal order is not a rival but an accomplice of the fatal strategy. Without this presupposition, the fatal strategy is

---

[50] See "The Dice Man" in *Impossible Exchange*, p. 58-67.

[51] See *Seduction*, p. 67-71.

unthinkable.

By displacing subjectivity, the semiological order displaces *meaning* as well: the latter is no longer primary but rather that which is reducible, for behind meaning there always lies non-meaning. Hence in *Seduction* Baudrillard writes: "Thus all science, reality and production only postpone the due date of seduction, which shines as non-sense, as the sensual and intelligible form of non-sense..." (SE, 70). And yet twenty years after *Seduction* Baudrillard insists that the passage from the semiological to the fatal order is not an attempt to grasp the universe of non-meaning but rather an attempt to see the world before meaning marks its appearance. I take meaning to be both the content of that which is given as well as the explication of this content. Meaning is that which is constituted in language; and language, in its own turn, implies subjectivity. Meaning is that which consciousness, as the implication of any possible discourse, intends. Unfortunately, Baudrillard has never explicated what exactly an attempt to grasp the world "before it assumes the force of meaning" is. I see this attempt to be of genealogical nature. *To say that meaning is not primary is to say that classical phenomenology presupposes either a certain "will" on the part of the objects to manifest themselves to the subject* or *that the objects passively comply to the glance of the subject.* By insisting that the question of *meaning* precedes the question of *being*, that the appearance of the world as a phenomenon is the realization that the being of the world is no longer its existence or its reality but its *meaning*, classical phenomenology unjustifiably shifted the question of the mystery of appearance into the realm of manifestation, disclosure,

revelation and epiphany, i.e., ultimately into the realm of meaning. Non-manifestation is granted a limited role: it is merely that which is not seen or encountered yet. "Something has been stolen from us: indifference" (RT). Baudrillard seems to be bringing to light the following: Intentional consciousness does not merely indicate the self-manifestation of beings; it also indicates the mystery, the "distance" of things, their resistance to appropriation and meaning. Transcendence is not merely the possible self-manifestation of the future; it in addition is that which never manifests itself fully as meaningful, which forever remains veiled to meaning. I take this rupture between the independence (transcendence) of things and their self-manifestation to be the primary reason why a return to the world before it assumes the force of meaning should be enacted. However, the fatal order does not indicate a return to the classical transcendence of things, to the distinction between things-in-themselves and phenomena. It is the appearance of things that is transcendent and indifferent to meaning, or to put it in other words, things as vital illusions transcend meaning by their radical immanence. By retaining their indifference, Objects retain their independence from the order of meaning and this distance (which is altogether not critical, for the latter always aims at appropriation) grounds seduction as genealogical basis of our "being (not) in the world."[52]

But if the task of fatal strategy is that of regaining the world before meaning marks its appearance in it, this strategy does not signify the disappearance of meaning, but rather its displacement. The reduction of meaning to that which is fatal is not an

---

[52] See *Impossible Exchange*, p. 3-25.

attempt to abandon meaning but rather an attempt to radicalize it. But if this is the case, the ultimate task of theory should no longer be that of returning the world more unintelligible than it has been given to us — a claim that *stems* from the '70s and only *echoes* in Baudrillard's later works (for this would be merely a return to non-meaning) — but rather to offer its re-evaluation. We seem to be left with two possibilities: Either the fatal theory is to alter its task, or it is to be granted a more limited role in a more encompassing theory which directly deals with numerous implications that Baudrillard so far has left unexplained. Whichever alternative one chooses, as far as meaning is concerned, the outcome is the same: The reduction of meaning into that which is fatal has turned out to be not an attempt to abandon it, but rather to clarify it.

The real encounters a similar fate in Baudrillard's narrative. While the semiological narrative signifies the disappearance of the real, while it turns the real into its own simulacrum, the fatal order indicates the reappearance of the real in a more radical form — that of a "vital illusion":

> Expelled...from its own frame, form its own principle, pushed toward its extraneity, the real has become an extreme phenomenon. So, we can no longer think of it as real. But we can think of it as "ex-orbitated," as seen from another world — as an illusion then. (RT)

Again, it is not the disappearance but the displacement of the real that is at issue in the semiological realm. The "reappearance" of the real in Baudrillard's narrative should not surprise us, for the semiological reduction, as the sphere of all possible exchange, is never ultimate, for it presupposes that which cannot be exchanged. However, the real that "reappears" is not that which has disappeared. While the destiny

of the latter is to be reduced to signs, the former, being ex-orbited and ex-centered, lying beyond all exchange, having no double, knowing no representation, by definition is that which escapes any form of appropriation: When Narcissus loses himself in his own *seductive* image, it is not a representational distance that leads him to death.

> His image is no longer 'other;' it is a surface that absorbs and seduces him, which he can approach but never pass beyond. For there is no beyond, just as there is no reflexive distance between him and his image. The mirror of water is not a surface of reflection, but of absorption (SE, 67).

Hence in the strict sense the real does not reappear in Baudrillard's narrative, for it is that which by definition cannot appear *as meaningful*, it is that which reappears in the form of the shadow or a trace. The real is no longer the referent of signs, but rather that which always escapes signification.

In opposition to representational and dialectical thought which aim at capturing the real, the task of "radical thought" is that of liberating us from the real[53]: Ex-centric thought is opposed to the concentric effect of meaning. This is the price Baudrillard is willing to pay in order to avoid the semiological disappearance of the real. Running faster than "reality," radical thought itself eradicates the real by pushing it to the unreachable realm, by transporting the real "into another planet."[54] To say the least, this strategy does not go well along with another task the fatal strategy assumes — that of achieving a better understanding of ourselves and the world. If the task of the fatal theory

---

[53] See "Radical Thought".

[54] ibid.

is not merely that of substituting the world of non-meaning for that of meaning, if fatal theory is not merely a reaction against representational and dialectical thought, Baudrillard is to reconsider the ex-centric character of the real. The phenomenological understanding of the real as the play of the originator and the originated offers a possible re-evaluation of the issue at hand.

As Baudrillard explains in "Radical Thought," we only coincide with the real "in our sleep, our unconscious and our death" (RT), for our consciousness is merely the echo of reality in "delayed time." Indeed, the question for the real as the immediate, as the "original integrity", as Merleau-Ponty would say, is a *meaningless* quest. To be sure, the real with which we coincide only in our unconscious, if restored, will carry the sediment of critical thought and hence be no longer the immediate. This is a sufficient reason to agree with Baudrillard that the real is merely an illusion, an ex-orbited real, *as far as the mere coincidence is in question*. But the real is not merely that which is marked by the hallmark of transcendence. The relation between reflection and the unreflected is a two-way relationship that phenomenology calls *Fundierung*: Even if reflection is the originated that is based on the primordial experience — the originator, the latter "is not primary in the empiricist sense and the originated is not simply derived from it, since it is through the originated that the originator is made manifest" (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 394).

This conception of the real constitutes a direct challenge to the real as the vital illusion. Phenomenologically speaking, the pure originator turns out to be an oxymoron:

Its purity is lost at the moment we reflectively mention it, or to put it in the context of Baudrillard's work, *its purity is lost at the moment Baudrillard tells us we coincide with it in our unconscious, our sleep, and our death.* We never coincide with it, for it is impossible to untie the link between reflection and the unreflected. But to this Baudrillard answers: The real as the play between the originator and the originated is not a radical conception of the real, for it presupposes the apparition of things, the seductive reversibility between appearance and disappearance. Even though this conception escapes the reflective glance, we should not concede that reflective glance is ubiquitous, but rather attempt to uncover the subject's initiation into the world which is of seductive character.

We seem to be dealing with two diametrically opposite conceptions of the real. But should we necessarily choose between them? The necessity to choose between two extremes — this is Baudrillard's strategy. The fatal strategy is described as a bet: If the universe of meaning results in that which is semiologically reduced, one is to bet on its radical opposite — on the fatal disappearance of things. Precisely this strategy allows one to insist that what Baudrillard terms "radical thought" is merely an expression of *ressentiment*, a bleak reversal of representational thought. Instead of looking at these two conceptions as alternatives, why not bet on both? Indeed, why not say that the real is both that which appears in the play between the originator and the originated as well as that which is forever deferred, as that which is marked by radical transcendence? This reconsideration and expansion of fatal strategy would satisfy two tasks that Baudrillard

has brought forth: (1) this conception of the real would still prohibit the concept of the real from being semiologically reduced, for the real would still be that which can never make its full appearance; (2) the fatal strategy would not be at odds with Baudrillard's desire to not merely oppose the universe of non-meaning to that of meaning but to offer a re-evaluation of the latter. Hence the real would be that which is not merely marked by disappearance as well as not merely that which is found in the play of *Fundierung*, the real would be marked by the play of appearance and radical transcendence. Not only is this a possibility for how the mentioned tensions in Baudrillard can be resolved. I would like to suggest the following: The logic of Baudrillard's narrative pushes fatal strategy to these conclusions.

The Question Of Writing

Let us turn to the question of writing. Writing serves as a perfect example of that which is open to a semiological explanation — it is one of the most notable digital codes. Writing is digital, for each character is discrete: the letter 'e' is either the letter 'e' or it isn't. As Baudrillard's analysis of the three stages of the image reveals, that which is semiologically explainable inevitably turns into an endless proliferation. And indeed, this is the situation of writing today — it functions in the mode of proliferation. But how is proliferation of signs to be challenged?

There are two answers that Baudrillard can offer. On the one hand, as far as fatal strategy is the eccentric opposite of all subjective strategies, writing can be challenged by

silence. Indeed, what can grasp objects as disappearing, what can signify the disappearance of subjectivity and of meaning, what can assume the form of indifference better than silence? If the fatal is the irony that lies at the bottom of the objective processes to the subject's desire for knowledge, is there a better weapon to challenge this indifference if not by the indifference of silence? And yet, the strategy of pure silence is impossible to achieve, for as soon as one attempts to enact it, the strategy becomes its own perversion, it becomes its own simulacrum: it demands *an effort* on the part of the subject to *actively* avoid the appearance of signs. Silence, as the opposite of writing, is nothing more but a reversal that presupposes that subjectivity which Baudrillard attempts to overcome — it presupposes a will, a project, a desire on the part of the subject. This strategy does not take us to the side of the object, for "only the subject desires; only the object seduces" (FS, 110). The strategy of pure silence is not a fatal strategy, for it does not escape the order of desire.

To be sure, Baudrillard does not opt for this possible subversion of the proliferation of signs: This strategy is to be abolished for it is impossible to counter the proliferation of writing by the abandonment of writing, just as it is impossible to live by a rigorous deregulation of the will in the attempt to step beyond the order of the will.[55] Hence the second option: *We should not counter writing with silence, but rather encounter silence in writing.* The fatal is to be grasped in writing itself and this is the strategy in which Baudrillard finds himself: "I *want* to slim things down, to get rid of

---

[55] See *Impossible Exchange*, p. 58-67.

things, reduce stocks. To escape fullness *you have to create* voids between spaces so that there can be collisions and short circuits" (BL, 38) [my italics — S.G.]. This, however, can be achieved not by means of silence, but only by means of writing. Indeed, writing offers both a possibility of the appropriation of meaning as well as of a loss of meaning, for writing both says more than it wants to say as well as it never says enough. Writing both unveils the object and veils it, for the tension — the distance — between what has and what has not been said is irreducible. Hence in the interview with Patrice Bollon, Baudrillard describes his style of writing as that which follows fatal strategy. Baudrillard's style attempts to seduce the reader: "[J]ust when you think you've grasped the meaning it evaporates, only to reconstruct itself a little further on" (BL, 39) and ... evaporate again.

"After this tremendous detour...through ideology, through radical criticism, through Freud and Marx, you will find in my work a return to writers I started with: Nietzsche and Hölderlin" (BL, 37). This return, however, is both stylistic and thematic. Indeed, Baudrillard's solution to the problem of the proliferation of writing can be expressed with the help of the famous phrase of Hölderlin: "but where danger is, grows the saving power also."[56] There is danger in writing, for the latter is open to semiological explanation and hence proliferation. But in the same sphere of writing we encounter the saving power also, for the semiological explanation is never final. There are two reasons why this is the case. On the one hand, the genesis of meaning escapes the semiological

---

[56] *Wo die Gefahr wächst, wächst das Rettende auch.* For Baudrillard's both Heideggerian and anti-Heideggerian interpretation of this phrase in relation to technology, see *The Vital Illusion*, p. 81-83.

framework: the latter does not account for the discursive nature of language. But on the other hand — and this is what directly interests Baudrillard — the "excess of the signifier" escapes the semiological explanation: "[T]he signifier is there from the beginning, spread everywhere, in a profusion that happily the signified never exhausts" (FS, 151). This magic overabundance of the signifier is not of the order of meaning, but of the fatal order, for writing goes "faster than the conceptual connections — this is the secret of writing" (FS, 162). Writing grasps (or is grasped) by the interconnectedness of appearances, it opens up the sphere within which "nowhere does there reign a law of meaning" (FS, 172). Writing grasps an order which is unknown either to the semiological realm, nor to subjectivity.

This analysis of language offers a reason why the fatal order is not to be opposed to the phenomenological sphere. First, Baudrillard bets on fatal strategy because it escapes the sphere of simulacra, the realm of senseless proliferation of images. But it is not the order of seduction alone but the sphere of meaning also that constitutes a challenge to the semiological order. Baudrillard is wrong when he insists that it is the fatal order alone that is opposed to the proliferation of images. While seduction reveals that which radically transcends any semiological appropriation, the genesis of meaning reveals that reduction to the play of signs is never final. Indeed, together with Baudrillard (although with a different aim in mind) we can reverse Hölderlin's phrase: the more the saving power grows, the greater the danger.[57] If we bet on the fatal as the only possible

---

[57] See *The Vital Illusion*, p. 81.

alternative to the semiological, we run the risk of falling into a universe of non-meaning — a possibility that Baudrillard definitely wishes to avoid. Only if we take into consideration both seduction and the sphere of meaning as the challenges to the proliferation of signs, can we relate the "recovered potency and originality of the world" (IE, 16) to the sphere of meaning.

Baudrillard's writings themselves lead to this conclusion. Just as the proliferation of writing is not to be challenged by the reverse — by the radical silence, so the fatal disappearance of things is not the only possible challenge to the proliferation of signs. Baudrillard is wrong when he insists that "if you want to get away from the madness of the world you have to sacrifice all of its charm as well" (FS, 181). On the contrary, in order to challenge the madness of writing you do not have to sacrifice all of its charm, but rather recover the charm, uncover its force, make it speak in a new way.[58] For if it true that "where danger is, grows the saving power also," then one should be cautious about how the semiotic order is overthrown, so that the saving power is not abandoned with it.

The semiological reduction is never final. Although the semiological sphere offers a new mode of explanation, it does not signify the disappearance of the symbolic.

---

[58] Antonin Artaud, to whom Baudrillard often turns for support, was well aware of the dangerous and yet redeeming power of language. On the one hand, as he wrote to Georges le Breton in 1946, "I have never been able to stand someone meddling with the lines of a great poet from a semantical, historical, archeological or mythological point of view — lines of poetry are not explained." And yet, at the same time he lets us know that "the only language which I could have with an audience was to bring bombs out of my pockets and throw them in the audience's face with a blatant gesture of aggression... and blows are the only language in which I feel capable of speaking."

The latter continues to persist, it overlaps with the semiological structures. Hence the question that one should ask is not how to ex-center the real, but rather how to uncover that real which is semiologically sedimented and yet not bygone. Baudrillard is wrong to assume that there is nothing left to do but to go over to the side of the enigma (BL, 39). Appearances can be challenged not only by means of disappearance; the semiotic can be challenged not only the fatal; the elimination of the Other can be challenged not only by the destruction of the real. Even though the subjective appropriation of otherness is reductive, the radical mystery of the Other is not the only possible alternative. And yet, Baudrillard reasons in the following manner: "It is the idea of a 'wager' that I am putting forward; just for a moment let us suppose that things are biased towards the fatal and the enigmatic" (ibid). The tension in Baudrillard's writings is indebted to this idea of the wager and it can be abolished only by rethinking the latter. To rethink the wager is to rethink reversibility.

Reversibility

Baudrillard has never offered a detailed explanation of how reversibility is to be understood. And yet he makes it clear that reversibility is the major weapon to challenge the semiological order. Let me briefly indicate the major characteristics of Baudrillard's reversibility. To say that the object takes the form of reversibility is to say that it lies (1) beyond the system of cause and effect; (2) beyond the opposition between chance and necessity; (3) beyond the order of history; (4) beyond the order of meaning.

To step into the sphere of seduction is to step into the order of reversibility between events. This reversibility, however, presupposes the disappearance of subjectivity, for to see objects as fatal is to see them as unpredictable, as unexplainable. They are unexplainable for they indicate the reversibility of the causal order — the reversion of cause and effect[59]. Objects become pure appearances when they are effects that precede their causes, when, in fact, they are events without causes. And yet, pure events are not explainable as brought by chance, because chance is nothing else but the opposite of the causal necessity. Hence as pure appearances Objects are seductive, and yet not meaningful, for meaning, like Kafka's messiah, always comes one day too late. For Baudrillard, the passage of events as pure appearances into the order of meaning is the passage from the seductive into the subjective order. This passage, however, is possible only as the sacrifice of seduction:

> This is the eternal delay to which things are condemned by meaning. Forever to invent causes in order to dispel the prestige of their apparition, forever to invent meaning to dispel appearances, to delay their too-rapid linkage. (FS, 162).

Hence reversibility is the fundamental rule of the game of appearances, of the "metamorphosis of appearances, against the irresistible order of time, of law and meaning" (FS, 163). It is this reversibility as the cycle of appearance and disappearance — this incessant metamorphosis — that Baudrillard calls *destiny*. The latter is the

---

[59] "This is the definition of fate: the precession of the effects over their very causes. So all things happen before having happened. Reasons come after. Sometimes things even disappear before happening, before having occurred. What, then, do we know of them?" (FS, 161).

ceremony[60] of the world — the opposite of the subjective desire and objective chance, for here reigns not the law of meaning, but the interconnection of appearances: "[E]verything is arranged...but never with a connection of meaning — always a connection of appearances (FS, 176).

It is only on the basis of the sacrifice of subjectivity and meaning that seduction can mark its appearance. And yet, while seduction is not a strategy,[61] it calls for a strategy that can join the game of appearance and disappearance — the fatal strategy. As I have indicated, this strategy presupposes a certain subjectivity that bets on its "validity." This subjectivity, that joins the game of appearance and disappearance, is crucial to the game, for all that has "happened only once, is only accidental, while what happens a second time becomes fatal" (FS, 187). By joining the game of seduction, fatal strategy becomes the fatal "second coming": by redoubling "can it make itself a true event, attaining the character of a fatal happening" (ibid). Hence in order for the fatal strategy to come to be, subjectivity is to (1) grasp the process of reversibility and (2) to join the game of reversibility by letting the Object retain its mystery.

But is reversibility merely a shift to one's opposite? Does it merely open the space for questioning the reversal of happenings and processes? Or should we think of reversibility as a play, as a dance, as a *pendulum*, where appearance and disappearance

---

[60] See "The Ceremony of the World" in *Fatal Strategies*, p. 166-179. The connection of signs in ceremony constitutes a violence to interpretation, a violence to the real, a violence against meaning, a violence against time, a violence against representation, a violence against the spectacle.

[61] See *Fatal Strategies*, p. 155.

are granted significance, where the one is not merely the final abolishment of the other? Not merely a shift from history to destiny, from meaning to appearance, from subjectivity to Objectivity, but a *reversible* process which calls for the task of grasping the *constant* appearance and disappearance. Indeed, like a pendulum the social shifts to the masses and the latter back to the social. As soon as identity (e.g. social, national) is granted a final statute, as soon as it is taken for granted, it becomes perverse, artificial. But as soon as it is recognized as such, we witness a search for a new voice, for new means of expression — a shift from the masses to the social, which, to be sure, is never final. Similarly, if the ceremonial is to have a meaning today, it is not that ceremonial which is opposed to any form of dialogue, not that ceremonial which is fatally opposed to the spheres of meaning, history, subjectivity. That is not to say that the ceremonial is to lose its fatal character; on the contrary, this fatality can tame the numerous forms of appropriation and proliferation only by entering into a dialogue with them. Reversibility is not merely a reversal: it opens up the space for re-evaluation, which (if it remains faithful to the fundamental rule of reversibility) never pretends to lift the last veil, to uncover the final secret. Therefore, while "the enigma is that fatality at the heart of every strategy," while "the object mocks the laws we attach to it" (FS, 188), it is not true that nothing else remains "but to pass on the side of the object and on the side of its eccentric and precious effects, of its fatal effects" (FS, 190), just as it is not true that the proliferation of writing can be challenged only by silence.

If fatal theory accepts these shifts of purpose, it has a chance of becoming a new

form of phenomenological reduction. It is here that we witness how raw phenomenology can positively reinterpret the themes of classical phenomenology. No longer a reduction to transcendental subjectivity (Husserl), no longer a reduction to the world (Merleau-Ponty), nor even to language (Ricoeur), but a reduction to the Object. Indeed, what is this process of the displacement of subjectivity in the passage from the semiological to the fatal if not a return to things themselves? The task of the fatal strategy is to grasp the appearance of things devoid of theoretical sedimentation, devoid of any possible subjective projections, to grasp things (as appearances) at the level of their highest intensity, to grasp the unfolding of the world as the *jouissance* between appearance and disappearance. Having described seduction as the *trompe l'oeil*, Baudrillard shows the implications this sphere has for the realm of meaning: "Suddenly this seizure rebounds onto the so called 'real' world, to reveal that this 'reality' is naught but a staged world, objectified in accord with the rules of perspective" (SE, 63). The reduction that the fatal strategy performs is a reduction of meaning, of subjectivity, of reference, and yet it is a phenomenological reduction, for its task is that of reaching a better understanding of ourselves and the world. And yet, for it to be truly phenomenological, fatal theory is to remember what so far it has forgotten — to place the Object back into the world (which, to be sure, is not merely a world of non-meaning). Only if this step is taken can fatal theory fulfill its promise — re-evaluate the world, things, appearances, subjectivity and meaning.

Consider the following passages from *Fatal Strategies*:

> There is neither form nor meaning to a first encounter, still stained with misunderstanding and banality. Fatality only comes afterwards, by the current effect of this previous life. And there is a sort of will and energy in this occurrence, which no one knows anything about, and which isn't the resurgence of a hidden order. Not at all. It's in the full light of day that certain things come to their assigned existence. If the stars rose and set in just any order, heaven itself would be meaningless. It's the recurrence of their trajectory that makes for the heavenly event. And it's the recurrence of certain fatal peripeties that makes for event of a life. (FS, 187-188)

> Once certain events of a life have thus had their second chance, once the cycle has brought them back once and once only, that life is completed. When a life knows no second coming of this kind, it ends before having begun. (FS, 187)

> Two events, ten years apart. No connection between them. Two disappearances the equivalent of symbolic murder. Something — how to say it — spiritually inexpiable. The first time I was the one who disappeared in this way; the second time I was the one abandoned, and without the shadow of a reason....But the story demands that a reversibility be subtly established between two events that are secret from each other, between which, furthermore, I have never made any connection. Then one day the two episodes appeared to me under the same sign, and were suddenly resolved in the beauty of this conjunction. This sign was a name. Both persons bore the same first name. No one can say what infinitesimal trace things will pick for the dénouement, but we can be sure that it is not by chance....Their duplication, their twin imagination, their conjunction made them suddenly understandable, without the secret of either one ever having been lifted. What could have happened, psychologically, on both sides, in the two cases? It was unimportant to me; whatever it was that had been meaningless was resolved in another kind of linkage. (FS, 158-159)

Baudrillard is not the first to uncover this fatal linkage that escapes the order of meaning. Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* is the greatest monument built to cherish and preserve the mystery of this experience. However, the *Recherche* is not the only work that addresses these issues. Whether we look at *Contre Saint-Beuve*, or at *Les plaisirs et les jours*, we will find Proust addressing the same issues: Proust managed to make this question into the question of his life. The taste of the *madeleine*, the uneven

steps, the sound of the bottle of beer being opened, or tying one's shoelaces — all these and other experiences express a certain interruption of the flow of time, a certain overlapping of events that escapes volition and knowledge. But Proust went further than that. His task was not merely that of showing how these experiences interrupt the order of chronological time. Proust knew not only how to escape chronological time but how to recover Time as well: Time, for Proust, is to be lost in order to be regained, wasted in order to be redeemed. The task of fatal strategy should not be merely that of noticing and describing the mystery and seduction of the fatal order, but, to paraphrase Proust, to catch its riddle flying by your side and to answer its question. It is this last step that is missing in Baudrillard. Only if it is taken, can the mentioned tensions concerning meaning, subjectivity, reference and reduction be overcome.

CONCLUSION

How can we encounter Nothing as the underlying fabric of all things, as the necessary shadow of Something, as the only ground or background against which one can comprehend existence? How can we reveal the continuity of illusion, of absence, of non-value as that on which Something is founded? How can we describe non-meaning as the necessary condition of meaning? How can we restore uncertainty as "the very precondition of the divided nature of thought?" If "the real divested of the anti-real becomes hyperreal, more real than the real, and vanishes into simulation" (IE, 12), how can we restore the power of the anti-real? Having followed the route of the Marxist interpretation of the contemporary scene of capitalism, having abandoned this interpretation for its numerous presuppositions and having passed over to the themes of simulation and simulacra, having relocated this analysis (to the despair of his sociological critics) into the realm of seduction, Baudrillard now places those questions at the heart of fatal strategy. Indeed, these questions constitute the task of fatal strategy, and yet, we do not encounter a promising description of how they are to gain positive answers. Although Baudrillard calls the figure of the wager a leap from the metaphysics of presence to the side of the Object, it is precisely this figure that does not allow the aforementioned questions to be positively illuminated. According to Baudrillard,

> if we cannot grasp both the genesis and the singularity of the event, the appearance of things and their meaning, then two courses are open to us: either we master meaning, and appearances escape us; or the meaning escapes, and

> appearances are saved. By the very play of appearances, things are becoming further and further removed from their meaning, and resisting the violence of interpretation. (IE, 19)

It becomes immediately obvious that if this wager is taken seriously, the questions of re-evaluation cannot be answered. But what happens if one agrees with Baudrillard? To say together with Baudrillard that images are only their own simulacra is to reject representation as the primary structure of thought. To be sure, this rejection does not mean that we are to choose between meaning and non-meaning, between something and nothing. It is my contention that a more radical wager underlies Baudrillard's recent works: on the one hand, the opposition between meaning and non-meaning, between something and nothing; on the other hand, the attempt to re-evaluate the universe of meaning by uncovering non-meaning as its underlying fabric. I have tried to show that in so far as the task of fatal strategy is to render the world more enigmatic and more unintelligible than it has been given to us, this strategy inevitably becomes its own simulacrum, for just as it is impossible to challenge the proliferation of writing by silence, so it is impossible to challenge the semiological destiny of signs by stepping to the other side of the enigma. That is to say, the logic within which Baudrillard finds himself requires that he bet on the second alternative of this new wager.

One can always ask what are the reasons that do not allow the probability of grasping both the genesis and the singularity of the event? According to Baudrillard, the reasons are semiological: It is the semiological destiny of every image to lose its referential tie and to become its own simulacrum; the unequivocal and immobile signs

inevitably reach the third order of the image — simulation. The singularity of the sign is lost when it joins the universality of the code. And yet, in order to uncover the singularity of signs or events one need not jump to the side of the enigma: the world, *contre* Baudrillard, is not Manichaean. If religious heresies can serve as examples here, the relation between simulation and simulacra is rather Amaurian.

Amaury (Almaric or Amalric of Bène) interpreted the Apostle's claim that "God is all in all" as a theological development of the Platonic doctrine of the *chora*. God is the determination, the *topos* of every entity — the place in which every thing is. This indeed is a radical interpretation of transcendence: The transcendent is no longer an entity that lies beyond all things; the pure transcendent is rather the taking-place of every thing.[62] On November 12, 1210, the followers of Amaric of Bène were sent to burn at the stake.

Just as transcendence retains its opposition from immanence and yet is found within immanence, so seduction lies beyond the sphere of simulation, and yet it is found within the sphere of simulacra, it is, as Baudrillard himself points out, an "enchanted simulacrum." The question thus becomes how to uncover the singularity of signs and events within the realm of the universality of the code. No longer a mere opposition between simulation and seduction, between meaning and non-meaning, between something and nothing, no longer a mere question of how to reverse the destiny of signs — the task that the fatal strategy should assume is rather how to uncover the transcendent

---

[62] See Agamben, *The Coming Community*, p. 13-17.

(the pure appearance) within the realm of simulation. This is where my analysis of raw phenomenology has led: Only a re-evaluated fatal strategy can gain positive determinations. So let us ask, what would a re-evaluated fatal strategy look like?

Placed within a new context, Baudrillard's genealogical description of the destiny of simulacra holds surprising affinities with the hermeneutical approach towards the power and powerlessness of language.[63] One can even say, what Baudrillard terms the destiny of signs, hermeneutics calls the forgetfulness of language. On the one hand, language is a digital code, made up of distinct oppositions whose internal difference determines the meaning of each term. On the other hand, language is a pure infinity, it is that within which we always already find ourselves, it is the fundamental presupposition of any thought. To say that we are thrown into language is to say that we are capable of expressing our experience, and yet, words are not capable of expressing the full richness of that which is experienced. The hermeneutical insistence on the primacy of language is not a form of linguistic idealism, it is a claim that places us in a totality of meaning which always transcends the speaker. That which is said is always accompanied with what is not said: Precisely because language is infinite and the human word is essentially incomplete, no meaning is ever exhausted, manifested as a whole. To put it in Heidegger's terms, the history of Being is at the same time the history of its forgetfulness: We are always on the way to Being, on the way to language, for it is Being

---

[63] There is nothing more powerful than language, for it is through language that beings are made manifest. And at the same time, language is powerless in its own nature, for it reveals the limits of our experience: there is always more to be said and thought.

which does not allow itself to be definitively articulated. That is to say, the hermeneutical insistence on the primacy of language is an insistence on our historicity and our finitude: if understanding is always lingually mediated, it can never manifest itself as a whole.

The forgetfulness of language is the forgetfulness of finitude: as soon as any truth escapes the context of language, we enter the stage of simulation. By being taken out of the language horizon, each truth starts leading a new artificial existence. It is on the basis of this reduction that signs can enter into distinct oppositions with each other. The passage from the openness of language to language as a closed system, or what Baudrillard often terms the passage from metaphor to metonymy, is indeed nothing other than the forgetfulness of language. For what is forgotten is not merely our finitude, but also the infinity of language. One can indeed call the human experience of language the experience of infinity, for to be thrown into language is to be *not* able to escape the infinite play of meaningful propositions, for voicing our experience can never reach a final determination.

Just as our experience of language is the experience of infinity, it is an experience of Nothing. Being placed at the very beginning, being the fundamental presupposition of anything that is said, language reveals itself to us in its absolute anonymity. Being capable of seeing and revealing the world through language, we are not capable of seeing and revealing language itself. We always experience language as being already there, as that which always enables and escapes our sight. Giorgio Agamben is right when he

argues that,

> This is the Copernican revolution that the thought of our time inherits from nihilism: we are the first human beings who have become completely conscious of language. For the first time, what preceding generations called God, Being, spirit, unconscious appear to us as what they are: names for language. This is why for us, any philosophy, any religion, or any knowledge that has not become conscious of this turn belongs irrevocably to the past. ("The Idea of Language," 45)

No other word can name this anonymous language better than the word 'Nothing,' for "there is no name for the name, and there is no metalanguage, not even in the form of an insignificant voice" (ibid). But if there is no name for language, if language, being the fundamental presupposition, allows us to see but does not allow itself to be seen, language as the underlying foundation of meaning itself is meaningless. Furthermore, if the real is that which is seen through language, language itself is non-real. Indeed, the task of the fatal strategy to uncover non-meaning as the foundation of meaning, to uncover Nothing as the underlying fabric of all things, to uncover the non-real as the necessary condition of the real gains its full significance in this context. Non-meaning, Nothing, non-real, impossible exchange appear to us as what they are: names for language. And indeed, they appear as the fundamental presuppositions of everything that is meaningful and real. Without a doubt, "things only ever exist *ex nihilo*....The Nothing does not cease to exist as soon as there is something. The Nothing continues (not) to exist just beneath the surface of things" (IE, 8), for *language is the Nothing from which something springs*. To borrow a metaphor from Agamben, reality and meaning are only two slopes dropping down from either side of the watershed of the Nothing (language).

Fatal strategy is right in insisting that "it is the forgetting and denial of the Nothing which brings about the catastrophic deregulations of the systems" (IE, 8). Here the closeness between fatal strategy and hermeneutics is most clearly discernible. Hermeneutics places the forgetfulness of language at the very beginning of Western metaphysics: the distinction between truth and language, to put the matter in Heideggerian language, leaves unthematized language as the house of Being. Only on the basis of this forgetfulness, which is the forgetfulness of finitude, can truth become independent of language horizons.[64] In a similar manner one can say: The forgetfulness of Nothing as the forgetfulness of the infinity and anonymity of language is the *conditio sine qua non* of the three stages of simulacra. Indeed, it is the forgetfulness of being thrown into language that constitutes the destiny of signs to lose their destination — their referents. This loss results in the birth of hyperreality, it signifies the implosion of the sign and the referent, of the medium and the message, for it is only when the word forgets that it is never fully a word that it can enter the game of distinct oppositions within the precession and circulation of the code. Baudrillard's semiological analysis brings us to a hermeneutical conclusion: It is the forgetfulness of the fundamental presupposition of thought that constitutes the merging of that which is disclosed through language and the things themselves.

However, just as the forgetfulness of Being is not its elimination but rather a part

---

[64] See Andrzej Wiercinski's "Inaugural Address" in *Between the Human and the Divine: Philosophical and Theological Hermeneutics.*

of the history of Being, so the forgetfulness of the Nothing (language) does not constitute its disappearance: The Nothing continues (not) to exist beneath the layer of things. It is in this context that Baudrillard's analyses of the loss of the object by sciences,[65] of the implosion of the social and the masses, of the merging of the medium and the message gain their full force. The anonymity of language resists the infusion of any logic, but this resistance is ironic: Being the ultimate horizon of all possible propositions, language allows the birth of subjective projections of meaning, but being at the same time anonymous and infinite, it prohibits analyses from the "extermination of the Inhuman in all its forms," from the "Integrist project of domestication of reality from outside our own spheres."[66] By overreaching itself, Something falls into ruins, by resisting all uncertainty, Something makes bonfires of its own postulates — what Baudrillard terms the revenge of the crystal is nothing other than the reappearance of the Nothing after its forgetfulness.

If it is the Nothing which is lacking, it is the Nothing which should be brought back into play. By re-evaluating the concept of thought, fatal strategy makes the Nothing into the fundamental rule of the game. Thought must register a leap: We should no longer say that it is the subject which thinks the object, but rather place thought within a reversible structure. Re-evaluation of thought results in its de-centering — when we think the object, the object thinks us. In fact this re-evaluation is not merely an act of de-

---

[65] "The object is not what it was. In all areas it evades us....At the end of their experimenting, the most advanced sciences can only register its disappearance. Are we not faced here with an ironic revenge of the object, a strategy of deterrence, flouting experimental protocols and divesting the subject itself of its subject position?" (IE, 22)

[66] See *Impossible Exchange*, p. 16.

centering subjectivity, but rather a destruction of any possible foundations:

> Physical alteration of the world by consciousness, metaphysical alteration of consciousness by the world: there is no cause to ask where this begins, or "who thinks whom." Each is simultaneously in play, and each deflects the other from its goal. (IE, 24)

This re-evaluation of thought speaks to us in a new way when seen as a meditation on language. Being thrown into the anonymous and infinite language, thought indeed becomes "thinking of the world thinking us" (IE, 24), for just as we speak through language, just as we see the world through language, so language speaks through us. Here lies the reason why one cannot simply say that the recognition of language as the fundamental presupposition of thought does not undermine the themes of scientific, religious, technological interpretations. It is not enough simply to note that to be thrown into language is at the same time to be anonymous to language, that this anonymity still allows to constitute infinite sets of meaningful propositions and therefore that the already constituted sets of scientific or religious propositions remain what they have been after coming to terms with language. To say that it is not we that speak but rather language that speaks through us is to say that thought is no longer in charge of the world, that thought is always placed within the anonymous and ironic universe of language. Indeed, only on the basis of the irony of language can one see the science's loss of the object as not merely an accident but rather as a fatal happening, for the scientific object, just as the social sphere and just as any figure of speech, is not passive but active: "Today, they say that science no longer 'discovers' its object, but 'invents' it. We should say, then, that the object, too, does more than just 'discover' us; it invents us purely and simply — it

thinks us" (IE, 23).

Just as we see the world through language but do not see language itself, so language sees the world through us, but does not see us. One might wonder why this is the case: Is it because there is nothing for language to see, because the subject is not an unalterable presence, an underlying substratum, or a pre-given entity? Just as we call the anonymous language the Nothing, are we "seen by language" as nothing as well? I can only agree with Calvin Schrag when he says that "the subject as an epistemological, metaphysical, scientific, or literary construct is indeed a vagary of reflection that had best be set aside" (Schrag, 120). But to follow Schrag's line of thought, "to be done with subjectivity in these senses is not to be done with the subject in any way you please" (ibid). Saying by necessity is saying something by someone about something: Subjectivity is a necessary implicate of any possible discourse. Precisely therefore language does not merely discover us, but invents us: it implicates us in its anonymous unfolding.

In two senses it is not quite right to say that we see the world through language but we do not see language itself. On the one hand, it is not really we who see the world through language, but rather it is language itself that implicates us in its unfolding. On the other hand, language does not really lie beyond our sight: it is we who see it as anonymous. We are all familiar with the experience of the anonymity of language. When we allow the words to assume their free play, we experience language as that which Baudrillard calls destiny. As Baudrillard rightly points out, "[W]hen two words,

two signs, seduce each other, even without their knowing it, in the unfolding of language (*Witz*), this seduction, as unique as it is, has dazzling effects on the entire sentence and on the whole effect of communication" (FS, 136). Not only is this free play of language the condition of comicalness, it also has the power of revealing to us the most unexpected truths.[67] In this context we both can and should say together with Baudrillard that we are not alienated, and yet, we are definitively other, that we are no longer subject to the law of desire but rather to the artifice of rules; that I answer only to something non-human — something that is inscribed not within me but in the vicissitudes of the worlds signs,[68] for "*In certain cases it is only language that knows. It is in language alone that the ironic and fatal chain is linked*" (FS, 134) [*my italics* — S.G.].

Hence, if fatal strategy is seen as the thinking of the anonymity and infinity of language, this strategy indeed uncovers and explains (1) the Nothing as the underlying fabric of all things, (2) absence as the necessary condition of Something, (3) the non-real as the necessary presupposition of the real, and (4) impossible exchange as the necessary presupposition of all the systems of exchange. No longer a mere reversal of subjective strategies, hence no longer a mere expression of *ressentiment*, fatal strategy becomes a

---

[67] "We may have revolved every possible idea in our minds, and yet the truth has never occurred to us, and it is from without, when we are least expecting it, that it give us its cruel stab and wounds us for all time....[R]ising up suddenly from the black night in which it seemed for ever buried, striking...perhaps also to make dazzlingly clear to my eyes the fatal consequences...I had perilously allowed to expand within myself the fatal road, destined to cause me suffering, of Knowledge." (Proust, 366-377).

[68] See *The Transparency of Evil*, p. 173.

true re-evaluation of our being-in-the-world.[69] No longer a mere leap to the side of the enigma, this strategy is rather an archeology of simulacra which aims at uncovering the fundamental presupposition of the language of the binary code — at uncovering the other, more fundamental language which is infinite, anonymous and ironic. Without a doubt, this re-evaluation carries numerous implications: Within this new space we are to rethink the disappearance of the social in the masses, of aesthetics in transaesthetics, of politics in the figure of the transpolitical, of sex in the transsexual, of economics in transeconomics.[70] A detailed analysis of these themes exceeds the scope of this work. Let me limit myself to the following: These and other disappearances are to lose the character of *ressentiment*, they are not to be mere reversals, but become re-evaluations of aesthetics, politics and economics. To be sure, this re-evaluation is not to be a conservative reaction against Baudrillard's body of works. Just as the re-evaluated subjectivity as the implication of any possible discourse has little, if anything, in common with subjectivity as the foundation of thought, so these re-evaluated spheres should not be mere returns to the simulated orders. To return once again to the heresy of Almaric of Bène: Fatal strategy becomes a thought within the sphere of simulation that attempts to uncover the taking-place of simulation and is therefore a radical abandonment of simulacra from within, not from without. It is this style of re-evaluating phenomena that

---

[69] "Has not humanity, with its inborn consciousness, its ambiguity, its symbolic order and its power of illusion, ended up altering the universe, affecting or infecting it with its own uncertainty? Has it not ended up contaminating the world (of which it is, nevertheless, an integral part) with its non-being, its way of not-being-in-the-world?" (IE, 24)

[70] See *The Transparency of Evil*, especially "After the Orgy," p. 3-14.

comes to terms with ambiguity, finitude, uncertainty, in short, with language.

How does fatal strategy as the thinking of language relate to the disappearance of perspectivism in the two forms of post-perspectivism? Baudrillard's describes the appearance of the third order of the image as the abandonment of the structures of perspectivism and their replacement with the precession and circulation of the code: What is seen no longer depends on the self-showing of phenomena or on drives and needs, as Nietzsche had it, but rather on the binary logic of the medium within which we are placed. Baudrillard challenges this first form of post-perspectivism with the theme of seduction. To be seduced by an Object is to escape the determinations of the code, to enter the realm of fatal reversibility, in short, to step into the second form of post-perspectivism. Baudrillard sees this order as the fatal and final disappearance of subjectivity, of meaning, of truth, of the fatal reappearance of the Nothing, of uncertainty, of ambiguity. Hence the fatal order is most radically opposed to the semiological realm, for the former most radically transcends the latter. Seen as the thinking of the infinity and anonymity of language, fatal strategy offers a re-evaluation of the relation between the two forms of post-perspectivism. The second order is no longer a mere opposite of the first order, one need not bet on one of them. The second order is rather the ultimate presupposition of the first one. Hence, fatal strategy as the thinking of language is truly genealogical and truly post-perspectival. It is genealogical, for it uncovers the infinity of language as the ground of the play of simulacra. This genealogy is truly post-metaphysical, for the ground of language is not a substance, not even a foundation, rather

it is infinite and anonymous. To be sure, if this strategy is truly genealogical, we no longer have to choose between the haecceity and the genesis of the event; being genealogical, the one is truly the other. This strategy is also post-perspectival, for it no longer merely speaks through language (which would be the case if it were only the Object that was seductive), but rather takes into account the fact that it is speaking. Hence, the fatal order becomes a play between perspectivism and radical post-perspectivism: philosophy can speak about everything and anything if it takes into account the fact that it is speaking. Fatal strategy is a strategy that speaks through language about the infinity and anonymity of language: it is a strategy of language, from language, about language. *Following the footsteps of seduction, fatal strategy is that which tears you away from your own subjectivity to return you to the sovereignty of the infinity and anonymity of language.*

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Agamben, Giorgio. The Coming Community. Michael Hardt, trans. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Pres, 1990.

Agamben, Giorgio. "The Idea of Language," Potentialities. Werner Hamacher and David E. Wellbery, ed. Daniel Heller-Roazen, trans. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999, 39-48.

Baudrillard, Jean. Baudrillard Live: Selected Interviews. Mike Gane, Ed. London: Routledge, 1993.

Baudrillard, Jean. Fatal Strategies. Philip Beitchman and W.G.J. Niesluchowski, trans. New York: Semiotext(e), 1990.

Baudrillard, Jean. For A Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign. Charles Levin, trans. St Louis: Telos Press, 1981.

Baudrillard, Jean. Forget Foucault. New York: Semiotext(e), 1987.

Baudrillard, Jean. Impossible Exchange. Chris Turner, trans. New York: Verso, 2001.

Baudrillard, Jean. In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities. Paul Foss, John Johnston and Paul Patton, trans. New York: Semiotext(e), 1983.

Baudrillard, Jean. "Photography, Or the Writing of Light," Ctheory A083 (4/12/2000): n. pag. Online. Internet. Francois Debris, trans. 6/13/2002.

Baudrillard, Jean. "Radical Thought," Ctheory A025 (4/19/1995): n. pag. Online, Internet. Francois Debris, trans. 6/13/2002.

Baudrillard, Jean. Seduction. Brian Singer, trans. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990.

Baudrillard, Jean. Simulations. Paul Foss, Paul Patton and Philip Beitchman, trans. New York: Semiotext(e), 1983.

Baudrillard, Jean. Symbolic Exchange and Death. I.A. Grant, trans. London: Sage Publications, 1993.

Baudrillard, Jean. The Ecstasy of Communication. Bernarde and Caroline Schutze, trans. New York: Semiotext(e), 1988.

Baudrillard, Jean. The Gulf War Did Not Take Place. Paul Patton, trans. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995.

Baudrillard, Jean. The Transparency of Evil. James Benedict, trans. New York: Verso, 1996.

Baudrillard, Jean. The Vital Illusion. Julia Witwer, ed. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000.

Bauman, Zygmunt. "The Sweet Scent of Decomposition," Forget Baudrillard? Chris Rojek and Bryan S. Turner, ed. London and New York: Routledge, 1993, 22-47.

Butler, Rex. Jean Baudrillard: The Defence of the Real. London: Thousand Oaks, 1999.

Clark, Maudmarie. Nietzsche on Truth and Language. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Debord, Guy. Comments on the Society of the Spectacle. Malcolm Imrie, trans. London: Verso, 1990.

Deleuze, Gilles. Nietzsche and Philosophy. Hugh Tomlinson, trans. London: Athlone Press, 1983.

Derrida, Jacques. "Differance," Speech and Phenomena. David Allison and Newton Garver, trans. Evanston VI.: Northwestern University Press, 1996, 129-161.

Foucault, Michel. "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," The Foucault Reader. Paul Rabinow, ed. Donald Bouchard and Sherry Simon, trans. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984, 76-101.

Gane, Mike. Baudrillard's Bestiary. London: Routledge Press, 1991.

Gane, Mike. Critical and Fatal Theory. London: Routledge Press, 1991.

Granier, Jean. "Perspectivism and Interpretation," The New Nietzsche: Contemporary Styles of Interpretation. David Allison, ed and trans. New York: Dell Pub. Co., 1977, 190-201.

Haar, Michel. "Nietzsche and Metaphysical Language," The New Nietzsche:

Contemporary Styles of Interpretation. David Allison, ed. Cyril and Liliane Welch, trans. New York: Dell Pub. Co., 1977, 5-37.

Havas, Randall. Nietzsche's Genealogy: Nihilism and the Will to Knowledge. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995.

Hegel, Georg W.F. Science of Logic. A.V. Miller, trans. New York: Humanity Books, 1999.

Heidegger, Martin. "On the Essence of Truth", Basic Writings. David Farrell Krell, Ed. John Sallis, trans. New York: Harper and Row, 1977.

Jurist, Elliot. Beyond Hegel and Nietzsche: Philosophy, Culture, and Agency. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000.

Kellner, Douglas. Jean Baudrillard: From Marxism to Postmodernism and Beyond. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989.

Kroker, Arthur. "The Image Matrix," Ctheory A105 (3\20\2002): n. pag. Online. Internet. 6/13/2002.

Lampert, Jay. "The Resurrection and Dissemination (From the Pillar of Cloud Toward the Aporia," Joyful Wisdom: the Resurrection in Derrida's Glorious Glas. St. Catherines and Zagreb: Thought House Publishing Group, 1999.

Levin, Charles. "Baudrillard, Critical Theory and Psychoanalysis," Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory. 8 (1-2), 1984, 35-52.

McGinn, Collin. "Can You Believe It?" The New York Review of Books. April, 2001

McLuhan, Marshall. The Medium is the Message. New York: Bantham Books, 1967.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. Phenomenology of Perception. Colin Smith, trans. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1989.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. The Visible and the Invisible. Alphonso Lingis, trans. Evanston, III.: Northwestern University Press, 1997.

Nehamas, Alexander. Nietzsche: Life as Literature. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. Beyond Good and Evil. R.J. Hollingdale, trans. Harmondsworth:

Penguin, 1973.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. Daybreak: Thoughts and Prejudices of Morality. Maudemarie Clark and Brian Leiter, ed. R.J. Hollingdale, trans. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. Gay Science; With an Prelude in Rhyhmes and an Appendix in Songs. Walter Kaufmann, trans. New York: Vintage Books, 1974.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale, trans. New York: Vintage Books, 1969.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense," The Portable Nietzsche. Walter Kaufmann, ed. New York: Viking Press, 1954.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. The Will To Power. Walter Kaufmann, trans. New York: Vintage Books, 1968.

Porter, Roy. "Baudrillard: History, Hysteria and Consumption," Forget Baudrillard? Chris Rojek and Bryan S. Turner, ed. London and New York: Routledge, 1993, 1-22.

Poster, Mark. "Introduction," Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings. Mark Poster, Ed. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988.

Proust, Marcel. Cities of the Plain. Remembrance of Things Past. Volume II. Scott Moncrieff, trans. New York: Random House, 1932. 3-383.

Ricoeur, Paul. "The Question of the Subject: The Challenge of Semiology," The Conflict of Interpretations. Don Ihde, ed. Kathleen McLaughlin, trans. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974, 236-269.

Sarup, Madan. An Introductory Guide to Post-structuralism and Postmodernism. Athens, II.: The University of Georgia Press, 1993.

Schrag, Calvin. Communicative Praxis and the Space of Subjectivity. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986.

Schrift, Alan. Nietzsche and the Question of Interpretation: Between Hermeneutics and Deconstruction. New York: Routledge, 1990.

Wierciński, Andrzej. "The hermeneutical Retrieval of a Theological Insight: *Verbum Interius*," Between the Human and the Divine: Philosophical and Theological

Hermeneutics. Toronto: The Hermeneutics Press, 2002.

Williams, Robert. "Hegel and Heidegger," Hegel and His Critics: Philosophy in the Aftermath of Hegel. William Desmond, ed. New York: State University of New York Press, 1989, 135-163.